Environmental Justice and Alternatives to Development in Latin America: Knowledge, Narratives and Cultural Production
An interdisciplinary workshop

6 March 2020, University of Leicester
PROGRAMME

WORKSHOP, Leicester Innovation Hub (128 Regent Rd, Leicester LE1 7PA)

9:30-10:00  Arrivals, registration and coffee
10:00-10:30  Welcome and introduction
Paula Serafini (CAMEo, University of Leicester): “Researching extractivism and cultural production”
10:30-12:30  Session 1
Anna Grimaldi (King’s College London): “Latin American Portrayals of Environment and Development during the 1970s-1990s”
Jonathan Coope (De Montfort University): “Indigenous ‘outreach work’ to technoscientific modernity: three strategies”
Aidan Jolly: “Popular Education and Protest Performance: How can artist activists working in solidarity with indigenous peoples centre the experiences of communities in struggle?”
12:30-13:15  Lunch
13:15-15:00  Session 2
Olivia Angé (Université de Bruxelles): “Subversive Seeds Catalogues: Developing Arts of Interspecies Attentiveness through Potato Drawing”
Hanne Cottyn (University of York): “Agroecological sounds of Sumapaz (Colombia). Representing and defending the páramos as a lived landscape in the context of a conservation conflict”
Adolfo Mejía-Montero (University of Edinburgh): “Quisieron enterrarnos sin saber que éramos semillas”
Fabienne Viala (University of Warwick): “Caribbean Artivism: mourning environmental loss in the context of the legacies of slavery”
15:00-15:15  Break
15:15-16:30  Masterclass on research, activism and knowledge production in environmental conflicts with Gabriela Merlinsky (Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani/ CONICET)
16:30-17:00  Performance
Naomi Hennig (Goldsmiths): “Field Research in the Capitalocene”

FILM SCREENING, Attenborough Film Theatre (Attenborough Building, University Rd, Leicester LE1 7RD)

17:30-18:00  Refreshments in the foyer
18:00-20:00  Screening of Cuba: Living Between Hurricanes and discussion with director Michael Chanan (University of Roehampton)
Olivia Angé

Subversive Seeds Catalogues: Developing Arts of Interspecies Attentiveness through Potato Drawing

In their political history of seeds, Bonneuil and Thomas (2012) pointed out the strategic uses of catalogues for the implementation of intensive agriculture in post-war Europe. Catalogues were intended to promote a restricted series of crop varieties at the expense of existing diversity, by criminalising the sale of unregistered seeds. As catalogues were designed as tools of control and assessment serving the performance of the agroindustry, varieties were selected according to their productivity and fixity, fitting with the Distinctness Homogeneity and Stability criteria.

As part of a broader research on human-tuber relatedness within “potato communities” in the Peruvian Highlands, I have obtained funding for the creation of subversive seeds catalogues. The latter will feature portraits of the potato cornucopia drawn by their growers in a zone of in situ conservation known as the Potato Park. Beside reclaiming catalogues as biopolitical tools for cultivators, the purpose of drawing as ethnographic methodology is threefold. (a) Open up spaces of shared experiences bringing forth “places of coincidence” (de la Cadena 2015) between growers and ethnographers. (b) Creating encounters to proliferate ‘versions’ (Despret 2001) of agrobiodiversity emerging as a co-construction between academia and local field experts. (c) Cultivating “arts of noticing” (Tsing 2015) that foster care for non-human forms of life (Van Dooren et al. 2016). Yet I am aware that such field experimentation raises crucial ethical and political challenges. How can we conjure potato affect and aesthetic in a catalogue? Does catalogue materiality allow for an open-ended inventory? Broadly, I am eager to discuss the very possibility of engaging cataloguing practices that would not reproduce Western modes of classification and value repertoire.

Jonathan Coope

Indigenous ‘outreach work’ to technoscientific modernity: three strategies

The western project of Enlightenment rationality has been implicated in extractivist exploitation of the natural world and ongoing efforts to delegitimize Indigenous cultures in Latin America and elsewhere. And yet modernity itself now finds itself facing a range of “modern problems for which there are no longer modern solutions” (Escobar, 2017), including anthropogenic climate change, prompting some western scholars to ask whether modernity might begin to learn from Indigenous peoples and the so-called “good way of living” in relation to the natural world.

However, given that previous western attempts to explore nonmodern traditions have usually been typified by “epistemic violence”, is an Indigenous ‘outreach work’ to technoscientific modernity conceivable that avoids modernity’s tendencies towards exploitation and extractivism?

This paper critically examines three strategies outreach might draw upon in dealing with such challenges: first, the Zapatista concept of a pluriversal approach to ontologies and epistemologies; second, ecopsychology – some versions of which have, since the early 1990s, sought to bring Indigenous insights to bear on ecological activism and western psychiatry; third, the psychological notion of ‘hierarchical integration’.
With some western commentators admitting that modernity’s task of learning from Indigenous and wisdom traditions grows increasingly pressing, the three concepts explored here – pluriversal ontologies, ecopsychology (or certain versions thereof), and the notion of ‘hierarchical integration’ – may prove useful additions to the toolkit of those activists engaged in the urgent task of Indigenous outreach work to modernity.

Jonathan is a historian and ecopsychologist, based in the East Midlands at De Montfort University. His recent publications include, ‘How might Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge (ITEK) inform ecopsychology,’ for the US journal Ecopsychology in 2019. Jonathan’s research focuses on counter cultural and ecopsychiatric understandings of ecocrisis, technoscience, and modernity.

Hanne Cottyn (with Lina Cortés, Santiago Martínez and Ana María Garrido)

**Agroecological sounds of Sumapaz (Colombia). Representing and defending the páramos as a lived landscape in the context of a conservation conflict.**

This contribution presents a socio-cultural and environmental project, currently in progress, between Colombian musicians from Sumapaz and researchers from diverse disciplines. Situated south from Bogotá, Sumapaz is a vast rural region that encompasses the world’s largest páramo site, a wet highland ecosystem that plays a key role in capturing CO2 and providing drinking water to Bogotá. Over the last years, Colombia has adopted a series of new regulations to protect this fragile ecosystem against anthropogenic pressures. These translate into increasing restrictions on agriculture in the páramo.

In Sumapaz, the peasants themselves have been developing territorial and environmental proposals for years, such as the Zona de Reserva Campesina. These proposals recognize Sumapaz’s unique trajectory in which generations of historically marginalized peasant communities have developed their potato- and cattle-based livelihoods in relation to this ecosystem and its other inhabitants, including trees, animals and water springs. Sumapaz is the product of "more-than-human” encounters that cannot be reduced to the region’s intense history of armed conflict. These encounters result in particular ways of understanding and interacting with the páramo.

Songs written from and about the Sumapaz territory constitute a source of peasant environmental knowledge and historical experiences that question the universal claims which often underlie state-based conservation policies. They reject the perception that conservation is intended for "empty" landscapes and point to alternative agroecological practices for the protection of the páramo. In the context of this conservation conflict, these songs become powerful tools in demanding recognition and understanding of peasant life in the páramo.

This is a collective proposal by a group of UK- and Colombia-based researchers. Hanne Cottyn is postdoctoral researcher in the Department of History at the University of York; Lina Cortés is a geographer and lecturer based at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia; Santiago Martínez is an anthropologist and postdoctoral researcher of the Social Sciences unit at the Instituto Humboldt (Colombia); Ana María Garrido is an anthropologist and researcher of the Social Sciences unit at the Instituto Humboldt (Colombia). Hanne, Santiago and Ana form part of the project “Integrating ecological and cultural histories to inform sustainable and equitable futures for the Colombian páramos” coordinated by the University of York (NERC). Lina Cortés coordinates the project “Sonidos Agroecológicos en el gran Sumapaz. Construcción de una cultura de paz entre el campo y la ciudad” (Secretaría de Cultura, city of Bogotá). Hanne Cottyn will represent this collective at Leicester.

David Dumoulin Kervran

**The aesthetics of tropical biology stations: A particular idea of Nature?**

“Nature” is largely produced by scientific work, and science production is a kind of politics. My own empirical investigation explore these claims, and I want to focus here on the role of social representations, experimenting with pictures. This talk aims to bridge environmental aesthetics and the sociology of science, using both perspectives to shed light on an unusual remote place: tropical biological stations.
After an introduction where I explain my use of “aesthetics” and my general approach, I will present and discuss three main representations of the biological station and its surrounding. I have called the first “ecolodge”: connecting a strong imaginary of pristine forest with the station itself perceived as comfortable garden and privileged point of view. The second is “laboratory”, as the aesthetics of this place points out to techno-natural or cyborg forests, when the station is explored with all its scientific instruments. The third one is “outpost”, when considering the representation of “localized” population, gazing over the station as an inaccessible bubble for mysterious strangers. The three faces form together a complex aesthetics for this scientific place where worlds meet, imaginaries clash, and the political ecology of tropical nature is uncovered.

David Dumoulin Kervran is a sociologist working on transnational forms of collective action, at the intersection of network analysis and multi scale analysis of biodiversity conservation policy. He has also published on the alliances between environmental organisations and indigenous peoples, and about knowledge production processes and exchanges.

Anna Isabella Grimaldi

Latin American Portrayals of Environment and Development during the 1970s-1990s

This presentation discusses the emergence of indigenous, environment, and development-related human rights amongst the Latin American Left. In particular, it focuses on the Left's engagement with domestic rights advocacy as well as wider transnational human rights movements and international institutions. In dialogue with human rights theorists, I seek to understand the conceptual framework employed by these groups to define and defend environmental justice and development in Latin America, as well evaluating objectives, strategies, and impacts.

The presentation will be guided by the case studies of the Brazilian, Argentine, and Chilean Left across the 1970s-1990s, as they appealed to international audiences for a range of human rights violations. When Southern Cone Latin America first caught the attention of the international human rights community, the narrative was largely focused on the violation of political and civil rights. However, at some point this, narrative changed, as the international arena also became a place for women's rights, workers' rights, indigenous rights, the environmental, and development. Here, the Latin American Left, too, shifted its discourse, adopting a much more expansive notion of rights that would contribute to the its growing identification with minorities, environmental justice, and questions of sustainable development.

This earlier interaction between the domestic Left and the transnational human rights movement was crucial, and without it, I argue, the narratives of envrionment and alternative development we know today cannot be fully understood. While in the countries to be discussed, the domestic Left had long been concerned with poverty, inequality, and aggressive economic policy, it was not until their encounter with the transnational that the language of environment and development came to form part of the debate.

Dr Anna Isabella Grimaldi is Teaching Fellow at the Department of International Development, KCL. She graduated with a joint PhD in Global Affairs from King's College London and the University of São Paulo in October 2019. Her individual and collaborative research focuses on the presence of Latin American exiles in Europe since the 1960s. Anna is currently working on two publications based on her doctoral research. More widely, her work contributes to understanding the construction of human rights discourses and practices by actors of the Global South.

Naomi Hennig

Field Research in the Capitalocene

A presentation of excerpts from a collaborative performance lecture, developed by Julia Mensch & Naomi Hennig in 2018

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in the second book of his famous drama Faust, portrays his protagonist as genious project-maker and engineer, looking back at the work of his life-time: prospering cultural landscapes, newly created
lands, modern harbours and a merchant fleet carrying goods from far-away continents. Faust is the logistics-king of international free trade, with Mephisto as his chief-ideologue and henchman, responsible for the ‘dirty work’ of expropriation and murder. Only a nameless traveller and a friendly old couple, Philemon and Baucis, appear as their adversaries, who quickly fall prey to the capitalist turnover.

In cross-referencing Faust with the on-going violent repression of indigenous land claims in Patagonia, we look to the far-away and yet so near geographies of this faustian relation to nature, and plea for those who resist, and who have resisted through history.

How could Faust, in his final incarnation as land-developer, be understood today, how can his success, his burning ambition, his blindness and subsequent death be re-interpreted in the light of the on-going ecocide and the death toll of the extractivist and neo-colonial frontier?

Naomi Hennig is a researcher and cultural producer living between London and Berlin. She has been involved in artist-run initiatives and organizations, including nGbK and District, Berlin. Her artistic work is based on moving image, as well as archival and multidisciplinary research. As a curator, she has collaborated on several group exhibitions, including ‘Context is Half the Work’ (2016), an exhibition on the Artist Placement Group. She is a phd candidate at Goldsmiths, with her research focussing on political ecology and extractivism.

Aidan Jolly

**Popular Education and Protest Performance: How can artist activists working in solidarity with indigenous peoples centre the experiences of communities in struggle?**

It should be obvious that direct lived experience of struggle and resistance needs to be at the heart of artist/activist work. But in the UK this is often not the case, for a variety of reasons.

This presentation looks at three years of a developing relationship between the Threepenny Festival Association (a Manchester based group of artist activists); the London Mining Network; and Colombia Solidarity Campaign. It will illustrate our ongoing attempts to develop methodologies that critically challenge arts and solidarity practices in the UK, whilst working to support the campaigns of people from Colombia, Chile, and Brazil against BHP Billiton.

We will describe the popular education process and the constituent groups that were involved in it, and the dynamic of the relationship between the partners and representatives of indigenous groups affected by mining. Part of the presentation will be a short excerpt of a film.

In the discussion we will invite people to explore

- the nature of the exchange of knowledge, skills and methods between indigenous people and their allies
- the experience of transnational solidarity from the view point of both indigenous people and their allies, and the recuperative power of ceremonial performance in generating this.

Aidan is a musician, performance maker and activist with 25 years’ experience. He works with Virtual Migrants, the Threepenny Festival Association, and Collective Encounters Theatre for Social Change. His current work is exploring hybrid performance methodologies, within the context of solidarity with struggles for climate and racial justice.

[www.aidanjolly.com](http://www.aidanjolly.com)  threepennyfestival.org/extract/

Adolfo Mejía-Montero

“Quisieron enterrarnos sin saber que éramos semillas”

An accelerated trend towards Renewable Energy Transition in Mexico has made of the Tehuantepec Isthmus the region with a higher density of on-shore wind power in the planet. Within this indigenous region, the Zapotec town
of Union Hidalgo accounts since 2009 for one wind farm and other two in process for approval. This presentation proposal includes four short stories exploring some of the workshop relevant themes, through the perspectives of wind power development coming from local children, women, collective mural artists and palm workers. The objective of this presentation is twofold; Firstly, I strive to make visible local narratives frequently absent from discussions on energy transitions and/or renewable energy development. Secondly, I aim for such narratives to brew novel and relevant topics for discussion among the workshop participants, potentially influencing future research related to the before mentioned topics.

Adolfo Mejía-Montero studied a bachelor’s in Physics at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México (UNAM). He is currently PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh, where he also obtained an MSc on Sustainable Energy Systems. Adolfo has been guest lecturer for the MSc in Energy, Society and Sustainability in the University of Edinburgh, guest researcher for the Mexican Institute for Electricity and Clean Energy (INEEL) and the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (e-COST). He also has experience in consultancy for distributed and community renewable energy projects in Mexico and UK. Currently he works part-time as PDRA for EnergyRev, promoting a UK transition towards Smart Local Energy Systems.

Gabriela Merlinsky

Research, activism and knowledge production in environmental conflicts

This workshop aims to share the results of a series of research projects surrounding environmental conflicts and experiences of the commons co-produced with different collectives that strive for the collaborative construction of knowledge in public Universities in Argentina.

Environmental conflicts pose questions about alternatives to development and generate controversies around events that are considered threatening to the environment and to human life. In this sense, they contribute to destabilizing a hegemonic vision that is based on an extractive mentality that sees the natural world as a resource for use and disposal. They therefore contribute to the creation of arguments and ideas that widen the available options for thinking about the commons and life in common.

In this workshop I will present a theoretical-methodological approach to the study of environmental conflicts. We will consider examples and look to establish dialogues with other experiences in Latin America and in Europe.

Gabriela Merlinsky has a PhD in Social Sciences from the University of Buenos Aires and a PhD in Geography (geopolitical specialty) from Paris 8. She is a researcher at the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research of Argentina (CONICET) and coordinates the Environmental Studies Group at the “Gino Germani Research Institute” (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires). She is a professor in the doctoral program in social sciences at University of Buenos Aires. She has published “Política, derechos y justicia ambiental. El Conflicto del Riachuelo” (Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica), “Cartografías del Conflicto Ambiental en Argentina” (Buenos Aires, Ciccus) and about fifty papers on the subjects of political ecology, urban sociology, political water ecology, environmental conflicts and climate change in Latin America

Fabienne Viala

Caribbean Artivism: mourning environmental loss in the context of the legacies of slavery

This paper will address one strand of my current research looking at Caribbean artivism as a facilitator for justice-making through empathy. As a region impacted by the systematic exploitation of men and resources, the Caribbean is the ideal place to study creative responses to racial and environmental injustices. The word artivism was coined at the beginning of the 21st century to describe Chicano Art as a platform to claim equal rights for non-white hispanic people in the USA. In the Caribbean, artivism is fairly recent. For the last twenty years, it has become a platform to address race and global warming in dialogue with each other, as legacies of the colonial economies and as topics for the reparative justice agendas. My approach brings into dialogue Black Studies and Anti-Racism with Environmental Studies and Sustainability. As a set of creative actions meant to trigger interaction with their audience in public spaces, Caribbean artivism is the only domain where race and climate explicitly come into
dialogue. Based on embodied scenarios appealing to the imagination rather than to scientific and academic knowledges, artivism allows to address justice making and reparations at the intersection of race and climate. This cross-disciplinary approach will allow me to understand racism and global warming as part of the same goals within a global transitional justice approach.

Dr Fabienne Viala, PhD in Comparative Literature (Université Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle), Reader in Hispanic and Caribbean Studies, Director of the Yesu Persaud Centre for Caribbean Studies, University of Warwick. She has published extensively on Caribbean Literature and Cultures. Her last monograph is *The Post-Columbus Syndrome: Identity, Cultural Nationalism and Commemorations in the Caribbean*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.

About the film *Cuba: Vivir entre Ciclones/ Cuba: Living between Hurricanes*

The Director writes:

We found our title in a speech by Cuba’s President, Miguel Díaz-Canel, to the meeting of Caribbean countries in Managua in 2019: “Living between hurricanes has conditioned our lives; it has modified our geographies and spurred our migrations. And it has also educated us in the need to further study the phenomena that await us and work to reverse their damage.”

Taking our lead from recent work by historians and alive to the growing threat of climate change, we set out for Caibarién, a port on the island’s north coast which has seen better days, to investigate the effects of hurricanes down the centuries in shaping Cuba’s agro-industry and the concomitant social formation. We chose Caibarién because this is where Hurricane Irma, one of the most powerful ever to sweep the Caribbean, made landfall in the early hours of 9th September 2017. Initial research threw up a variety of footage of the event on YouTube, and we knew there would be more. But this would only be our starting point. Our aim was the historical big picture, and the relation of hurricanes to other facets of climate and ecology in a vulnerable region whose economy was tied in to global markets. One of us already knew the locality, where forests and food self-sufficiency had given way to cattle ranching, tobacco cultivation, and increasingly during the nineteenth century, the sugarcane industry, with its railways and sugar mills, resulting in soil exhaustion and pollution. Caibarién, once a thriving entrepôt, offered a promising vantage point to test the historians’ thesis about the advance of commodity frontiers, a process in which the twenty-first century has brought the encroachment of a new commodity in the form of mass tourism – which is equally at the mercy of global markets, and also has serious ecological effects.

Working with the Fundación Antonio Jimenez Nuñez, a Cuban NGO dedicated to environmentalism, gave us the opportunity to get away from the iconic imagery of a Caribbean paradise which Communism has caught in an anachronistic time warp – the very imagery associated with the mass tourism whose growth since the 1990s has gone some way to replacing the foreign earnings lost when the sugar industry collapsed after the fall of the Soviet bloc. Our camera offers an unvarnished alternative perspective, as we film the streets of the town and surrounding countryside, and visit one of the new hotels on the nearby keys.

The film combines a series of elements, including the benefit of access to the archive at the Cinemateca, especially the newsreels that the film institute, the ICAIC, released every week from 1960 to 1990, which provide glimpses of hurricanes and their aftermath, as well as various aspects of agro-industry. The independent filmmaker Giselle García Castro kindly gave us drone shots of Caibarién filmed for her documentary ‘Lista Quinta’. Our interlocutors fall into two main groups. First, the historians and others who gathered for a symposium hosted by the Fundación in Havana. Second, the people we met in Caibarién, who were well aware of being caught between the past, which has bequeathed problems like soil exhaustion and contamination, and a future threatened by rising temperatures and sea levels combined with ever more intense hurricanes. Our guide in Caibarién is a local ecological activist, Pedro González. Reinaldo Funes from the Fundación takes us to the eco-tourist installation at Las Terrazas, near Havana, and not far away, Finca Marta, a model of sustainable farming run by his brother Fernando Funes.

The results, showing a picture of Cuba very different from what is normally seen abroad, will support the work of the Fundación within Cuba and connect it to an international audience geared up to thinking globally and acting locally. To be disseminated through open access, *Cuba: Living between Hurricanes* has been made under aegis of
the Commodities of Empire Research Project at the University of London’s School of Advanced Studies, with project partners in the UK, USA, Puerto Rico, Spain and the Netherlands, forming a network with potential impact on public thinking and policy makers at both local and international level.

Michael Chanan

GENERAL INFORMATION

Twitter handle: @CAMEo_UoL

Local taxi numbers: Swift Fox 0116 26 28 222/ ABC 0116 2555111

Wi-Fi: eduroam is available for participants from UK universities. Otherwise, delegates can use The Cloud system free of charge.

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