

La Compañera

Latin American Studies Newsletter

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Olivia Williams '17, and Becky Boling Director of Latin American Studies, Editors

Solo en México: Thoughts from a Land called Sabbatical

By Constanza Ocampo-Raeder, SOAN Department



I was born privileged because I was born in Mexico. I don't ever remember thinking otherwise. As a child so many things that we would do, think, eat, or see were followed by a simple statement "...*solo en México.*" We even looked at all that was "American" with great suspicion because it represented something that was in direct opposition to anything that was truly Mexican. Deep down I know I still believe this today even if now I am aware of some of the problems behind such a vision, even if technically I am now a citizen of the US, and in spite of spending a considerable amount of time doing

research elsewhere around the world.

Lately, I have been thinking much about where I come from and what this all means to my scholarship as I work on a series of articles and a book during my sabbatical. At first glance my work may seem to cover a wide variety of themes-- from artisanal fishing in coastal deserts, to cat eating traditions, to indigenous resource management practices in rainforests around the world-- but fundamentally my scholarship is concerned with one idea: *revealing the complicated ways in which multiple understandings of nature intermingle.*

To me, this quest is critical to the future of the world. Appreciating the diverse manners in which nature is imagined by different groups of people is key to finding solutions to environmental problems. Unfortunately, in the realms of environmental conservation western science has been privileged almost to the point of completely excluding other forms of knowing. And, although western science provides important analytical tools for conservation, it can be limiting in scope when placed in conversation with other societies that value, order, and conceive of nature and its resources differently. My work aims to show why this is the case and my Mexican mind comes in handy in the process because I grew up thinking about nature in a peculiar and distinctly non-American way.

To tap into the Mexican logic burrowed in my *cerebrito and pancita* (because in addition to intellectualizing nature I also feel it in my gut), I needed to immerse myself in my country. For this reason I spent the first month of my sabbatical in Guerrero, Mexico. In addition to seeing my family, I was able to continue to document the *super folclórico* tradition of glass boat tourism in Acapulco as well as interview local government officials and conduct archival research. The result is an article that discusses the way in which urban dwellers from Mexico City come to Acapulco to experience the wilderness. However, in this case it is a wilderness based on Mexican identity and not the normal markers used in Western notions that tend to equate wilderness with an absence of people. The glass boat tours I documented are designed to provide precisely this kind of experience and the result is that people visit these beaches, which look nothing like typical ecotourism destinations (see pictures), and report the same kind of transformative experience as people who go to a remote jungle or safari destination. This finding shows that we may be missing environmental education opportunities if we think that "nature" can only happen in people-free zones or that only indigenous people can have a valid and robust alternative vision of nature.



The Pacific Mexican coast holds special meaning to me in other ways as well, as it was the place I first ventured out on my own to do research. When I was 10 years old my parents asked two marine biologists to take me with them to help



with their sea turtle conservation project. I am not sure why they said yes, but I lived with them in a remote coastal village in northern Guerrero for several weeks helping count turtles that came to the beach to lay eggs, transfer the eggs to safe locations to avoid poaching, and working with the local community in the development of an environmental education program. The book on which I am currently working is anchored around this experience as my professional trajectory has landed me in direct opposition to my views back then. Here is a small excerpt I have written for my book, which depicts an unexpected encounter with a boy from the local community:

One of the young boys I had befriended sat next to me as we settled inside the *palapa* where the research team slept. He eagerly told me how much he loved turtles, how wonderful these nights were to him. I can still see his huge smile and how the tan sand stuck to his curly hair, his skin, and his long dark lashes. He had been out among the turtles as well and we giggled as we tried to shake the sand off ourselves and recount how fun the evening had been. I could not agree with him more as we talked and laughed. Even more than thirty years later it is still one of the most enchanting nights I have ever lived. I felt such camaraderie with him and shared with him how thrilled I was to be able to observe sea turtles so closely, that I loved living in that outdoors structure in front of a beautiful ocean like proper researchers did in documentaries, that by pulling those eggs from the sand for protection I was finally actually participating in conservation directly. And then, as I told him about my professional aspirations and my dream of helping save endangered species he joyfully handed me a bowl full of turtle eggs.

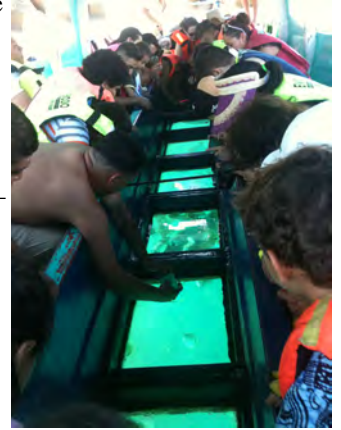
Initially, I was not sure what he wanted me to do with them until he handed me a dark-red bottle of *salsa buffalo*. All the resonant joy that filled my body left instantly as I realized what he meant. My *chocolatito caliente* filled belly, which has never consciously rejected any food, went numb and cold. He noticed the change but misinterpreted my shock with confusion and proceeded to cheerfully showed me how to properly eat a turtle egg: you pinch a little hole on the top, carefully place a couple of salsa buffalo drops inside and then squeeze the contents into your mouth. I stared in disbelief with a forced smile and still body as a series of empty egg shells dropped next to me like small white deflated balloons. I can still recall the hollow plop of empty shells as they hit the dirt floor. To this day I have never eaten a turtle egg in honor of that night, even if I have eaten countless other creatures since.

The fact that it was food that embodied the fundamental disconnect between one perspective of nature and the other is key to the main argument of the book: *that food is the most direct and consequential connection people have with nature*. By simply eating something you are able to say a lot about your relationship with the environment as it may remind you of home (and home can be far away thus forcing you to sometimes forgo concerns of carbon footprints just to be able to find comfort in the familiar), it may remind you of your labor (as someone who cherishes whatever it is that comes from their backyard garden) or it may even signal your understanding of what entails a healthy body (as when you choose to buy organic products). Food provides a unique window into understanding what societies do in order to obtain what is considered proper food. From the environmental anthropology perspective this is a gold mine.

My book uses the familiar food lens to reveal complex human and ecological processes at play. My goal is to show that eating is fundamentally an ecological event that we tend to overlook or oversimplify. I want readers to get a glimpse at what truly happens socially and ecologically when they choose to buy fair trade chocolate harvested in the jungles of Peru, or what it really means to choose to purchase fresh local products as happens when Peruvians claim to use only fresh fish in their delicious cebiches. Since I have worked directly with resource-based societies that produce many of these products I can explain some of the contradictions and oversimplifications commonly depicted in claims made by sustainable food products. Thus the book draws from my different field sites in Peru (rainforest, Andes, and coast) to show the complexity behind resource management systems found in rural societies and how little the sustainable food movement really knows about these intricate human-nature interactions. I hope to encourage a more nuanced and realistic understanding of what food tells us about our relationship to the environment and each other.

But!...I will tell you no more about this because on top of experiencing nature *con la panza* I am also incredibly *supersticiosa* and do not want to jinx the process (...*toco cabeza de buey*). Rest assured all is going well and that I am enjoying the time I have been granted to travel to my field sites, write and think

exclusively about my work. Plus I also have my virgencita de Guadalupe *veladora* next to me burning in all her splendor, I am smoldering *palo santo* and *copal* to attract my ever wandering muses, and take frequent walks with my boys to the druid circle in the arb where I have taught them how to spit *agua florida* like a proper Amazonian shaman in order to keep the world around us *en paz*.





Joshua Reason '17

As a Fulbright Research Grant recipient, I will be continuing my research on Blackness, queerness, non-normative gender identities and urban space in Brazil. I hope to expand upon my comps research by investigating the ties between the aforementioned identities and urban development projects within Salvador da Bahia, allowing us to reexamine and reimagine city planning through a Black queer lens.

Eye on Peru!

Haylee Derrickson '19 and Rachael Sutherland '18

Photo taken in Cusco, during the Viaje al Sur. While staying in Cusco, we explored the city and the surrounding archeological and cultural sites. We were struck by the coexistence of the new and the old in Cusco: the integration of ancient Incan architecture with colonial structures; traditional Andean skirts walking beside name-brand jeans; representations of Catholic saints surrounded by depictions of local flora painted on church walls. In the above photo, one can see evidence of the old and the new manifested in the layout of the city. Beyond the historical district directly behind us, thousands of new structures built by migrants from the surrounding sierra extend far into the cerros (hills), reflecting a pattern of migration both similar and distinct from the migration we have observed in Lima.



Majors and Minors in LTAM

Senior Majors:

Gabriela Bosquez ('17)
Raul Guzman ('17)
Joshua Reason ('17)
Jack Bredar ('17)

New Majors:

Haylee Derrickson ('19)
Ana Yanes Martínez ('19)

New and Continuing Minors:

Francisco O. Castro ('18)
Rachael A. Sutherland ('18)
Emerson Herrera ('19)

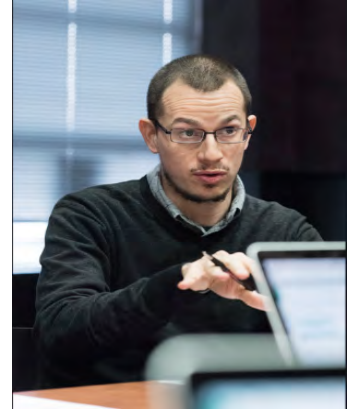
A Glimpse into 2017-2018:

New director of LTAM Studies 2017-2020. **Jorge Brioso**, professor of Spanish (PHD, City University of New York), teaches twentieth-century Peninsular Literature, Literature, Philosophy and Film at Carleton College as well as Latin American Literature. His main areas of interest are philosophy, literary theory and aesthetics. His research focuses on twentieth-century Spanish essay and poetry: Unamuno, Ortega, Machado, Zambrano, etc.; Latin American poetry and literature: Borges, Casal, Darío, Lezama and Virgilio Piñera, etc.; and Political Philosophy: Hobbes, Foucault, Carl Schmitt, etc. Organizer of this year's Foro Latinoamericano, Jorge invited Rachel Price, Associate Professor at Princeton University; Walfrido Dorta, Postdoctoral Fellow at New York University; and artist Geandy Pavón to present and participate in the forum dedicated to "The Revolution After Fidel Castro." In addition to courses such as The Political and Cultural History of the Cuban Revolution, which he is currently teaching, his course on Don Quijote next year also counts for LTAM Studies credit.

Welcome to Luis Herran Avila

who will join the History Department and LTAM Studies.

Luis Herran Avila, visiting assistant professor of History (The New School for Social Research, PhD), teaches 20th century Latin American History with an emphasis on the Cold War, US-Latin America relations, political violence, and migration. His interests also include various topics in Argentine, Mexican, and Colombian political and intellectual history; and the study of conservative and extreme right movements across the Americas. He also holds a B.A. in Latin American Studies from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and has been a past op-ed contributor to the Mexican dailies Reforma and El Norte.



Welcome back to Constanza Ocampo Raeder and Yansi Pérez who have both been away on sabbatical for the current year.

Spanish and Latin American Studies are co-sponsoring a talk that Yansi Pérez will give the third week of fall term on the research she has carried out while on sabbatical.

Andrew Fisher will be stepping out of LTAM Studies to be **Associate Dean of the College** for the next three years.

Jay Levi will be on sabbatical next year conducting research on the Indian reservations in San Diego County near where he grew up for his new book project, *Coyote Takes the Heart: Being and Belonging in the Kumeyaay World – Essays on Religion and Philosophy of a California Indian Nation*.

SDA for 2017-18: Rachael Sutherland

Courses Fall 2017

SPAN 220: Magical Realism. IN TRANSLATION

Is it real? A concern with the interplay between reality and fiction rests at the heart of Magical Realism--a mode of discourse and a perspective on the problem of representation that informs a good many of the best known works in Latin American literature. This course will examine works in translation by authors such as Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel. We'll close the course with a nod to those authors who reject Magical Realism as the primary mode of fiction in Latin American prose. **Becky Boling** 2a 9:50-11:00

ECON 240: Microeconomics of Development. This course explores household behavior in developing countries. We will cover areas including fertility decisions, health and mortality, investment in education, the intra-household allocation of resources, household structure, and the marriage market. We will also look at the characteristics of land, labor, and credit markets, particularly technology adoption; land tenure and tenancy arrangements; the role of agrarian institutions in the development process; and the impacts of alternative politics and strategies in developing countries. The course complements Economics **241.Faress Bhulyan** 2a 9:50-11:00

LTAM 100: The Politics of Memory in LTAM Literature. (*A&I Course*) We will explore the ethics and politics of memory and trauma in societies previously torn asunder by civil wars and dictatorships. The texts and films assigned will be studies of how subjective and collective memories are negotiated both through fictional and testimonial narratives. Our focus will be primarily on Argentina, Chile, Guatemala and El Salvador but we will also read some Holocaust literature to compare how this subject has been represented in another tradition. The primary question we will explore is: how does a work of art adequately represent the horror without aestheticizing the experience? **Yansi Pérez** 3a 11:10-12:20

ARTH 100: A Visionary Aesthetic: Shamanism and the Art of the Ancient Americas. (*A&I Course*) How did the shamanism, or a "transcendental worldview," influence the making of ancient American artworks? How did ancient American artists solve the visual problem of representing the ambiguity, paradox, and flux central to shamanic experience? Are some media and techniques better suited to expressing an other-worldly perspective? This course explores those questions and interrogates the use of a shamanic lens in the study of ancient American visual culture. We will also engage with artwork by indigenous shamans and ethnographic accounts of shamanic practice to guide our definition of shamanism, criticisms of shamanic analyses, and examinations of global contemporary "shamanisms." **Meghan Tierney** 4a 12:30-1:40

LTAM 300: Issues in LTAM Studies. This required course for Latin American Studies concentrators and majors explores complex issues pertinent to the study of Latin America. These issues may include the emergence of indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andean region, the workings of narco states and their networks, and the contemporary urban cultural production in major Latin American cities, among others. The course emphasizes the necessity of a multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research perspective for understanding the changing nature of Latin American Studies today. Designed by the faculty in Latin American Studies, the course will include regular guest lectures from among these faculty *Prerequisite:* Latin American Studies gateway course **Silvia López MW 1:50-3:35 [Requirement]**

SOAN 203: Anthropology of Good Intentions. Is the environmental movement making progress? Do responsible products actually help local populations? Is international AID alleviating poverty and fostering development? Today there are thousands of programs with sustainable development goals yet their effectiveness is often contested at the local level. This course explores the impacts of sustainable development, conservation, and AID programs to look beyond the good intentions of those that implement them. In doing so we hope to uncover common pitfalls behind good intentions and the need for sound social analysis that recognizes, examines, and evaluates the role of cultural complexity found in populations targeted by these programs. **Constanza Ocampo-Raeder** TTh 8:15-10:00

SOAN 333: Environmental Anthropology. Can we learn to use resources sustainably? Are there people in the world that know how to manage their environment appropriately? What are the causes behind environmental degradation? These questions are commonly asked in public and academic forums but what discussions often overlook is the fact that these are fundamentally social questions and thus social analysis is needed to understand them fully. This course aims at exploring key issues of human/nature interactions by using anthropological critiques and frameworks of analysis to show how culture is a critical variable to understanding these interactions in all their complexity. **Constanza Ocampo-Raeder** TTh 1:15-3:00

SPAN 377: History and Subjectivity in LTAM Poetry. A course designed to develop the student's oral and written mastery of Spanish. Advanced study of grammar. Compositions and conversations based on cultural and literary topics. There is also an audio-video component focused on current affairs. *Prerequisite:* Spanish 204 or equivalent. **José Cerna Bazan** TTh 1:15-3:00

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