Inhalt/Content

Special Section
Fieldwork Meets Crisis
Ed. by Mirco Göpfert, Andrea Behrends, Minh Nguyen, Thomas G. Kirsch, Anna Lisa Ramella, Thomas Stodulka, Magnus Treiber and Asta Vonderau

Shortcuts
Crisis Meets Crises

Special Section: DGSKA/GAA Prize Winners

Shortcuts

Nachrufe/Obituaries

Buchbesprechungen/Reviews

Fieldwork Meets Crisis
Introduction

Mirco Göpfert, Andrea Behrends, Thomas G. Kirsch, Minh Nguyen, Anna Lisa Ramella, Thomas Stodulka, Magnus Treiber, Asta Vonderau

In May 2021, one of us, Mirco Göpfert, received a handwritten letter from Uganda via his professional postal address. It was written by a young girl, it said, whose father had passed away from HIV/AIDS, whose mother had died in a storm, and who was left with her two younger brothers, with neither shelter nor garden, in a village that had been ravaged by the storm that had killed their mother. Prior to the deaths of her parents, she had been attending college for a three-year course in midwifery until the college was closed 'due to the Corona virus, which attacked the world'. This letter was captivating. For one thing, after a year of the continuous and ever-increasing virtualization of communication in teaching, research and private communications, the physical immediacy of the handwritten letter almost felt like a blow to the stomach. And unlike most of the unsolicited emails most of us are familiar with, in which people unknown to oneself are asking for financial assistance in response to particular situations of personal, regional or national crisis affecting someone somewhere, this letter referred to a crisis that hit everyone everywhere.

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

'Can You Hear Me?' Five Reflections on Building Rapport Online During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Hannah Bartels
Universität Hamburg

Ina Tanita Burda
Universität Koblenz-Landau

Claudia Eggart
University of Manchester

Katharina Nowak
Universität Bremen

Sara Wiederkehr
Université de Lausanne

Abstract: Building rapport with research participants is crucial for ethnographic research. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has intensified the existing challenges of building rapport. In this article, five researchers explore the ethical and methodological implications of adapting their research processes to comply with the restrictions imposed during the pandemic. The researchers, each at various stages of their dissertation projects, ask a familiar question with renewed relevance: How can meaningful, reciprocal relationships be built with interlocutors through digital interactions?

The planned fieldwork, with bazaar traders in Ukraine and Bishkek, adolescents in a Romanian post-industrial region, breastfeeding mothers in Germany, museum employees in Papua New Guinea and street 'artivists' in Los Angeles, was not intended to take place remotely. Five PhD students at different stages of their doctoral projects met at the DGSKA Autumn School, 'Fieldwork meets crisis', where they decided to analyze their rapport-building strategies during the pandemic together, as they were facing different challenges in applying the methods of digital ethnography for their originally on-foot planned research. Yet evaluating the approaches that have been adapted to conceptualize, conduct, and interpret online ethnographic research provides fertile ground for discussing the following interconnected questions: How can relationships be built and maintained online? How is corporality related to trust? And to what extent is reciprocity possible online? By critically reflecting on these questions, the five researchers seek to take forward the longstanding and under-theorized debate in anthropology on building rapport.
[rapport, digital ethnography, COVID-19, methodology]

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

The Emergence of New Contact Zones? Ethnographic Museums, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the Digital Age

Gesa Grimme and Katharina Nowak in Conversation with Andrea Scholz

Gesa Grimme
Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Ludwig–Maximilians–University Munich

Katharina Nowak
Department of Anthropology and Cultural Research, University Bremen

Abstract: In recent years, James Clifford's (1997) notion of *museums as contact zones* seems to have finally arrived in Germany's ethnographic museums. However, many of the newly established collaborative projects faced setbacks in 2020, as working with others on collections became impossible because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Normally not known for their digital progressiveness, museums suddenly embraced communication software and online platforms in order to stay in touch with their project partners. Apparently, the pandemic accelerated the digitization of the museum.

In this article, we examine the implications of digitalization for German ethnographic museums as a *contact zone*. Through our conversation with Andrea Scholz – since 2021 curator for transcultural collaboration at the Ethnological Museum of Berlin and an expert in digital collaboration – we explore what epistemological effects an expansion into the digital might have on the collaborative production of knowledge for which museums strive today. After situating the recent push for both digitalization and collaboration within the growing engagement with the colonial histories of ethnographic museums, we consider what digitalization means for collaborative projects and the unequal relations of power that continue to underlie them. Revisiting Clifford's concept, Robin Boast (2011) reminds us that, as long as the authority remains with the museums, the *contact zone* is an asymmetrical space. Reconstructing our conversation, we discuss how digital exchange and networking might facilitate the permanent inclusion of divergent postcolonial perspectives that might help to overcome these unequal power relations.
[ethnographic museums, contact zone, digital collaboration, power relations]

Interrupted Futures: Transformed Activist and Research Knowledge Practices in Times of 'Crisis'

Sabrina Stallone
University of Bern

Mariana Arjona Soberón
Rachel Carson Center, Ludwig Maximilians Universität München

Abstract: Creating collective imaginaries of the future is a central practice in our respective fieldwork with the Fridays For Future movement in Mexico and urban activists in Switzerland. In light of the global pandemic, the knowledge practices that forge these imaginaries, such as concerted action in public space, were interrupted and now stand transformed, allowing us to find commonality between our otherwise distinct fields and our reimagined research trajectories. In this article, we examine how activist practices and ways of producing research knowledge have morphed during the SARS-CoV-2 crisis through the digitalization or hyperlocalization of activism in both contexts. We argue that the interrupted future imaginaries we have observed play a significant role in reshaping the knowledge repertoires (della Porta and Pavan 2017) of both activist and academic endeavours and create possibilities for changed forms of future-making. Through both synchronous and asynchronous collaborative writing practices facilitated by digital tools, we create a joint space in which to reflect, reframe and respond to each other's encounters within our research fields. With this collective exercise, we embrace the 'vulnerabilities, anxieties and uncertainties' (Checker, Davis and Schuller 2014) that are inherent in the entanglements of academia and activist work, so as to reimagine our study of future-oriented activism in times of crisis and beyond. *[knowledge practices, future imaginaries, activism, Mexico, Switzerland]*

Sharing Messages, Not Meals: Engaging with Non-Humans in Fieldwork during the Pandemic

Jenny García Ruales
Max-Planck Institute for Social Anthropology , Philipps University of Marburg

Benedict Mette-Starke
Universität Konstanz

Joaquín Molina, Naomi Rattunde
Universität Bonn

Abstract: The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has led to crises worldwide, affecting how anthropologists do research. The physical absence of ethnographers from their field-sites has made it impossible to conduct participant observation as historically practised. As a result, anthropologists have had to become methodologically creative, often turning to digital methods to mediate access to the field. These methods have modified ethnographic research, simultaneously opening up and limiting possibilities for engagement. This article explores the challenges of engaging with non-humans, namely spirit and forest beings, material things and 'data', by drawing comparatively on the authors' respective ethnographic fieldwork in Ecuador, Myanmar, Peru and Germany. Starting by discussing their respective engagements with their changing fields, they reflect on the possibilities and impossibilities of engaging with non-human interlocutors and the transformations they experienced in their relationships with human research partners. The crises related to SARS-CoV-2 and the authors' respective ways of dealing with them have transformed their field-sites and how they access them, making them more reliant on their research partners. The authors conclude that, while engaging with non-humans living in distant places is, in some cases, possible through human mediation, this mediation changes the forms of engagement.
[non-humans, ethnography, engagement, exchange, SARS-CoV-2]

Afterword: Pandemic Effects on Teaching and Fieldwork, or what's Left of Participant Observation after the Pandemic?

John Borneman
Princeton University

In August 2021, I completed an 'essay for '*Shortcuts*' on the coronavirus pandemic and, following suggestions by the editors, I completed rewrites in February 2022. The editors then suggested I incorporate reflections on the other essays on the pandemic (sent to me in June 2022), and this is the result. My original text tracked changes in the process of teaching and research, as well as in my personal and professional life, so I've set my reflections on the other essays apart in italics so as to allow them to interrupt without going off-track.

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

Thinking Through Regimes of Survival and Improvisation in Times of Crisis: Considerations for Urban Research

Prince K. Guma
British Institute in Eastern Africa

Introduction

The acceleration of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed, if not exacerbated, the systemic and institutionalized socio-spatial inequalities of many southern cities. In East Africa, the Kenyan government deployed far-reaching measures and directives to control transmission of the pandemic and mitigate its social and economic impacts. It put in place a number of public health measures, including travel bans and the closure of borders, schools, workplaces, open markets, places of entertainment and places of worship. It also implemented evening curfews and mandatory quarantines, authorized increases in health service capacity and supplies, and expanded mass testing in several cities in the country. Most of the measures and restrictions that Kenya employed between March 2020 and November 2022 were incremental, with evening curfews being the most consistent. This means that the government had to sensitize the public through different forms of media, as it set up portals and opened toll-free lines and WhatsApp channels to disseminate reliable information on the pandemic and enabled citizens to report suspect cases.

The Crisis of Sensory Citizenship in Dense Urban Living

Kelvin E.Y. Low, Noorman Abdullah
National University of Singapore

Introduction

In June 2021, Indian-Singaporean Livanesh Ramu was going about his bi-weekly Hindu prayer routine just outside of his flat, which involved ringing a bell for five minutes, when he was 'rudely interrupted by a neighbour loudly clanging a gong and moving animatedly in what appeared to be the common corridor area'. According to news reports, Ramu has lived in this flat for more than two decades and never has had a confrontation with his neighbours about his bell-ringing prayer routine. Yet, that day, as captured in a video that Ramu had posted on Facebook, the woman 'can be seen aggressively hitting the gong over and over again for around 16 seconds, before giving Livanesh [Ramu] one last pointed glance and heading back into her own unit'. Ramu notes in his Facebook post that his family has never encountered any issues, but 'with COVID we have a new norm'. On a daily basis, residents in Singapore may be accosted by a whole host of sensory registers in their home environments that can be overwhelming. Different forms of sensory infractions between neighbours include noisy behaviour (as the above encounter over prayer routines shows) and olfactory transgressions, among others. These sensory registers become further pronounced given the longer periods of time people spend at home owing to COVID-19 restrictions on work-related mobility (Lee and Jeong 2021; Quah and Chun 1992). If a dense urban ecology of residents sharing more intimate social and sensory spaces in their day-to-day living becomes more intensified, then disputes as a result of perceived sensory infractions are bound to occur.

The End(s) of Mobilities: An Ethnographic Shortcut on a Micronesian Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Edward D. Lowe
Soka University of America

One of the advantages of the emergence of social media for ethnographers is that we are now better able to keep in touch with the people with whom we have worked than would have been the case only about a decade ago. Among the social media posts for the Micronesians of Chuuk Lagoon, where I have conducted ethnographic research, one finds many that document mobilities of various kinds. These include mobilities of people, goods, mundane activities and ritual events, and sentiments of care and concern. There is a vigorous trafficking in posts among networks of increasingly dispersed kin living in Chuuk and in the rapidly growing *chon Chuuk* ('people of Chuuk') diaspora.

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

Layered Crises and Rhythms of Household Debt and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Eastern Europe

Marek Mikuš

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

On a hot summer day in August 2020, I met Mirko on the edge of Zagreb city centre for coffee and catch-up. I first met him during my initial fieldwork in Croatia's capital in 2016–2017. He was one of the debtors of a number of Raiffeisen banks in Austria that issued cross-border home-equity loans to thousands of Croatian citizens in the 2000s. The loans resulted in defaults and foreclosures of debtors' real estate with a striking frequency, and debtors accused the creditors of predatory and fraudulent practices, which in some cases was confirmed by courts (Mikuš 2019). However, Mirko was not among the few fortunate debtors. By 2020 he lost his legal battle with his creditors and almost all of his property had been foreclosed. He still owned a house inherited from his parents, but there was a lien on it too. In an out-of-court settlement, Mirko promised to pay €35,000 to the bank to remove the lien. The deadline was close, but he had only managed to collect about €10,000. He was a self-employed photographer and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic put a pause on the kind of events that he mostly documented, such as weddings and birthday parties. Unsurprisingly, the situation caused him severe anxiety. He hoped the bank would grant him more time to raise the money, but he had little reason to count on their largesse, and what was at stake was his last remaining property and home.

Roundabout Fieldwork during Infectious and Ideological Pandemics

Antonius C. G. M. Robben
Department of Cultural Anthropology, Utrecht University

Imagine yourself sitting down in a hospital, surrounded by thoughts about the fieldwork you're about to begin, while the nurse gives you a COVID-19 vaccine. Another entry into your *International Certificates of Vaccination* booklet that already contains shots against typhoid fever, hepatitis, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, smallpox, tuberculosis, yellow fever and cholera. Generations of anthropologists have shielded themselves from contagious diseases before embarking on their fieldwork. Bronislaw Malinowski lacked such protection. On the Trobriand Islands, he took quinine against malaria and the occasional dose of arsenic against his bouts of depression.

Crisis, Catastrophe and Long-term Fieldwork with Children

Silvia Vignato
Università di Milano-Bicocca

My research in Aceh was initially carried out in 2008–10 with children and teenagers born in the late 1990s or 2000s and living in charity-funded homes and Koranic boarding schools. Their families had been inflicted with loss and impoverishment by two disasters: the 2004 tsunami, and a long and murderous civil conflict that, with different climaxes, lasted from 1975 to 2005. Had it not been for the tsunami, the children would not have been in those institutions, and I would not have landed in Aceh and met them: quite naturally, the humanitarian-related ideology of catastrophe, survival, rescue and reconstruction that structured the children's own growth also framed my approach to them. '*Bencana*', 'catastrophe', and '*darurat*', 'emergency' determined both their needs and the landscape of my research.

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

Life and Debt: Financial Precarity, COVID-19 and Ethical Dilemmas in Laos and Vietnam

Phill Wilcox, Ngoc Minh Luong
Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University

The authors of this piece experienced fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic from both near and far. For Phill Wilcox, far away from research participants in Laos and with no prospect of returning anytime soon, fieldwork was reduced to internet messages and occasional video calls in which news of her area of research - perceptions of China in Laos researched through the new high-speed railway - were interspersed with growing worries about the pandemic and, since March 2021, experiences of the lockdown in Laos. These included worries about reductions in the freedom to move, including to work in the rice fields, lost livelihoods for those working in the collapsed tourist industry, and for many the necessity of returning to their rural places of origin. For Ngoc Minh Luong, fieldwork consisted of ethnography on the ground in Vietnam from August 2020 to August 2021, focusing on welfare access for migrant workers at global factories. She experienced first-hand the intensity and destruction of the four waves of COVID-19 by seeing workers being quarantined, losing their jobs, returning home and becoming infected with COVID-19.

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

DGSKA/GAA Outstanding Doctoral Thesis Prize Winners

Every two years, since 2019, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie/DGSKA (German Anthropological Association/GAA) has granted a prize for outstanding doctoral theses by students based in the German-speaking area, acknowledging their innovative contribution to their respective fields of study. A selection committee evaluates the nominated dissertations according to their theoretical contribution, methodological innovativeness, conceptual argument and use of language in a high-quality standard selection procedure.

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

Schoolchildren as Intermediaries: Fights over Children, Education and Power in Hamar on Ethiopia's Southwestern Frontier

Sabrina Maurus

Universität Bayreuth

Abstract: Compulsory schooling has become a social good that is so much taken for granted that it is hardly criticized anymore. Due to the prevalence of this norm, the paradoxical effects of its global implementation are often overlooked. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Hamar District, southwest Ethiopia, this paper analyses why 'schooling for all' that is supposed to bring development and a better life is violently contested among agro-pastoralists in Hamar. Along with the expansion of 'Western'-style schooling, school-educated youth unemployment is increasing, and the attempt to implement compulsory schooling has created a violent conflict in Hamar District. Following the lives of first-generation schoolchildren from agro-pastoral families, this article shows how schoolchildren become intermediaries between their agro-pastoral kin and the Ethiopian government. Both groups use children and education in struggling over power and change, which creates dilemmas for school-educated youths who are related to both groups and have to navigate these political tensions throughout their life courses. The violent conflict over the implementation of compulsory schooling in Hamar District shows how schooling can turn not only into a metaphorical arena but into a literal battlefield, in which the relations between agro-pastoralists, the state and (inter)national development are negotiated. Various actors claim competing rights to decide about young people's education and schooling, but young people are also taking their own decisions about their lives. These educational decisions about learning in and outside school shape wider social, political and economic processes. The increasing number of schoolchildren from agro-pastoralist families blurs the boundaries between agro-pastoralists and the central government, making it fruitful to integrate the study of schooling into research on infrastructure and politics in order to understand processes of rural transformations and conflicts. Young people mediate multiple and at times antagonistic visions of future livelihoods and corresponding forms of education, which creates dilemmas and conflicts throughout their life courses that need to be taken into account in developing sustainable ways of education beyond schooling.

[school, pastoralism, childhood, education, Ethiopia]

Face-to-Facebook Activism and the Politics of Proximity in the Maldives

Boris Wille

Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

Abstract: This article discusses the organization and activities of a protest movement in the Maldive Islands in order to explore the particularities of contemporary political activism in the context of a small society. My analysis links the anthropological debate about the social ramifications of territorial and demographic smallness to a discussion of the entanglements of street and digital activism under the conditions of the network society. I approach the study of social dynamics in the networked small society from a new vantage point, arguing that Maldivian society is characterized by a condition of multiple overlapping proximities through which people are tied together in various ways concurrently. My ethnography of the protest movement demonstrates how activists create, entangle and conceal proximity assets. I suggest that social dynamics in small societies are subject to a politics of proximity in which nearness in one domain may enable or hinder closeness in others. I stress that smallness is not merely a quantitative property of small societies but a condition that local actors recognize, manipulate and utilize.

[digital activism, street protest, smallness, democracy, Maldive Islands]

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

A Global Arabian Horse Kula, or: 'The Fundamental Interconnectedness of All Things'

Christoph Lange
Universität zu Köln

Abstract: This article reflects key findings of an ethnographic journey undertaken by the author into the contemporary global world of Arabian horse-breeding. This journey was based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork with different groups of Arabian horse breeders, breed admirers and equine professionals in Egypt, Europe, the US and the Arab Gulf states from 2013 to 2020. The author briefly sketches his global ethnographic journey to the different sites of the making and remaking of the Arabian horse and sheds light on the consolidation, certification and circulation of this horse as a modern breed. The aim of the article is to engage critically with one's own underlying anthropological ideas of what I call the 'Global Arabian Horse Kula' and 'the Fundamental Interconnectedness of All Things' (Adams 2012 [1987]) as an 'experiment in holism' (Otto and Bubandt 2010). The article thus provokes an 'experiment' in itself to account for the obstacles the author had encountered in doing ethnography in a translocally defined global community of breeders, while on the other hand grasping the complex circulation of Arabian horses, people and meanings as a hidden, fragmented, contested and more than human globalization. The conclusion shows how this exercise might highlight a future anthropology that playfully and self-ironically accepts its own missteps, is open and, above all, is undogmatic.
[Arabian horse, anthropological theory, ethnography, holism, holistic approach, interconnectedness, kula]

[Zurück zum Inhalt / Back to Content]

Trigger in the Rearview: Staying with the Discomfort in Teaching Anthropology

Heike Drotbohm

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

This semester, it happened even earlier than usual. Already in the first session, a student posted in the chat that I should have used a trigger warning. Working at a Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Germany, I was still explaining the syllabus of the (online) seminar Conflicts in Fieldwork, which addresses not only the challenges of denied field access, research in illegalized contexts and romantic relationships, but also those of confronting armed conflicts and sexualized violence. Over the years, I have become accustomed to students reacting to these topics with personal concern. Given the sometimes explicit depictions of violence in the texts used in the seminar, I usually warn about the risks of traumatization or re-traumatization later in the term, when responsibilities and presentations are assigned or before a potentially difficult session begins. What is new, however, is participants requesting a clearly articulated trigger warning, using the term *trigger warning*, even before the actual explanation of the content. Moreover, similar escalations are happening more frequently in seminars that do not necessarily cover 'triggering' topics, such as those on Latin America when we touch upon the violence in the region, those on migration that also cover issues of asylum and trauma, and those on care that include a reflection on the power asymmetries in social relationships.