

Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series

Monday, 24.07.2023; 4:15 - 6:00 pm CEST

Louise C. de Mello, ATBL Transatlantic Fellow. Universidade Federal Fluminense (Brazil) & Universidad Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla (Spain)

**A Life Story In The Guaporé Rubber Fields:
Racial relations and labour coercion in the South West Amazonian commodities
frontier**

Abstract:

The definition of national territories and borders during the creation of most Amazonian nation- states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may be described as a violent process driven by the regional capitalist expansion of commodity frontiers, such as rubber, gold, oil, among others, and their merciless global economic cycles. This lecture looks at the intersection of racial and labour relations during the expansion of the rubber frontier in southwest Amazonia in the first half of the twentieth century. Based on first-hand accounts and local experiences, it aims to address the many forms of labour coercion and/or enslavement that sustained the process of rubber trade territorialization in the Guaporé Valley, on the border between Brazil and Bolivia. In keeping with a transdisciplinary approach, it further assesses the spatial and temporal dimensions of labour commodification (CARDOSO DE MELLO & MELKEBEKE, 2019) in the rubber fields from an Indigenous perspective. In so doing, this talk ultimately seeks to advance the discussions on the transformations in labour relations during the rubber boom (WEINSTEIN, 1983; ULLÁN DE LA ROSA, 2004) by engaging both with the literature on the periodization of the history of slavery (TOMICH, 2018; ZEUSKE, 2019) and Indigenous historicities in order to contribute to the debate about the persistence of modalities of coerced labour in post-abolition Brazil and their role in the development of the capitalist world-economy in Amazonia.

Bio:

Louise C. de Mello is a historian and anthropologist specialised in the ethnohistory and archaeology of Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant communities in Amazonia. She holds an MA with distinction in Indigenous History of Latin America from Universidad Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla (UPO), in Spain, further focusing on Archaeology of the Americas at the University of Cambridge. She has a PhD in Social History from Universidade Federal Fluminense (Brazil) in joint supervision at UPO, and an international cum laude doctorate mention at Harvard University. Her thesis presents a transdisciplinary study of the intersection and territorialization of Indigenous and Black populations in southwest Amazonia starting in the eighteenth century. Currently, her research interests include the intersectionality of race and labour coercion during the expansion of the rubber frontier in Amazonia. Louise has recently been awarded the American Trust for the British Library-Newberry Library Transatlantic Fellowship to pursue this and other lines of research. Over the past decade, Louise has carried out a number of research fellowships and grants at several institutions in the Americas and Europe, including Brazil's National Museum, Universidad de Oriente (Mexico), Universidad Nacional Amazónica de Madre de Dios (Peru), MIT, Princeton University Library and The Huntington Library (USA), as well as the Universidade de Lisboa and the Université de Provence. After three years at the Museum of Huelva, in Andalusia, Louise will soon be joining the British Museum as Project Curator at the Santo Domingo Centre of Excellence for Latin American Research.