

Convergent Migrations: Assemblages of Monarch Butterflies, Cyber-activism, and Mexican Workers in Minnesota



This talk argues that nonhumans can mobilize and be mobilized to resist particular power configurations. The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) is the best known and most cared-for insect in North America. For millennia, monarchs have inhabited and moved between what are now three different nations accomplishing a 4000-km migratory loop that links distinct habitats and people across Canada, the United States and Mexico. Increasingly, the monarch butterfly is under mobilization to raise political awareness against two dominant North American economic projects that have significant socio-environmental consequences for North Americans. One is Monsanto's agri-food business model, and the other is the contradictory NAFTA State-led project that promotes 'free trade' yet illegalizes, and in consequence, sets precarious conditions for labour migration across North America.

This discussion draws upon fieldwork at two sites. One is an online North American community of butterfly amateurs interested in preventing monarch extinction. The second is a Mexican-American indigenous revitalization collective that performs at the largest Monarch Butterfly Festival celebrating the convergent migrations of monarchs and human migrants. Both groups are part of what Dr. Gonzalez-Duarte calls a butterfly-human assemblage that exists due to the migratory pattern of the monarch joining what exists in seeming disassociation. Both cases are representative of a political resistance emerging around exploitative North American projects that maintain the structural violence towards humans and nonhumans under the NAFTA (today's CUSMA) umbrella and which is currently under intensification by the Trump presidency. In this way, the talk connects the contradictory dynamics of international integration, national border securitization, and eco-social inequality across Canada, the United States and Mexico through the journey of a butterfly.

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2:30 – 4:30 p.m.
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This lecture is part of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology Colloquium Series.

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Columba Gonzalez-Duarte has a Ph.D. in sociocultural anthropology at the University of Toronto and a collaborative degree at the School of the Environment. Her doctoral thesis examined monarch butterfly conservation dynamics across the East Coast migratory route. Her work builds on critical conservation studies and post-humanities approaches to elaborate on how humans and butterflies co-constitute in a free-trade but also a nature protected corridor. Her postdoctoral research explores the connections between CUSMA (new NAFTA), intensification of border control in the U.S./Mexico border, and the role of the migratory butterfly in boosting political activism against border enclosure, ecological devastation, and anti-Mexicanism.