

Anthropology of Mining – EASA Network proposal

Intention

The numerous amounts of recent publications on the extraction of a wide range of raw materials (i.e. gold, diamonds, iron, copper, aluminum, cobalt, tin, uranium) signals the increased interest in establishing a better understanding of the extractive practices and their impact on environments and communities around the world. This interest is not surprising: the global production of commodities (and the global economy as whole) is largely dependent on local productive and extractive systems of raw materials. Recent economic and environmental crises have made more clear than ever the risks and limits, as well as the opportunities, of mine development. Indeed, mining practices shape environments and society in problematic ways; subsequently, it heavily impacts upon, and it is a matter of concern for the life-worlds of many people.

As anthropological research on mining clearly shows, raw materials, and minerals in particular, are not simply local products to be extracted and globally commoditized. Any extracted material comes from a certain cultural space, is embedded in a political and ecological context and it is formed and framed in specific histories. In other words, it is a highly socialized product; its extraction is a complex and contested political, economic and social process.

Although the anthropology of mining is relatively under-established as a field of research, anthropology is highly suitable to critically understand and makes practical proposals over a wide range of issues, such as conflicts over the management of resources among and within communities; labor and industrial relations in mining companies; sexuality, infectious diseases and migration to and from mining areas; indigenous rights over local resources and corporate responsibility of large scale mining.

During the EASA 2014 conference in Tallinn some of these issues arose among the participants of the panel dedicated to mining technologies. As in previous panels on mining organized at the EASA biennial meetings, it drew a considerable audience and raised highly relevant questions related to a variety of anthropological inquiries ranging from modernity, religion, trust, political discourse to questions of property, land, mobility and heritage. Significantly, discussions in Tallinn developed into a manifest and general expression of interest in establishing a more formal and sustainable collaboration through the formation of a network.

Objectives

The Anthropology of Mining network aims at the following: bringing together scholars working on mining practices; establishing a comparative approach to different forms of mining of different types of minerals; understanding how mining is embedded in social, political, economic and environmental discourse

and vice-versa; revive Ballard & Banks (2003) initiative to establish an Anthropology of Mining (a disciplinary focus that cross cuts all the sub-disciplines, from material culture, to the anthropology of religion and economic anthropology); formally organize anthropologists with expertise on mining with the aim to create a stronger voice in public debates around extraction issues.

Activities

The activities of the network will be four-fold.

First of all, we intend to bring together a panel focused on a mining related topic during each EASA conference. This is an excellent venue for sharing research insights, new publications, as well as the development of potential research collaborations. As described above, the network focuses on all minerals in all regions, thereby offering a locally comparative perspective to global phenomena.

Secondly, the network aims at organizing one workshop in the years when there is no EASA conference. In order to create ongoing collaboration among our network members, and to keep the momentum that usually exists after EASA conferences, we are convinced that inter-EASA conference workshops are highly stimulating in terms of network collaboration and the development of ideas.

Thirdly, the network wishes to stimulate regular communication among its members. Therefore the network continues managing the facebook page 'Anthropology of Mining' as a platform of exchange. This facebook page was established after the EASA 2014 conference and its rapid growth shows the interest for a platform such as this. Depending on developments within the networks we foresee the possibility of expanding from a facebook page to a blog (Anthropology of Mining) where text and audiovisual representations can be brought together by the various network members. However, in the initial stage we reason and experienced that facebook serves as a suitable first step. Besides the facebook page, upon the creation of the network an e-mail list will be created through which any kind of news or question could be communicated. All network information should be available for all network members, including those that do not have a facebook account.

Fourthly, the convenors and board members of the network aim to jointly publish research papers presented at either the biennial conference of the workshops held in non-biennial years. This can be in the EASA book series or through (special issues in) anthropological journals.

Contact Convenors

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Board members

(to be elected at the next meeting)

Proposed members per 18-11-2014 (all have confirmed interest)

| Name | Institution |
|-------------------------|--|
| Arregui Anibal | University of Rostock, Germany |
| Bolay Matthieu | Université de Neuchâtel, Switzerland |
| Bonate Liazzat | Seoul National University, Korea |
| Boulton Jack | KU Leuven, Belgium |
| Burge Michael | Constance University, Germany |
| Christiaens Charlotte | CATAPA |
| D'Angelo Lorenzo | Catholic University, Italy |
| De Theije Mario | VU University, Netherlands |
| Engwicht Nina | Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Germany |
| Eriksen, Thomas Hylland | University of Oslo, Norway |
| Geenen, Sara | University of Antwerp, Belgium |
| Groß Lena | University of Oslo, Norway |
| High, Mette | St. Andrews University, Scotland |
| Hirons Mark Alexander | University of Reading, UK |
| Kesselring Rita | University of Basel, Switzerland |
| Lanzano Cristiano | Nordic Africa Institute, Sweden |
| Lopez Maria Elisa | Uppsala University, Sweden |
| Pijpers Robert | University of Oslo, Norway |
| Pusceddu Antonio Maria | University of Cagliari, Italy |
| Sabine Luning | Leiden University, The Netherlands |
| Shaffner Justin | University of Cambridge, UK |
| Spiegel Sam | University of Edinburgh, UK |
| Thornton Robert | University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa |
| Verbrugge Hannelore | KU Leuven, Belgium |
| Wolff Møldrup Stina | Aarhus University, Denmark |

¹ Members may request for elections of new convenor(s) and board members at every EASA biennial conference. Elections take place through nomination and voting during the network meetings.