



## Research on Toxic Worlds

This seminar will explore the ethical and methodological challenges of researching toxicity in urban environments. It examines how communities affected by pollution are increasingly exposed to damage-centered and extractive research practices. The discussion will highlight the political ecologies and embodied experiences of toxicity. The seminar will argue for research methods as ethical and political practice, emphasizing the need for slow-paced, collaborative experiments guided by radical reflexivity and epistemic humility. The aim is to rethink researcher positionality and responsibility, offering a framework for scholarship that contributes to sustaining life in polluted worlds.

**Monday, 24 March 2025**

15.00-17.00

University of Amsterdam  
REC Building, Anthropology  
Common Room (B5.12)

Join us via [zoom](#) or in  
person.

All welcome!

Speaker: **Dr. Mariana Rios Sandoval**  
Wageningen University

Discussant: **Dr. Jorge O. Nuñez Vega**  
University of Amsterdam

## Vital Elements Seminar Series

Vital Elements is a team-based ERC-advanced research project led by Amade Aouatef M'charek, Professor of Anthropology of Science at the University of Amsterdam, and implemented in partnership with the University of Sousse. The project aims at understanding migrant death in relation to, and in the context of, sources of life that we call *vital elements*. These are materialities that are crucial for life or spur on death in their absence, think of water, phosphate, salt, oil, seeds, fish or sea sponges. The project focuses mainly on the south of Tunisia and explores how these essential resources are connected to major global challenges - not only migration, but also pollution, environmental crises, climate change and colonial relations.

The Vital Elements Seminar Series brings together researchers from around the world to discuss these critical issues. The seminar is a space for experimenting and conversing about these complex questions across worlds. Crucially, given the nature of these issues the seminar attends to *how* we know; it attends to our methods of research. We thus hope to open up conversations about methodology and epistemology in relation to the issues we study.

The Vital Elements Seminar Series is a moving seminar, travelling between the universities of Sousse, Gabès, Sfax, Gafsa and Amsterdam. While sessions are mainly in English, questions can be asked in French or Arabic.

The seminar will be conducted in a **hybrid format**, allowing participants to join either in person or via Zoom. All welcome!





## **Dr. Mariana Rios Sandoval**

Postdoctoral researcher at the Embodied Ecologies ERC project, Wageningen University & Research

Mariana's work sits at the intersection of anthropology and STS (Science and Technology Studies), from where she studies the embodied, everyday experience of toxicity. She is interested in the politics, poetics, and sensoriality of the everyday in the study of chemicals as ethnographic objects, in the relationship between bodies and environments, and in collaborative, methodological experiments that help advance social and environmental justice.

### **Slow collaborative experiments: can research help improve conditions to sustain life in heavily polluted environments?**

The question of how we make, live and survive in polluted worlds is receiving greater attention from the natural and social sciences. While this is timely and necessary, it also means that places and communities particularly affected by toxicity have become increasingly exposed to researchers, and to damage-centered and extractive research practices. In this presentation I will share some insights and shortcomings in dealing with issues of positionality, responsibility and power from ongoing research on the political ecologies and embodied everyday experiences of toxicity in urban centers in France, The Netherlands and The Philippines. I will argue for a renewed attention to research methods as ethical and political practice and, specifically, for slow-paced collaborative experiments, guided by radical reflexivity and epistemic humility, as fundamental steps towards research relations that aim to contribute, even if very modestly, to improve conditions to sustain life in heavily polluted environments.