

# Full programme

Heroes and Villains in the Anthropocene

a virtual seminar series

(Spring - Autumn 2021)

1-2pm GMT on Zoom

Pre-registration: [candida.furber@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:candida.furber@brunel.ac.uk)



7 April 2021

***Love or disgust: One Butterfly, Two Worlds?***

Columba Gonzalez-Duarte (Mount Saint Vincent University Halifax)

This paper explores the theme of heroes and villains in the context of conserving the North American monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). The monarch butterfly is a migratory insect that travels across Canada, The

Mount Saint Vincent University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her research

19 May 2021

***Indigenous Peoples and their Role as "Bearers of Hope" in the  
Anthropocene: Critical Reflections from Indonesian Borneo***

Michaela Haug (University of Cologne)

Current debates around the Anthropocene emphasise the close interconnections between humans and all other beings on this planet. They reflect the notion that the ecological crisis largely stems from a globally dominant, "Western" or "modern" worldview, while stimulating a renewed interest in indigenous conceptualisations of the world (Knauß

Wergin, C. 2018. Collaborations of Biocultural Hope: Community Science against Industrialisation in Northwest Australia. *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 83 (3): 455-472.

**Michaela Haug** is Assistant Professor at the Department for Social and Cultural Anthropology and Senior Researcher at the Global South Studies Centre at the University of Cologne, Germany. She focuses on environmental anthropology, rural transformations, social inequality, and gender relations with a regional focus on Southeast Asia. Her current research project *Future-Making, Environmental Change and Socio-economic Transformations in East Kalimantan, Indonesia* explores how different and partly contradicting visions of the future affect forest use changes in Indonesian Borneo. Recent publications include the article *Claiming Rights to the Forest in East Kalimantan: Challenging Power and Presenting Culture*, published in *SOJOURN* (2018), a Special Issue on *Translating Climate Change: Anthropology and the Travelling Idea of Climate Change in Sociologus*, co-edited together with Sara de Wit and Arno Pascht (2018), and a Special Issue on *Frontier Temporalities* in *Paideuma*, co-edited with Kristina Großmann and Timo Kaartinen (2020).

discrimination in cross-species health, veterinary anthropology, and multispecies ethnography. As a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, she is currently carrying out a project on the local transmission dynamics and understandings of dog-mediated rabies in rural Western India. Her project is hosted at the Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine of the University of Glasgow, UK, and the Center for One Health Research of the University of Washington, USA. She has recently published her first monograph, titled "*Rabies in the Streets. Interspecies Camaraderie in Urban India*" (2020, Penn State University Press).

30 June 2021

***Tibetan Medicine, Conservation and Covid- 19 in the Anthropocene: Diagnosing the Spiritual Revenge of Nature?***

Jan van der Valk (University of Vienna)

During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Asia, Tibetan medicine (Sowa Rigpa) rapidly emerged as a key interface through which practitioners and patients of Tibetan, Himalayan and diasporic communities interpreted and responded to the origins and spread of the virus. Apart from a host of preventative, protective and curative measures - ranging from mantras and amulets to multi-compound pills - the root causes for Covid's sudden appearance and devastation were also framed through

21 July 2021

***Anthropocene atmospheric animals:  
Ruminations with climate cattle***

Jonathon

**Adam Searle** is a cultural and environmental geographer interested in the relationships between humans, other animals, and technologies. His recent research project concerned the cloning of extinct animals, and upcoming work focuses on the use of genetic engineering in agriculture and conservation.

**Catherine Oliver** is a geographer and postdoctoral researcher, currently working with ex-commercial laying hens and their keepers in London as part of the ERC-funded project *Urban Ecologies* at the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge. She completed her PhD on veganism in Britain at the University of Birmingham in 2020. Catherine is also a Royal Geographical Society Wiley Digital Archive Fellow, exploring animals as workers, collaborators, in conflicts and in mapping in the Society's archives.

8 September 2021

***Orangutans as gateway species:  
charismatic megafauna as interspecies portals of concern***

Hannah Fair (University of Oxford)

Tba.



29 September 2021

***Autonomy and culpability on a Malaysian plantation:  
the case of the Batek***

Alice Rudge (University College London)

When attributing blame is avoided, who can be made culpable for Anthropocenic environments? Batek hunter-gatherers of Peninsula Malaysia avoid attributing culpability for perceived wrongdoings, blame is seen as an infringement of autonomy. Even when someone has done something perceived as wrong, it is said that they are 'on their own': one cannot know their intentions. The other-than-human persons of their forest are also considered autonomous - they are said to 'live on their own'. Thus, autonomy is part of multispecies co-existence.

But among Anthropocene landscapes, as many Batek turn to plantation labour, they say the oil palms that they encounter *cannot* 'live on their own'. Because they are planted they are dependent, they lack autonomy. How, then, to live, work, and act among them? Might they therefore be blamed for environmental harms?

To answer this question, this talk will explore the relationship between autonomy, dependency, and culpability. It will argue that through careful cultivation of autonomy in the face of environmental destruction, people find strategies for living in Anthropocenic realities that move beyond a quest to attribute culpability to Others. This challenges both the paradigm of the environmental hero who points the finger of blame, and the figure of the suffering, helpless victim of environmental crimes that so often pervade representations of Indigenous peoples.

**Alice Rudge** is a Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at UCL. Her current research is on language, plants and human ethics in the Anthropocene, and she conducts long-term ethnographic fieldwork with Batek people in Peninsular Malaysia. Recent writings can be found in *American Ethnologist* and *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*.

20 October 2021

***In search for fire villains:  
blame and wilful blindness in Indonesia's peatlands***

Viola Schreer (Brunel University London)

This paper explores how Bornean villagers experience and engage with peatland fires that haunt the island almost every year, causing regional air pollution, detrimental health effects, tremendous economic costs, and environmental impact on a global scale. In the midst of choking, noxious "haze", the search for fire villains (*penjahat Karhutla*) takes centre stage: Who or what caused the blaze? Blame and speculation proliferate.

Examining local and international fire discourses, I ask what Anthropocenic ideas are mobilized to establish causation, attribute blame, and identify fire figures (*Feuergestalten*)? As I will show, for villagers living with recurrent fires the Anthropocenic reasoning adopted by governments, media, and non-governmental organisations have little meaning, but the fires and their politics raise much more concrete concerns about food security, land tenure, and culpability. In the face of serious livelihood pressures and imminent criminalisation, the claims of governments an

