



Lecture Series in Social Anthropology

Full
Semester
2025

Tuesday 2 December 2025 | 4.15 p.m. | Room AND-4-06

A Register of Loss

Prof. Dr. Andrea Mühlebach (Universität Bremen)

In late 2024, news hit the world that a wave off the South eastern Brazilian was granted legal protection as juridical person with standing before the law. Media outlets ranging from BBC to Surfer Magazine barely suppressed their wonder over the fact that a regional government had issued a legal ordinance recognizing the right of the waves to break perfectly at the mouth of the Rio Doce. This paper focuses on the rise of the wave as person within the context of the loss suffered by the Rio Doce and all of its inhabitants after a tailings dam owned by a giant Brazilian iron ore pellet mine broke almost exactly 10 years ago, annihilating much of the life along the river and for many years severely damaging that perfect wave at the river's mouth.

I focus on the crushing compensatory apparatus set in place by the corporation after the dam break; a compensatory apparatus that allowed the mine to translate the river's death into a specific register of loss and reparation. Yet the rise of this register of loss provoked other assertions of loss as well as other kinds of reparation too, generated out of a political rights-of-nature project patiently erected by the people living at the mouth of the devastated river and at the edge of the Atlantic's churn.

I first explore a "Loss Register Survey" as a manifestation of capitalism's ominous vitality – a vitality that deforms and distorts on the level of bodily cells, sediment and water. It explores the survey as a device that "passes through the death of the Other" (Mbembe 2019: 72); allowing for a renewal of the corporation. At the same time, I also attend to the kinds of attachment to life that exist alongside capital's totalizing ambitions. Without wedding myself to a romance of vibrant matter, I tell the story of people's attachment to life as elemental rhythm, return, and churn and explore their attempts to work from within and against capitalism's necrotic project.

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Entrance free of charge.

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