

Programme

Mondays, 5:15pm to 6:45pm, Lecture Hall 10, GWZ

24th April

Fast-tracking Projects, shifting Agencies? How new Mineral Demands shape the Future in West African and European Mining Regions

Diana Ayeh, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, Leipzig

8th May

Think Global Block Local. Experiences of Environmental Activists with Science and Society

Students for Future, Leipzig University, in Dialogue with Activists of the Global South and the Global North

15th May

Contested Landscapes: Ghosts of the Colonial Rail in Tanzania

Samwel Moses Ntapanta, Senior Research Associate, Chair for Social and Cultural Anthropology with a Focus on Africa, University of Bayreuth

22nd May

Freedom and Trepidation: Labouring in South India's Toxic Waters

Rishabh Raghavan, Research Fellow, MPI Halle

5th June

Scientific Studies as Tool for and against Communal Resistance to Pollution from Gold Mining in Sudan's Northern State

Mohamed Salah, Center for Environmental and Social Studies Sudan, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

12th June (online, find zoom link below)

Song of the Chili Mother: Kinwork and Cosmopoesis with Uitoto Desplazadas

Amy Leia McLachlan, Research Affiliate, Field Museum, Keller Science Action Center

19th June

Filmscreening and Q&A Session: EVER SLOW GREEN – Re-Afforestation in Auroville, South India

Lesley Branagan, Independent Documentary Filmmaker & Postdoc Researcher, Hamburg University

26th June

Oil and Post-Revolutionary Politics in Timor-Leste

Judith Bovensiepen, Reader in Social Anthropology, University of Kent

3rd July

Shifty Grains: Towards an Ethnography of Coastal Sands

Javed Kaiser, Teresa Cremer, Tarini Monga, Lukas Ley, Research Group SAND, MPI Halle

Contested Ecologies

Lecture Series in Summer Term 2023

Institutes of Anthropology and African Studies, Leipzig University

The enhanced concern for environmental challenges opens a complex political field that enables concerted action but also involves new challenges to engage diverse publics in the negotiation of what counts as an ecologically 'better' world. Upon closer look into life worlds across the globe, we note new inequalities in who gets to speak in debates and imaginations of better forests, cleaner oceans and enhanced protection of species. Such tensions also concern the generation and use of, for instance, energy and food. If environmental interventions are organized without acknowledgement of such inequalities, then there is a risk that old and new forms of paternalism, marginalization and colonial extractivism are merely reinforced. New fields of inaction arise when the responsibility for environmental protection is being shifted to macro levels of transnational organizations and large-scale politics, or delegated to long-term programmes and to the ingenuity of future generations. At the same time, affected populations demand, with their own forms of collaboration, a voice in these debates, and environmentally-concerned collectives push forward into the global climate discourse. It is our attempt with this lecture series to discuss such political negotiations and participatory efforts, and to ask what old and newly emerging formations of political (in)action are at work in them. Scholars concerned with extractive activities, toxicity and human/other-than-human entanglements speak about their research, opening a view on the negotiations they observe and engage in.



**UNIVERSITÄT
LEIPZIG**

Institutes of Anthropology
and African Studies



Lecture Series
Summer Term
2023

**Contested
Ecologies**

24th April: How new Mineral Demands shape the Future in West African and European Mining Regions

Diana Ayeh, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, Leipzig

The increasing demand for minerals deemed “critical” for future “green” energy security and digitalization has both significant temporal and spatial implications at the source of mineral supply. On the one hand, global sustainability considerations have the potential to create and shift mining frontiers in and between old and new areas of extraction across regions and continents. On the other hand, urgent calls for global sustainability transformations and specific geopolitical constellations have led to “a new form of temporal pressure to resource development propositions”. Using former, current and future mining regions in Western Europe (Germany) and West Africa (Burkina Faso) as a case study, the presentation explores emerging formations of political (in)action in the field of Informed Consultation and Participation (ICP). The primary focus is on how the agency of local communities in concession-making is shaped, first, by existing mining legislation and, second, by discursive strategies used by private-sector, state, and civil-society actors to promote or contest the “fast-tracking” of the project approval and mine permitting process.

8th May: Think Global Block Local. Experiences of Environmental Activists with Science and Society

Students for Future, Leipzig University, in Dialogue with Activists from the Global South and the Global North

This session takes place in context of the Public Climate School 2023 at Leipzig University. As the formulation by Ende Gelände in the title suggests, environmental activism that relates to the planetary climate crisis has to manifest in specific points of action, in order to be impactful. Both where these points should be, the kind of action to be taken there, and the expected and actual impact are surrounded by uncertainty and debate, which activists have to make sense of while dealing with matters of high urgency. We enter into dialogue with activists from the Global South and from the Global North that are engaged in actions of civil disobedience and who will talk about their experiences. We discuss with them similarities and differences between their situations and will speak specifically about how they perceive the relation of their activism to scientific studies and academic institutions.

15th May: Contested Landscapes: Ghosts of the Colonial Rail in Tanzania

Samwel Moses Ntapanta, Senior Research Associate, Chair of Social and Cultural Anthropology with a Focus on Africa, University of Bayreuth

Rail lines were the souls of the empire and its colonial economy. As rails aided progress in industrial countries, they brought political, social-economic, and environmental entanglements to the colonies. The rail lubricated “contaminated diversity”, whereby humans and the more-than-humans travelled from one area to the other to create “alien” ecologies. It accelerated the exploitation of resources, drained labour (forced and cheap), decimated natural resources (land, forestry and minerals) and shaped ecologies in the colonies and the metropolises as well. The railways speeded up global overheating, and eventually, the rail deteriorated when the colonial project ended. In this paper I ask: What kind of world-making practices can we observe through the ruins of the colonial rail? What agency does/did the rail have in creating and re-creating “ghost” ecologies?



Vehicle Lanes. Picture: Colourbox

22nd May: Freedom and Trepidation: Labouring in South India’s Toxic Waters

Rishabh Raghavan, Research Fellow, MPI Halle

My research focuses on the everyday lives and livelihoods of those who live by state-owned coal-fired thermal power plants in Ennore, a coastal peninsular suburb located to the north of Chennai (Tamil Nadu, India), and conceptualizes their bodily engagement, labour, and protest in the context of the multiple toxic substances suffusing the landscape. At the ‘Contested Ecologies’ lecture series, I will present my research on the labour of artisanal fishermen who fished by Ennore’s power plants, describing some of the ways in which toxic coal seeped through their bodies and their environment. I argue that the constant bodily engagement with coal-based toxicities caused them a distressing ‘feeling’ every time the fishermen fished in Ennore’s polluted waters. On the one hand, labouring with the toxic had become a necessity in validating their identities as male fishers, while on the other hand, interacting with the toxic only accelerated the notion that they were rapidly disintegrating with their landscape. In presenting this research, I draw particular focus to the uneasy ways in which labouring bodies mediate, challenge, and embrace the toxic to articulate and navigate what might be conceptualised as contested ecologies.

5th June: Scientific Studies as Tool for and against Communal Resistance to Pollution from Gold Mining in Sudan’s Northern State

Mohamed Salah, Center for Environmental and Social Studies Sudan, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Gold mining has a long history in northern Sudan’s desert areas but it was modern-day increased usage of mercury and cyanide that turned this extractive activity into one of the most polluting factors in present Sudan. In adjacent settlements along the Nile, this pollution is everywhere: in the air, in the water, in the soil and sediments. At the same time, not only companies and migrant artisanal miners, but also some of the residents in these parts benefit economically from the extraction, or at least hope to do so. This combination of complex chemical distribution and diverse economic effects makes mining also a battleground of scientific knowledge around its environmental impact. I will speak in this paper about my own experiences as an environmental researcher and activist from one of the affected areas, as well as about the position of other scientists, some benefitting from lucrative consultancy contracts, some joining environmental protection initiatives, some somewhere in between.

12th June: Song of the Chili Mother: Kinwork and Cosmopoesis with Uitoto Desplazadas

Amy Leia McLachlan, Research Affiliate, Field Museum, Keller Science Action Center

For people who understand themselves to be composed of, animated by, and kin to plants, what does it mean to make lives in a place where those plants are missing, lifeless, or transformed beyond recognition? What does it mean to live where ones' kin cannot, and where the vital foundations of a good life are unavailable? What does it mean to continue a project of cosmopoesis—of world-making praxis—even as that world unspools at an accelerating pace? Uitoto world-making in the midst and wake of displacement and environmental devastation, it argues, offers a space from which to reflect on the ethics of caring for the lives on which we depend, even as they can no longer sustain us. Amy Leia McLachlan is a cultural anthropologist whose work considers the ethics, politics, and transformative potential of relations to and through plant life. Her talk will share work from a current book project, *The World for Now*.

Zoom link: <https://uni-leipzig.zoom.us/j/61009951848?pwd=MkpsZTRMRUNzZ2RRK1JcWNBclliUT09>

19th June EVER SLOW GREEN: Filmscreening and Q&A

Lesley Branagan, Independent Documentary Filmmaker & Postdoc Researcher, Hamburg University

50 years ago, a unique afforestation project took root on an eroded desert plateau in Tamil Nadu, South India. People from diverse countries came together to establish the international experimental township of Auroville. While some early residents were initially driven by idealism and the necessity to make the harsh conditions more liveable, they slowly developed expertise in cultivating the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest, a rare forest type native to the coastal belt of Tamil Nadu. Today, the lush Auroville forest is an outstanding example of eco-restoration, that recreates and preserves a type of tropical forest that is on the verge of extinction. Ever Slow Green tells the story of this 50-year-young forest through the diverse characters who have dedicated their lives to bringing Auroville's forest to fruition.

26th June: Oil and Post-Revolutionary Politics in Timor-Leste

Judith Bovensiepen, Reader in Social Anthropology, University of Kent

In the years after Timor-Leste regained independence from Indonesia, 'oil fever' took hold in the country – a contagious excitement about the prospect of oil wealth enabling a profound societal transformation. This is when the government of Timor-Leste launched a plan for the implementation of a large oil development project, aimed at transforming the thinly populated south coast into a futuristic high-modernist state planned oil and gas infrastructure. Critics argued that the project was economically and technically unviable and that it would have detrimental impacts on local residents. So, to persuade affected communities to relinquish large stretches of land for the project, some politicians and oil company employees mobilised the spiritual powers of the land, drawing on customary practices traditionally associated with ritual authorities. Their ability to regulate 'nature' was seen as a sign of their legitimacy to implement this mega project.

3rd July: Shifty Grains: Towards an Ethnography of Coastal Sands

Javed Kaiser, Teresa Cremer, Tarini Monga, Lukas Ley, Research Group SAND

In the face of rising seas and rapid soil settlement along urban shores, the importance of sand for coastal fortification is growing – the construction industry and developers are thirsty for sand (Torres et al. 2017) to build 'resilient' cities and sustain the rate at which cities are growing, while littoral communities need it to protect land and settlements from rising seas. Often, obtaining sand through mining exacerbates coastal degradation and human suffering, for instance, by destroying fishing grounds and accelerating erosion.

In an era of rapid urbanization, sand is thus assuming unprecedented cultural and political stakes. The Research Group "SAND – The Future of Coastal Cities in the Indian Ocean" examines the poetics and politics of coastal infrastructuring to theorize the active and even directive role materials like sand play in shaping urban natures.

Contact us!

Contested Ecologies: A Lecture Series



A child surrounded by garbage. Picture: Colourbox

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