ANTHROPOLOGY AND HISTORY IN LATIN AMERICA SYMPOSIUM
Tuesday November 14th, 2017
Centre for Amerindian, Latin American and Caribbean Studies,
School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies,
University of St Andrews.

11am, St Mary’s College Lecture Room 3

Keynote lecture: Matthew Restall, Penn State.

Montezuma’s Zoo, Cortés’s Tiger: Revisiting the Meeting That Changed History

Presentations starting at 2pm, Hebdomadar’s Room

2:00 – 2:30  Sabine Hyland (Chair: Mark Harris)

Writing with Woollen Cords: An Ethnohistorical Investigation

Two newly discovered khipu (Andean twisted cord) epistles are presented as evidence that khipus could constitute an intelligible writing system, accessible to decipherment. In 2015, the author conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the village of Collata, Peru, where authorities have preserved two animal fibre khipus from the 18th century. Villagers state that these sacred khipus are narrative epistles about warfare on behalf of the Inka pretender to the throne in 1783. Analysis reveals that the khipus contain 95 different symbols, a quantity within the range of logosyllabic writing, and notably more symbols than in regional accounting khipus. A shared, mutually comprehensive communication system of such complexity presupposes a writing system, possibly logosyllabic. At the end of each khipu epistle, cord sequences of distinct colours, animal fibres and ply direction appear to represent lineage (“ayllu”) names.

2:30 – 3:00  Sarah Bennison (Chair/discussant: Jonathan Alderman)

Understanding Twin-Birth Lexicon in the Huarochiri Manuscript: Pariacaca’s Punishment and the Case of a Bright-Futured Baby.

All twin-births must be arduous for the parents. In pre-Hispanic highland Huarochiri (Peru), giving birth to twins was an especially trialling burden for the parents. It meant they had ignored a forewarning of anger from the most powerful local landscape being. Like ancestor beings elsewhere in the Andes, Pariacaca would inscribe and imbue marks of discontent on his descendants, demanding ritual action. How was Pariacaca said to have left his mark?

The supplementary material in the final pages of the Huarochiri Manuscript (an early colonial Quechua text of indigenous authorship) offers detailed, but at points confusing, insights into how native people in the highlands of Lima conceptualised human twin-births. These sections of the Quechua manuscript have attracted little scholarly attention, yet were deemed to be important enough to ‘add on’ to a text which was a product of, or a tool in, early colonial efforts to extirpate all native idolatry.

The content of these sections can be better understood if the conceptual link between Pariacaca’s initial warning and eventual twin-births can be clarified. To this end, I explore how we might better understand the featuring indigenous lexicon relating to duplicity, through reflecting
on ethnographic encounters with my baby in the today Spanish-speaking San Damián and Tupicocha districts of Huarochíri.

3:00 – 3:30 Christine Lee (Chair/discussant: Luz Martinez)
Towards an ‘Ethnography of the Archive’: Personal and Community Memory in the Parish Archives of Talavera, Peru.

In the south-central Peruvian Andes, the Talaveran parish archives are living parts of the local community, interacted with and acted upon by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Locals consult parish archives as part of day-to-day life and in many cases, the parish archives are treated as static documents: proof of baptism or marriage, for both civil and religious purposes. Often, however, those same archives are instead dynamic and contested parts of local community and personal history: through parish archival documents, both locals and foreigners actively contest and negotiate memory, identity and legacy.

Break – tea and coffee

4:00 – 4:30 Michele Wisdahl (Chair/discussant: Jonathan Alderman)
Present-Pasts, Past-Presents and the Future: Imagining Brazil Through the High School History curriculum

This paper explores the framing/teaching of history in an emerging middle-class, private high school in Northeast Brazil. I begin with a discussion of how students and teachers linked particular histories to present and future possibilities. I show how this coincided with (and deviated from) the authorised implications of history set out in the National High School Exam. This paper draws on participant observation of history classes and an analysis of study materials and the National High School Exam.

4:30-5:00 Courtney Stafford-Walter (Chair/discussant: Luz Martinez)
“Granny Got Her”: Intergenerational Relationships and Spirit Possession in Lowland Guyana

The paper explores the phenomena of spirit possession taking place in boarding school dormitories in southern Guyana through the lens of the local history and shifts in intergenerational relationships. The sickness, a local term for the possession, affects primarily young girls of Amerindian descent. The paper will engage with the embodiment of gender, the history of gendered knowledge production and how it relates to movement, and the influence of gender in intergenerational and community relationships and Amerindian lifeworlds.

This kind of possession is out of the ordinary for Amerindian people as problems of a spiritual nature in Amazonia tend to centre around the difficulty of keeping the soul within the body, given their propensity for detachment. However, once the history of gendered mobility and knowledge production are taken into account, various reasons for this spiritual crisis emerge and illuminate how young Amerindian women are navigating a shift in expectations from their parents and communities and experiencing this rapid social change and transformation.

Discussion and final reflections: led by Mark Harris.