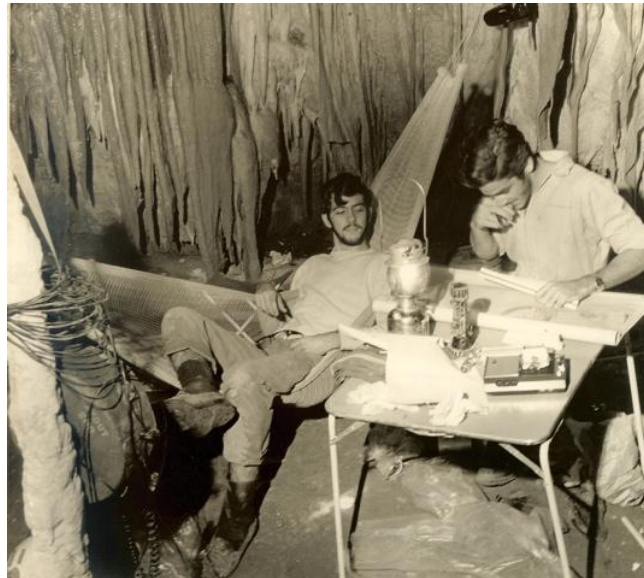


Department of Anthropology 2011-2012 Colloquium Series presents

*Coming Together at the Map: Exploration and Representation  
in Venezuela's Cave Landscape*



# María Alejandra Pérez

University of Michigan

Friday, October 28, 2011

2:30 P.M.

27 Macbride Hall

*For over 40 years, Venezuelan speleologists, or cave scientists, have been exploring, surveying, and cataloguing the country's caverns. This has been an independent and amateur pursuit, beyond both state institutional support and academic science. At least in the context of the history and sociology of science in Venezuela, this civic geographic project is unique. Appreciating this fact requires analyzing the dialectic between practice and representation that takes place in a particular kind of landscape, the cave landscape. Building on the work of the history and practice of science in the field, I present "the map" as a site where two key tensions play out: first, the identity anxieties of a group struggling to define itself as scientific despite the sporting aspects of its pursuit; and, second, the desire to subvert the traditional social hierarchies characteristic of imperial and state science, particularly as they have played out in the Americas. Examining these two tensions has implication on a theoretical debate between "representation" and "experience" in social research. In the present case, it is precisely a focus on human experience in/with the landscape that demands a dialectic with both the ideological and material qualities of representational practices.*

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María Alejandra Pérez is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Michigan. Her dissertation, titled **Exploration, Science, and Society in Venezuela's Cave Landscape**, examines the history and practice of cave exploration and science, or speleology, in Venezuela. Its analysis, which focuses on the activities of the Venezuelan Speleological Society, investigates the ways this organization both contributes to and challenges a broader state-run national project of geographical knowledge and territory-making. Exploring human-cave relations, from a historical, phenomenological, and political perspective provides broader context to speleological practices.

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