



**The UNC Latina/o Studies Program Presents
The “Health, Environment, and LatinX Experiences”
Graduate Symposium**

Day 1

September 9, 2020 @ 4PM: Shared Spaces & Lives: Overlapping and Discrete Experiences
To attend, click on this [Zoom Link](https://unc.zoom.us/j/97436101962) or copy and paste the following URL into your browser:
<https://unc.zoom.us/j/97436101962>

Presenter: Santiago Bejarano Hernandez

Modern Transnational Familia:
Exploring Cultural Gaps in the Experiences of Latinx Families

Abstract

Significant research exists on what defines transnational families, and more recently, literature has focused on gender and the effects that transnationality has on children. However, there is little qualitative research about living as a part of a transnational family. I hope to use what previous research has defined to mean transnational and expand it to include the experiences of modern transnational families. The modern transnational family is one in which the caretakers and the children live in the same household here in the United States. This distinction is made from ‘traditional’ transnational families, in which the children are left behind in the Latin American countries, to highlight that much of the literature focuses on the geographical gap within the family and the changes and tensions that this brings to familial relationships. This thesis expands on the literature about traditional transnational families by including families in which the geographical gap is absent or largely missing by applying similar questions of culture, belonging, and familial relationships to modern transnational families. This thesis explores the experience of living in a transnational family through three lenses: how the experience affects the individual bodies of Latinx transnational immigrants as well as the larger flow of bodies of labor that form transnational families, the sacrifices that are made as a result of being transnational by both parents and children, and the gaps between gender, social class, and language that are created in a modern transnational family.

Bio: Santiago had never heard of global health before stumbling into an introductory class during his first year of undergraduate studies. This new topic seemed to bring together his interest for science and health with his identity as a first-generation Latinx immigrant. For the following four

years, Santiago pursued this newfound passion by taking courses within global health ranging from research and methods to medical anthropology. This work culminated with a senior global health capstone poster and an honors thesis in Transnational Latinx Migration in cultural anthropology. Outside of class, Santiago occupied his time with work-study jobs in both cultural anthropology and global health. Between graduation and medical school, Santiago worked for almost two years at the Duke Cancer Institute on an SMS text-based smoking cessation intervention for pregnant women. This was followed by jobs in the medical field as an EMT, a phlebotomist, and an overnight emergency room technician at Duke University Hospital. Santiago continues to combine his academic endeavors with his personal experiences through his extracurricular involvements and his global health projects. Currently, Santiago is pursuing his medical degree while serving as Co-President of the Latino Medical Student Association. He hopes to pursue further interests in the field of emergency medicine and eventually apply them as a global health physician in the United States and in South and Central America.

Presenter: Marcy Pedzwater

Xing Borders: TRANSPLANTation as Survival and Subversion
in the Fiction of María Luisa Bombal and Isabel Allende

Abstract

In both Latin American and Latina/o Studies, transculturation has served as a useful framework for theorists to understand the impacts of colonization and the aftermath of two or more cultures coming into contact with one another. However, because transculturation has been used in such a variety of contexts, the term has the potential to overshadow or ignore certain frameworks, especially the impacts of patriarchal violence over women in the environment. With roots in the theory of transculturation, TRANSPLANTation, I argue, serves as a more specific paradigm characterized by its prioritization of a simultaneously feminist, environmentalist ethic. I develop this model of TRANSPLANTation through an analysis of María Luisa Bombal's "El árbol" and Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*. Specifically, I contend that there are two logics of transplantation at play in these works: transPLANTATION, a violent, patriarchal system associated with monoculture and domination, and TRANSPLANTation, a feminist survival strategy enacted to counter the logic of the transPLANTATION. Furthermore, through the similarities in name, TRANSPLANTation is shadowed by transPLANTATION, highlighting the eminence of patriarchal violence that informs the actions of TRANSPLANTation. Through the logic of TRANSPLANTation, the authors model a critical LatinX environmentalism—one that replaces the conflation of national identifications and belonging with a critical consciousness that strategically crosses and defies borders and the logic of the nation state. TRANSPLANTation, exemplified in these works, offers a fruitful model for engaging a variety of feminist, transnational, LatinX writing.

Bio: Marcy Pedzwater is a PhD student in English and Comparative Literature at UNC. Her current research focuses on intersections of race, gender, class, colonialism, and memory in

representations of dictatorship and US imperialism in twentieth-century and contemporary Latina/o/x and Latin American Texts.

Day 2

September 11, 2020 @4PM: **Ecological Ruminations, Diagrams, and Philosophies**

To attend, click on this [Zoom Link](https://unc.zoom.us/j/93586653312) or copy and paste the following URL into your browser: <https://unc.zoom.us/j/93586653312>

Presenter: emilio jesús taiveaho peláez

Colonial Saints Subverted by an Indigenous Brush:
Cecilia Vicuña's pre-Pinochet Paintings

Abstract

Writing about her paintings in 1973, latinx poet Cecilia Vicuña states: “I am slowly getting closer to form. To find it I need an opener and then a needle to join the loose ends into a structure that is not only a diagram, a spider web in the cosmos or a mandala but a particular universe to be used by the thinker.” For Vicuña, painting functions relationally rather than mimetically, serving as a mediating technology to be “used by the thinker” in order to generate new vistas for thought, affect, action, and experience. Rather than simply display or represent pre-existing information, paintings create “diagrams of thought” that shape the world itself, making it possible for their users to think differently and creatively about the correlation between themselves and their environments. Building on the work of C.S. Peirce, Frederik Stjernfelt, and Margaret Iversen, this talk will explore Vicuña's semiotic experimentalism, highlighting her contributions to the nascent field of “diagrammatology.” I will argue that Vicuña uses diagrams to articulate an intercultural subjectivity in which mediation assumes a central role: By re-deploying and re-configuring colonial aesthetic practices, the artist superimposes maps to voice dissent and creativity, globe and community at once. Understanding Vicuña's diagrammatic practice will allow us to conceptualize a hemisphere that is neither simply Hispanic nor Anglo-American but both: “America” thus becomes a site of transformation, mediation, and exchange between dissonant cultural histories and traditions, leading to an agonistic artistic and political practice that is loaded with past and pregnant with future.

Bio: emilio jesús taiveaho peláez is a PhD. candidate through the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. Emilio's dissertation, tentatively titled *Ojos de Hierba: Walt Whitman's Children & the American Lyric*, probes the shared literary and philosophical history of the Américas as expressed through the work of poets such as José Martí, Federico García Lorca, Allen Ginsberg, and Cecilia Vicuña. As a practicing poet, their work engages the intersection of aesthetic experience and political discipline, blending critical, creative, and archival inquiry.

Presenter: Krysten Voelkner

Another Way of Seeing:
Latinx Environmental Existentialism in Cortázar's "Axolotl"

Abstract

The threat of climate change and environmental crisis is beginning to manifest in increasingly literal and physical ways as humanity bears witness to the rapid melting of arctic glaciers, dramatically rising sea levels, and the destruction wreaked by extreme weather events. Yet as these physical representations of climate change mount daily in headlines and lived experiences, there is another, less critically discussed effect of anthropogenic forcing—that of environmental existentialism. This study interrogates the intersections of Latinx eco-fiction and the philosophies of the existentialist movement in order to reveal a burgeoning context in Latinx criticism which is concerned with the philosophical questions unique to an era of climate change. Specifically, I posit a philosophical perspective which draws from traditionally existential concepts of environment, dwelling, and death in order to complicate modern discourses on place, dwellings, and the threat of extinction. Drawing primarily from an analysis of Julio Cortázar's short story "Axolotl," I develop a theoretical approach to Latinx eco-fiction which is capable of addressing the modern philosophical, emotional, and existential impacts of climate change.

Bio: Krysten is a PhD student and teaching fellow in the department of English and Comparative Literature. Her research interests reside at the intersection of environmental humanities and contemporary LatinX literature. Topics which she finds exciting relate to the rhetoric of environmental advocacy, the myriad of emotional responses to the threat of climate change, and the ways in which LatinX writers and artists create environmental epistemologies through their works. Outside of the academy, she enjoys nurturing all forms of human and other life through her passion for plants, pets, and parenting.

Day 3

September 14, 2020 @4PM: **(E)merging Bodies: Environmental Hazards and Vulnerable Populations in LatinX Ecopoetics**

To attend, click on this [Zoom Link](https://unc.zoom.us/j/95664264871) or copy and paste the following URL into your browser: <https://unc.zoom.us/j/95664264871>

Presenter: Christine Johns

The Lithic Poetics of Limestone: Porosity and Vulnerability in a Warming World

Abstract

Geopoetics is a relatively new philosophical attempt to engage the poetic relationship between peoples and their environments, including geological landscapes. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's articulation of a lithic poetics as the poetry of the earth unpacks the role of stone in geopoetic approaches. Kamau Brathwaite's "tidal dialectic" ("tidalectic") method seeks an oceanic approach to history and culture which emphasizes the cyclicity of oceans and tides. Between these bodies of literary scholarship, between the geological and the oceanic, the figure of limestone as both mediator and measure of risk remains to be explored, particularly in the context of environmental crises that worsen concerns of erosion and flooding so deeply embedded in limestone's pores. In the Caribbean and Florida, geology, coastlines, and clean water access are frequently shaped by limestone aquifers that are subjected to the destruction of natural disasters. In the poetry of these regions, I argue, the figure of limestone encapsulates the qualities of porosity and vulnerability as well as peninsular and island histories. This essay will explore limestone's poetic expression at the crossroads of three poets. Puerto Rican poet Victor Hernández Cruz's *The Mountain in the Sea* (2006), Barbadian poet Anthony Kellman's *Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados* (2008), and Cuban-American poet Gabriel Ojeda-Sagué's *Losing Miami* (2019) each express limestone as a mediator of tides and culture. As a sculptor of many coastlines and an intermediary between ocean and land, and between humans and nonhumans, limestone and its poetic expression invite engagements with geopoetics and tidalectics in the Anthropocene.

Bio: Christine Johns is a Ph.D. Student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the Department of English and Comparative Literature. Her research focuses on the intersections of literature, science, and the visual arts. She studies narrative and visual representations of underground and underwater environments, focusing on key issues such as groundwater depletion, mining, and rising sea levels.

Presenter: Sejal Mahendru

“A Place with no public memory”:
Pueblo and Nuevomexicano experience at the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory

Abstract

This paper studies the interviews by native Pueblo and LatinX Nuevomexicano workers in and around the Los Alamos Nuclear laboratory (LANL) during various stages of its existence, in conjunction with poems from established and emerging LatinX writers from the valley, in order to constellate the forgotten and ignored experiences of those to whom the land belonged. The intersecting axes of economic, racial-ethnic, nationalist identities of the people living in northern New Mexico highlight a unique experience of nuclearization unlike that of the rest of the USA. While in the national imagination, the nuclear project was often associated with United States’ growing military and political clout even as it thrust citizens’ daily lives into theoretical possibilities of annihilation, for the residents of New Mexico (especially poorer residents of color) the nuclear phenomenon was a material reality that had to be negotiated through their bodies and land. Imbricated in economic and ecological systems where citizenship and survival are constantly negotiated, the native and LatinX communities of New Mexico have responded through their own environmentalist movements, which were often at odds with mainstream Anglo Environmentalism. This paper attempts to situate these experiences within the larger framework of economic crises and political questions of citizenship to understand the complex nuclear legacies of the native communities of New Mexico.

Bio: Sejal Mahendru is a second-year Ph.D. student in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at UNC-Chapel Hill, from New Delhi, India. Sejal’s interest in environmental justice is inspired by the accelerated and unequal effects of climate change in India. Her research focuses on exploring the intersections of the environmental and geopolitical effects of nuclear energy through their representation in literature and film.

