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**Online Symposium
Race, Activism and Space in Latin-American Theory and
Practice**

28th May 2020

14:00 – 18:30 UK Time

Organisers:

Dr Nadia Mosquera

Dr Archie Davies

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**INSTITUTE OF
LATIN AMERICAN
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**SCHOOL OF
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OF LONDON**

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Henrique Gomes | University of Hong Kong, Latin American Studies

Paper: Deindianization as a threat to indigenous reserves in Bolsonaro's Brazil

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Catalina Ortíz | UCL

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Blanca Yáñez Serrano | UCL

Paper: De-stabilising Urban Social Relations: Exploring the Geographies of Ipanema Beach

Olivia Arigho-Stiles | University of Essex

Paper: Elite constructions of race and space in pre-revolutionary Bolivia

Symposium Abstracts

Jefferson Scabio | Museu Nacional/UFRJ, Brazil

Paper: Death, Voice and Listening: The Mother's Plea

Narratives associating Latin America with armed violence are overwhelming; less frequent though are accounts that take seriously the account of violence victims. Drawing on the intersection of mourning and activism, this work approaches what I call the narrative practices of violence in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, as told by the mothers of its victims. I depart from one of the mottos the mothers constantly speak: "Our dead have a voice/Our children have mothers". By voicing the voice of their dead children they declare their innocence, and put into question the official version that otherwise takes young black men from favelas as criminals, thereby projecting them as figures of death. The suspicion that hangs over the victims undoes the murder itself, legitimizing the killing of a public enemy; it also silences the suffering, once the mothers are made responsible by not having given the proper care that would have kept their children away from crime. I thus look at the activist mothers efforts in telling and retelling (their version of) how their children were killed by the state, focusing on how it grounds a place for itself, a space of listening, while presenting the injustice of their loss against an official narrative that menaces to steal their voice. In bringing the narratives practices of the victims' mothers to the forefront, my objective is making again a point about the ethical urgency in presenting rebuked narratives of violence, taking the plea of the victims however not as an essentialized truth but following how it makes its way into the world.

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Henrique Gomes | University of Hong Kong, Latin American Studies

Paper: Deindianization as a threat to indigenous reserves in Bolsonaro's Brazil

Jair Bolsonaro exerts an agenda of opposition to autonomous indigenous territories, which can be understood in the concept of deindianization (Ribeiro). For indigenous leader Ailton Krenak, "the state machine works to dismantle the forms of organization" of indigenous societies, in which the preservation of the environment is key. In stating that "the indian is [becoming] a human being like us", Bolsonaro uses social Darwinism to typify indigenous people as lacking humanity. For Krenak, "the quasi-humans are thousands of people who insist on staying out of this civilized dance, of technique, of planet control". The 305 indigenous ethnic groups in Brazil, despite their varied specificities, do not recognize themselves as controllers of nature, but as part of it. Forests and rivers are their relatives. Their "mythical discourse and exegesis", are inseparable from the "empirical reality" (Litaiff). Raposa Serra do Sol, the largest indigenous reserve in Brazil, is essential to guarantee the rights of five different ethnic indigenous groups. Bolsonaro, in endorsing racist discourse, encourages illegal invasion on indigenous lands. As a result, the murders of indigenous leaders has risen, reaching in 2019 its highest number in 11 years. The latest one was Zezico Rodrigues Guajajara, murdered on March 31st this year. Racism is ultimately the base of a genocidal and epistemicidal process against the indigenous populations of Brazil. Therefore, fighting Bolsonaro's racist rhetoric and its reach is fundamental to guarantee the security and livelihood of communities that inhabit demarcated lands, as well as to speed up the demarcation of pending territories.

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Ana Nenadovic | Institute for Latin American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin

Paper: Occupying Virtual Spaces: Caribbean Afro-feminism Online

This contribution focuses on contemporary Afro-feminism from the Caribbean (mainly Cuba and Puerto Rico) and the ways in which the Afro-feminist activists use the online world to make Caribbean Afro-feminist thought more visible, to share their knowledge and to network. It aims to prove that the access to the internet has had an important impact on both their visibility and their possibilities to connect on a transnational level.

Caribbean Afro-feminists are present in social media and are adopting manifold modes of expression, like blogs (e.g. *Negra cubana tenía que ser*; *Directorio de afrocubanas*; *Narrativas de Yolanda*), by which means they expand street activism and scholarly work to the online world, thus making it more accessible to people from (almost) anywhere in the world. Afro-feminist artists use the internet, and especially social media, to spread their work and epistemology online

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Sarah Buntin | University of London, School of Advanced Studies

Paper: Peasant Enclaves to Transnational Networks: Marcus Garvey's UNIA Movement in Dominica, 1919-1923

This paper examines the role of Marcus Garvey's UNIA movement in helping marginalised black Dominicans to acquire capital, expand their economic opportunities, and connect with transnational networks. The current literature primarily focuses on biographical accounts of Garvey, analysing his ideology or the failings of the organisation's enterprises. Although chapters of the UNIA existed globally, the scholarship on this activist programme is predominantly US-centric. The examination of the USA context is important: the movement's headquarters were there. Consequently, this geographical focus has revealed the details of the core operations of the group. However, this is not representative of the functioning of other chapters, most of which were in colonised nations. Through an analysis of colonial correspondence, newspaper articles and communication between the organisation's leaders, this paper seeks to illustrate my plans to research the tactics that members used to nation-build within the parameters of colonisation. I also aim to highlight the specific socio-economic situation in Dominica leading up to the early twentieth century and how this shaped the motivations of people engaging in this activism. The island's mountainous topography was significant, as were the colonial laws restricting the land that formerly enslaved people could purchase. These two factors resulted in the formation of isolated peasant enclaves. I will discuss the role of Garvey's movement in connecting these historically isolated communities.

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Martina Madaula Munt | University of Amsterdam

Paper: Collectivity and activism in Latina Domestic worker's lives in Barcelona

Within the context of an economic system that has devalued reproductive spheres in the West, domestic and affective tasks have been transferred from Western women to migrant,

less privileged ones. Latina domestic workers' lives in Barcelona are located amid oppressive structures, which they have to navigate daily. Such structures can be seen when domestic workers have to face the Spanish migration legal framework, when they perform their jobs as part of a commodified care system that is based upon mental matrixes rooted on neo serfdom perceptions of the other or when they migrate to perform the breadwinning role while being mothers or daughters from afar. My arguments will be based on the dialogue observed in the field between domestic workers and decolonial activists. Domestic workers used collective activities on a park as a way to endure with the multiple oppressions of their emotional, legal and labor situation. Similarly, decolonial feminists put the emphasis of their discourses on collectivity as the tool to face the major colonial oppression, which is the isolation that care regimes entail. This papers aims to explore how Latina domestic workers live a deconstruction of activism based on collective actions of care performed in public spaces. Rather than focusing on finding direct acts of activism, my contribution will move along the ethnographic observations of the collective consciousness of domestic workers' shared experiences of domination. Opening the debate on whether a woman sharing information and emotional support with another one can be considered activism I would like to think about the privilege embedded in direct action activism and how much a personal daily action can be political. Hence, through the particular ethnographic case of Latina migrants in Barcelona and their construct of collaborative and affective networking my aim is to reflect on how the cooperative reproduction of the everyday life can be considered political activism.

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Dr Manuel May Castillo | Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

Paper: Mayan Heritage and Land Preservation

In this presentation I am going to expose how some development strategies, and promotion of the Mayan heritage, in fact exclude the Mayan peoples of Mexico and how they respond to such exclusions through safeguarding of cultural heritage and land preservation. Currently, the Mexican State is developing an integral development plan in the Mayan region known as the 'Mayan Train'. This transnational project promotes ancestral Mayan heritage as a commodity for global tourism and at the same time excludes descendant indigenous communities from decision-making on the management, preservation and transmission of their own heritage. In times of quarantine by COVID-19, and in the full phase 3, the construction of the project has been announced without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the indigenous communities concerned, in accordance with international human rights standards. On the other hand, several Mayan communities are carrying out heritage registration and documentation actions in order to generate detailed information on endangered heritage sites that will be affected by this mega-project and that are already being affected by land speculation, conflicts and violence generated after the project was announced.

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Dr Cari Tusing | Catholic University of Temuco, Chile

Paper: Contested Landscapes and Lived Ecologies in Northern Paraguay

This article considers the spatial and ecological relationships to land that are shaped by the kind of title available to cattle ranchers, campesinos and indigenous Guarani in Paraguay. I begin with documenting how ecologies of living plants and animals are organized and emerge

through the implementation of a settler-colonial property regime. This continues a racialization that blames the rural poor for deforestation and labels their expulsion as 'self-dispossession.' The ecological impacts of property privatization and resource exploitation are distributed unevenly through and across different populations, as is the memory and history of the landscape. In this sense, material, living things remain as traces on a landscape, that, if one knows how to see them, reveal other occupants and other ways of life under contestation. I conclude to show that in these same landscapes, there are different lived experiences of land based on indigenous and non-indigenous understandings of ownership, property, and the organization of space.

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Catalina Ortíz | University College London (UCL)

Paper: Mestizo Urbanism: Decolonial Insights for Urban Studies

In this presentation, I explore a range of contributions of Latino American thinkers yet to be articulated in the decolonial turn in urban studies. While the project modernity/coloniality emerged in Latin America and has informed the social sciences decolonial turn, its recent effervescence in urban studies still is disjointed, preventing a renewed emancipatory understanding of the spatiality of Latin American cities. Yet, the genealogy of the constitution of the urban derives from historical and ongoing intercontinental trajectories of urban policies, people, and capital that enacted singular territorial and ethnical configurations. I argue the notion of mestizo urbanisms could capture the cultural syncretism embedded in Latin American cities' urban fabric as well as in its geopolitics of urban knowledge challenging some decolonial assumptions.

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Blanca Yáñez Serrano | UCL

Paper: De-stabilising Urban Social Relations: Exploring the Geographies of Ipanema Beach

This research explores the geographies of Ipanema Beach, focusing on its socio-spatialities and its economic informalities. It investigates the extent in which the specificities of Ipanema Beach reproduce or transform Rio de Janeiro's wider urban relations of segregation and inequality. As part of a postcolonial methodology, Brazilian scholarship and theorisations are centred, with non-local scholarship used to support arguments.

Theoretical concepts such as geographies of care, economic informality, democratic public space and Ipanema's demophobia are used to analyse the Beach's social relations between beachgoers and beach workers, and the spatial relations between the Beach and the wider city. The research shows that the socio-spatialities of Ipanema Beach reproduce Rio's wider relations in ways such as othering, class and racial discrimination, and violent conflict.

Simultaneously, Ipanema Beach also transforms wider urban relations by constituting socio-spatial interactions based on care that enhance community co-existence and de-stabilise wider urban segregation. Informal vendors practice care and sociability as a form of insurgent citizenship that responds to wider socio-economic instability. Care is exercised through

collective solidarity between beach workers, and through the interactions between beachgoers and beach workers that result from the spatial circulation of informality.

Therefore, Ipanema Beach acts as a key arena in Rio by revealing how wider social relations can be transformed through care. It is particularly worthwhile as a site of geographical inquiry, because it offers constructive lessons 'from within' about the transformative potential of undoing inherently colonial relations.

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Olivia Arigho-Stiles | University of Essex

Elite constructions of race and space in pre-revolutionary Bolivia

In the first half of the twentieth century, the doctrine of environmental determinism - the belief that the physical environment dictates societal development - became increasingly popular among reformist intellectuals in Bolivia. Confronted with the so-called 'Indian problem', elites found in the natural world a persuasive explanation for Bolivia's deep racial divisions and political fragmentation. Elites identified the harsh and unforgiving landscape of the Bolivian altiplano as decisive in shaping the psychology and social conditions of the indigenous peoples who eked out a living in isolated and semi-feudal conditions. In this way, the altiplano, the highlands of the Andean cordillera, became reimagined as a distinctly 'Indian' space. This echoes similar political developments in Peru which have been amply documented in Peruvian scholarship (see Orlove, 1993; Méndez, 2011). Drawing on selected political and cultural writings by Bolivian essayists including Jaime Mendoza, Pastor Valencia Cabrera, Daniel Pérez Velasco and Arturo Vilela, this paper will argue that geography was central to the construction of a racialised modernity in pre-revolutionary Bolivia. But as space became intimately connected with race, the natural world would emerge as a locus of struggle for indigenous peoples in twentieth century Bolivia who adapted the language of environmental determinism as part of wider contestations over land titles and autonomy.

Notes

Benjamin Orlove, "Putting race in its place: order in colonial and post-colonial Peruvian geography, *Social Research*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 1993, 301-336.

Cecilia Méndez, 2011. 'De indio a serrano: nociones de raza y geografía en el Perú (siglos XVIII-XXI)', *Histórica*, pp.53-102.