More-than-Human Un/Commoning

Plenary Session 1

Chair: Franz Krause, Universität Köln

Projects of commoning and uncommoning are not limited to human participants and contestants. In multiple environmental movements, Indigenous organisations and local communities, un/commoning means relating with non-human beings, elements, and spirits. By expanding the boundaries of commoning beyond human communities, this plenary challenges the anthropocentric limitations of traditional commons theory and highlight the interdependent relationships that sustain collective life.

The plenary brings together scholars and activists working in southern Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia to reflect on Indigenous land management, alternative conservation initiatives, and collaborative environmental movements that position animals, plants, and ecosystems as active participants in shaping collective governance. It discusses the ways in which more-than-human relations of producing, maintaining or unmaking commons are imagined, known and practised in different contexts. This includes orangutan conservation in Borneo, where the conservationists' ecosystems-based logic of more-than-human commoning clashes with the relational, intersubjective logic of the area's Indigenous communities. In southern Africa, San groups are struggling to re-build commoning practices in the face of intergenerational trauma resulting from multiple waves of dispossession of both human and non-human communities. Wayuu women in Colombia are campaigning to establish water and non-human beings as bearers of rights, as well as securing access to water for both humans and non-humans, thereby reshaping ideas and practices of environmental justice. By examining the interplay of commoning and uncommoning, this session invites a reimagining of collective futures where

human and more-than-human relations are reconfigured through mutual care, solidarity, and justice.

Plenary Speakers:

Liana Chua teaches at the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. She has long-term research experience in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, where she has explored conversion to Christianity, ethnic politics and experiences of development and resettlement among Bidayuh communities. Her more recent research centred on the more-than-human politics, socialities and aesthetics of orangutan conservation in the 'age of the Anthropocene'. Liana works across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries through collaborations with conservationists and public engagement. She also holds long-running research interests in theories of visuality and materiality, more-than-human socialities, indigenous museology, and the histories and politics of anthropological knowledge practices. Engagement beyond anthropology and the academy is an important part of her research practice. She is also committed to making anthropology more accessible and interesting to the general public.

Kileni Fernando is a !Xung speaking San researcher and activist. She is a co-founding member of the Indigenous San youth organisation ǂAna-Djeh San Trust (AST), for which she has conducted various projects including "Ju-Taa-Khoe, Nature's Recipes: An Introduction to Traditional Veld Foods for San Youth". Kileni completed several short courses on marginalisation & inequality, as well as a diploma in legal history. She has volunteered as a community facilitator for the Women's Leadership Centre (Windhoek, Namibia) on the project: "Speaking for ourselves, Voices of the San Young Women". In 2017, she continued to be a voice for San as a curatorial development consultant for the !Khwa ttu San Heritage Centre on the West Coast of South Africa. In 2024, Kileni was the inaugural San Visiting Fellow at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree with the Open University of Tanzania.

Astrid Ulloa Cubillos is a Full Professor at the Department of Geography of the National University of Colombia. Her research and teaching focus on Indigenous peoples' movements, ethnicity, eco-governmentality, environmental anthropology, feminism, and climate change with a particular expertise in Colombia. She has conducted ethnographic fieldwork with Wayúu people in La Guajira region, with various Indigenous people in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and with Indigenous Embera people in the Pacific Coast rainforest of Colombia's Chocó region. Astrid has worked at the Universidad del Cauca, Université de Paris III, Universidad del Magdalena, Universidad de los Andes, and Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia.