



The Vertical Archipelago Revisited: Agrobiodiversity, Markets, and Food System Vulnerabilities in the Bolivian Andes

Speaker: **Dr Alder Keleman**
Anthropology Department, Aarhus University, Denmark

Chair: **Dr Chris Gouramanis**
Department of Geography, NUS

Date/Time: Friday 2 November, 3.30pm

Place: Earth Lab (AS2 #02-03), Department of Geography, NUS

Abstract

Recent research has demonstrated that agrobiodiversity can play a supportive, enabling role for food and nutritional security at the individual, household, and national levels. Even so, most such studies focus on the extent to which ecologically and genetically unique crops support nutritional health without examining the potential for diet-driven processes of food distribution and consumption to reinforce the agro-ecological patterns that regenerate agrobiodiversity. Through a case-study from the Bolivian Andes, this paper begins to consider feedback loops linking agrobiodiversity consumption to on-farm regeneration, asking the questions: what contribution do crops that are important for agrobiodiversity conservation make to household diets? And to the extent that they are consumed, do households primarily produce them on their own farms, or purchase them at market? The project draws on a two-period survey conducted with over 400 households spread across four altitudinally defined ecotypes in the Department of Cochabamba, Bolivia. It finds that while potatoes, perhaps the most iconic native crop of the Andes, account for as much as 30% of caloric availability at the household level, other native, traditional, or Andeanized crops account for less than 2% of calories reported. Some 66-79% of calories reported from native crops were sourced from households' own farms, whereas introduced crops were sourced almost entirely from markets. Markets did play a role in redistributing NTACs across ecotypes, which was more pronounced in the post-harvest season. The paper concludes with three points of discussion. First, it considers the implications of these consumption patterns for research and interventions linking food security to on-farm agrobiodiversity conservation. Second, it reflects on the extent to which these patterns of cross-regional exchange represent an extension of – or a divergence from – the “vertical archipelago,” a pattern of inter-ecotype trade described in earlier studies of the Andes. Finally, it considers key aspects of vulnerability and resilience within this agrobiodiversity-reliant food system, with emphasis on the materialities of mountain geography, and their implications for agriculture and transport.

About the Speaker



Alder Keleman Saxena is a sociocultural anthropologist whose research sits at the intersection of the environment, food systems, and human wellbeing. Her dissertation studied the relationships linking agricultural biodiversity to food culture, food security, and nutritional health in the Bolivian Andes. In this project, she used a mixed-methods, biocultural approach, carrying out 22 months of ethnographic fieldwork, complemented by methods drawn from ethnobotany and public health nutrition. Based on this research, she is preparing a book manuscript, provisionally entitled *Culinary Codeswitching: Agrobiodiversity, Indigeneity, and the New Bolivian Cuisine*. Alder is currently a postdoc affiliated with Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene in Aarhus, Denmark. In this position, she is a co-editor of *Feral Atlas: Infrastructures of the More-than-Human Anthropocene*. *Feral Atlas* tells the story of the

Anthropocene as a multi-species history, drawing together some 60 case-studies of environmental change from across the social and the natural sciences. Prior to her PhD, Alder worked in applied agricultural development research, exploring the impacts of policy, technology development, and economic change on the diversity of maize landraces in Mexico. In addition to her PhD, she holds a BA in Biology and Latin American Studies, an MA in International Relations, and an MEd in Social Ecology.

ADMISSION IS FREE – ALL ARE WELCOME