UNIVERSITY OF LUCERNE

FACULTY OF LAW

INSTITUTE FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY LEGAL STUDIES – LUCERNAIURIS

## SWISS LAW AND HUMANITIES HUB

# A KIND OF JUSTICE

## A READING AND CONVERSATION WITH PETINA GAPPAH

FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT VISITING PROFESSOR FOR WORLD LITERATURE
UNIVERSITY OF BERN



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18.15–19.30
UNIVERSITY OF LUCERNE, ROOM 3.A05

REGISTRATION VIA THE QR CODE

# A Kind of Justice: A Reading and Conversation with Petina Gappah

Critically acclaimed author and lawyer Petina Gappah joins us to read and reflect on themes of law and justice in her work. In conversation, we will explore what draws her to courtrooms, prisons and the everyday injustices of ordinary life, and think about the possibilities that literature and storytelling might afford for expanding – and complicating – our understanding of things legal. We will also consider the role of humour in writing about law and justice, and discuss some of the most significant authors, texts and traditions that have inspired her.



**Petina Gappah** was born in Zambia and raised in Zimbabwe. She studied law at the University of Zimbabwe and at Cambridge and completed her doctorate at the University of Graz. An international lawyer specializing in the World Trade Organization, she most recently worked for the ACWL, an organization in Geneva that advances the interests of more than seventy developing countries in the multilateral trading system.

Though she trained as a lawyer, Gappah always wanted to be a writer and in 2009 she published a volume of 13 short stories about a Zimbabwe experiencing economic and political meltdown, An Elegy for Easterly (2009), which was internationally acclaimed, was nominated for awards – such as the Orwell Prize – in six different countries, and won the Guardian First Book Award. Already in this début, Gappah developed her trademark use of gallows humour: laughter is often the only defence left to victims of injustice, and it is this kind of humour – despite all tragic events – that makes Petina Gappah's stories so remarkable. Her first novel The Book of Memory (2015) is set on death row in Harare's Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison and narrates the story of Memory, an albino woman who is said to have murdered her white adoptive father. Petina Gappah uses the epistolary form to recount Memory's turbulent childhood and explores the relationship between fate and choice as well as the redemptive power of love.

Petina Gappah's interest in the relationship between the law and justice is also expressed in her collection of stories Rotten Row (2016). Inspired by the stories of Ferdinand von Schirach and John Mortimer, in Rotten Row she exploits the possibilities of the short story with skilled craftsmanship and an unsparing yet humorous eye at crime: its causes, its perpetrators and its victims. The English writer and short story master Helen Simpson said that Gappah has succeeded in "doing for Harare what Dickens did for Victorian London, with lethal comic relish and rage".

In her most recent novel Out of Darkness, Shining Light (2019), Gappah illuminates an unknown chapter of Africa's colonial history, narrating the journey taken by the African companions of the Scottish missionary David Livingstone (1813–1873) as they carried his body home from the interior of Africa to the coast, so that he could be buried in England. The American writer Yaa Gyasi describes it as an "engrossing, beautiful, and deeply imaginative novel that lends voice to those who appeared only as footnotes in history, yet whose final, brave act of loyalty and respect changed the course of it".

Currently, Petina Gappah is Friedrich Dürrenmatt Visiting Professor for World Literature at the University of Bern.

The event is free and open to all but registration is required. Please register by 25 November either via the QR code overleaf or via email to lucernaiuris@unilu.ch.