

M.A. in Liberal Studies Newsletter

Spring 2022

Uncommon Paths: Angel Lara & the Place of Cinema



Dr. Angel Luis Lara

No Old Westbury professor can claim Dr. Ángel Luis Lara's unique experience of studying towards a bachelor's degree in Archeology at the University of Moscow. Lara said his educational path might be tricky to follow—he took a road less travelled. Raised in a working-class neighborhood of Madrid, Lara was the first in his family to attend college. He won a full scholarship to attend university, five nations and nearly 2,500 miles away. Being an eighteen-year-old foreign student in the USSR was wonderful and chaotic.

Lara was there in 1990, as the Soviet Union disintegrated. He lived through a global, century-defining experience. Imagine finding yourself as a young undergraduate, at the same time that a nation was learning that its accepted truths no longer held, with social structures also fraying. Lara formally studied Archeology, but while in Moscow he became an informal anthropology student of the Soviet way of life. People did not live in a society defined by the commodity form, and wage relations co-existed with

the countless ways that people invented every day to escape. The material reproduction of life (security in shelter, food, and health care for example), was assured by public institutions, people didn't need to think about surviving. He became curious about the relationship between these social relations and Soviet consciousness, and more general questions of how our society and culture shapes our thinking.

Lara returned to Spain, to complete his bachelor's degree, or *licenciado*, not in Archeology, but Sociology, at the Complutense University of Madrid. Simultaneously he worked as a Russian translator for European Union. His interest became focused upon the sociology of work, specifically "immaterial labor." Scholars have long recognized "productive labor," factory work or white-collar work, for example, but were less interested in the study of the caring, emotional, and service labor that so many people, especially women and black and brown peoples do globally. **Continued on next page**

Lara, cont. from P. 1.

Lara focused on the media industry and investigated the culture of screenwriters. While interviewing one for his doctorate he was hired to be a screenwriter for *Hospital Central*, a Spanish television melodrama akin to *E.R.* in the U.S. He worked there as a writer for six years. He met his wife Yolanda Pividal in Madrid, and moved to the U.S. with her as she completed her master's at the City College's program in documentary. She ended up directing the award-winning documentary *Of Kites and Borders* about working children living in Tijuana, on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Before joining the faculty at SUNY Old Westbury, Lara was a researcher at the universities of Paris and Padova (Italy). He also taught research methods at The New School. In 2007 he began teaching



Film Still, *Distancia*, directed by Sergio Ramirez, 2010

screenwriting at the internationally-recognized International School of Film and TV (EICTV) in Havana. Lara's scriptwriting talents are often sought out by Latin American and Spanish filmmakers, so Old Westbury students are sure to get an education that draws on theoretical and practical knowledge.

At Old Westbury Lara's teaching includes many courses addressing Latin American, Latino, and Iberian cultures—using cinema, literature, and other cultural forms. For example, he teaches Mario Camus's *Los Santos Inocentes*, based on Miguel Delibes's novel of the same name, which explores the lives of exploited rural laborers in Franco's Spain.

His MALS course on Latin American and Spanish Cinema will engage with the relationship between national cinemas (for example, Argentinan, Spanish, or Mexican cinemas,) and their particular historical and cultural contexts. Currently he is engaged with thinking through the different rhythms and cinematography of Indigenous films such as the Guatemalan film *Distancia*. He believes cinema is one of the best ways to understand a culture, and that films show the unique character of different Latin-American, Latino, and Iberian cultures.

Lara appreciates the freedom of the U.S. educational system which has less rigidity around what is taught, and also the kinds of programs and courses students may study.

Noteworthy

Two MALS students are completing the first master's theses in the program. **Fatima Logan-Alston**, under the supervision of Dr. Jermaine Archer, is investigating African-American choreographers Chuck Davis and Alvin Ailey, and their complex negotiations in connecting the historic roots of African diasporic culture to the concert dance stage. **Jennifer Suazo**, working under Dr. Fernando Guerrero's guidance, is interpreting the satirical components of Salvadoran poet-activist Roque Dalton's work, which challenged El Salvador's corrupt and exploitative institutions that ultimately led to Civil War.



Fatima Logan-Alston



Jennifer Suazo

Noteworthy—Cont. from P. 2



At SUNY Old Westbury's 42nd Honor's Convocation on April 28, 2022, the MALS program recognized four students for Academic Excellence. Students winning awards included:

Melisa Wright, Fatima Logan-Alston, Kevin Horton, and Brian Morgan.

Additionally, Logan-Alston was the recipient of SUNY's Diversity Graduate Fellowship, typically awarded to one MALS student each year. The Fellowship is a SUNY-wide initiative.

In 2021-2022 MALS student internships sustained Old Westbury's social justice mission. **Sudha Beghari** aided the Panther Pride Food Pantry under Claudia Newman. **Kevin Horton** supported the student paper, the *Catalyst*, under Dr. John Friedman (AS). **Brian Morgan** trained students in the Peer Tutoring Center under Marisa Glaser, **Fatima Logan-Alston** contributed to the Sophomore Jump program under the supervision of Academic Advising's Kaitlyn James, and **Serena Malhotra** advised for the Student Success Center's Ricky Guerra and Sydney Williams.

Professors in the American Studies/Media and Communications Department, **Laura Chipley** and **Samara Smith**, who both teach MALS courses, are submitting their work for the second round of National Endowment for Humanities Digital Projects for the Public Discovery for *Virtual Aquapolis* about New York City's Harbor, and the historic inter-relations between the harbor's ecology and the thriving metropolis.



Honor's Convocation-2022



Enjoying the beautiful spring Convocation were three honorees with family. Pictured are: Dr. Carol Quirke, MALS Graduate Director, Melisa Wright, Kevin Horton, and Fatima Logan-Alston, with son David, and husband, David Alston.

MALS Classes -- Fall 2022

Monday, 1:00-3:15

Psychopathology, CRN 29942, MH 6120, TBA

Monday, 4:45-7

Economics: Theories, Tools, and Debates CRN 29936, HI6530, Prof. DelGuidice

Tuesday, 4:45-7

Foundations of U.S. Literature, CRN 29922, EL6510 Prof. Hobson

Topics in Islamic Civilization, CRN 30824, HI6570, Prof. Anderson

Tuesday, 7:10-9:30

Latin American/Spanish Cinema, CRN 30457, ML 6310 Prof. Lara

Wednesday, 4:45-7

Topics in US History: Struggles for Justice, CRN 29850, HI 6510 Prof. Barber

Questioning Global History CRN 29935, HI77500, Prof. Marechaux

Thursday, 4:45-7

Foundations of English Literature, CRN 29923, EL6520, Prof. Lee

Introduction to Interdisciplinary Study, 30462 LI 6000, Prof. Quirke

Online, Asynchronous

Masterpieces of Hispanic Literature CRN 29835, ML6520, Prof. Gonzalez

Garden and Wilderness: Hispanic Literature, CRN 29871 ML 6810, Prof. Assa

Classes in yellow have been developed for MALS students—they are a great opportunity to work closely with professors and fellow MALS students.

If you have taken fifteen credits, and are half-way through your thirty-credit degree you can take an Independent Study with a faculty member who is willing to support your studies. Please speak with Prof. Quirke, quirkec@oldwestbury.edu.