



**Report on Activities of the Orfalea Center Research Cluster**

**Energy Challenges in the Developing World**

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## Energy Challenges in the Developing World

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#### Research interests (as per original proposal)

As climate change threatens communities worldwide, how to transition to cleaner sources of energy remains a global challenge. For developing countries, the stakes are high: they must simultaneously respond to climate change impacts and strive to develop using more expensive, fossil fuel-free energy sources. In this context, what have been developing countries' approaches to energy policy and fuels? How are these challenged by the current pressure to switch to cleaner energies, and with what effects? What have developing countries been doing to participate in new markets for fuels and energy technologies, and respond to new energy challenges, like for mobile technologies that are increasingly important not just in cities but also in rural areas across Africa and Latin America? Can developing countries benefit from new energy sources, like lithium used in electric cars? Or are fossil fuels still black gold, as Brazil's and Ghana's recent oil discoveries suggest? IHC support will provide funding to create a new Research Focus Group called "Energy Challenges in the Developing World" that explores humanities and social science approaches to energy issues.

Participating faculty bring expertise from places in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, with on-going or planned research projects in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Egypt, Ghana, and Zambia from a range of energy technologies that include hydroelectric, fossil fuels, solar, wind, and lithium. As a new RFG we hope to create inter-disciplinary conversations and exchanges by bringing together faculty and graduate students from the humanities and social sciences. The result will be improved academic capacity to discuss historical and current energy choices in environmental, social, economic, and political context. We are particularly interested in ways in which mapping technologies and spatial data can support humanities-based research on energy issues, and vice versa. These efforts will culminate in a workshop, for which we plan to invite historian Gabrielle Hecht (University of Michigan) and political scientist Timothy Mitchell (Columbia University).

#### Workshop (February 2015)

February 20, 2015 we held our main event: a workshop featuring renowned historian of science and technology, Gabrielle Hecht. Professor Hecht presented a talk titled "Toxic Tales from the African Anthropocene", which built on her past work on uranium mining (published in the award-winning *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*, MIT Press, 2012). Her talk took this work in new directions to reflect on how to think across scales, including that of time, and in truly global terms, meaning in ways that do not render invisible processes of mining and mining waste across the African continent. Professor Hecht's keynote was followed by three panels, including

one based on new films produced by UCSB faculty. In total about 80 people attended the event throughout the day.

### **Additional meetings**

October 22, 2015: This was a planning meeting to agree on a yearly schedule.

December 10, 2015: We shared our own work with each other, including giving each other feedback on work in progress.

February 6, 2015: Open house, that attracted about 30 people. We presented the group's goals and generated discussion and excitement that helped make the February workshop a success.

May 6, 2015: We met to discuss the work of Timothy Mitchell, whom we hope to invite to campus next year. We also decided on a theme for a future event, "Fuels, Extractivism, and Equity".

June 5, 2015: We met to discuss work on "New Extractivism" by Veltmeyer and Petras and to discuss planning for next year.

### **Participating Faculty**

**Werner Kuhn**, Director of the Center for Spatial Studies

**Lisa Parks**, Professor, Film & Media Studies

**Paul Amar**, Associate Professor, Global & International Studies

**Stephan Miescher**, Associate Professor, History

**Javiera Barandiaran**, Assistant Professor, Global & International Studies

### **Participating graduate students**

Christopher Walker, English

Tristan Partridge, Post-doc in the Center for Nanotechnology and Society

Alston D'Silva, Film & Media Studies

Lan Le, Film & Media Studies

Ryan Minor, History

Corrie Ellis, Sociology