47: Claiming Agency: Thinking critical with and about (Audio-) Visual Sovereignty - Counter Visuality - Collaborative Visuality (Workshop)

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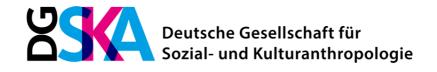
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AG Visual Anthropology

Ongoing discourses about (Audio-)Visual Anthropology (Nichols 1991; Minh-ha 1992) and its research including filmmaking, participatory/shared cinema, photography or (audio-)visual representations demonstrate a challenging diversity of knowledge production and its contestation. Of central interest is therefore discussing the potential of new approaches and research models that address and question non-transparent knowledge production, asymmetrical forms of representation or one-dimensional cultural mediation. With a critical reflection on agency and autonomy, this panel invites contributions on experimental, collaborative and co-productive research projects that situate (Audio-)Visual Anthropology at the intersection of contesting knowledge and its production. "How can decolonial, participatory, activist or collaborative research look like?"; "How fruitful can the co-production of knowledge and its representation be, to whom, when, why?"

While recognizing the interdisciplinary potential (in Anthropology and beyond), we understand 'the (audio-)visual' to be significant in discourses concerned with analysing asymmetrical power relations and global inequalities associated with 'the crisis of representation' and contested knowledge production. Thus, conceptual approaches such as visual sovereignty, counter visuality, epistemic disobedience, collaborative visuality as practices deserve critical reflection, especially when new situations of political contestation and charged cultural concepts (e.g. identity, gender, "race") develop in (audio-)visual and media cultures.

Possible themes:

- indigenous or activist (audio-)visual knowledge production
- visual documentation-, co-creation, collaboration (film, photography, websites, installations, performances, labs,..)
- class, gender, race, religion and the dilemma of non/hegemonic visual representation
- (de)coloniality and the crisis of representation
- (audio-)visual ethnography in times of crisis (war, revolution, climate change,..)

Drifting vs. Co-Creating: Participatory Films with Youths
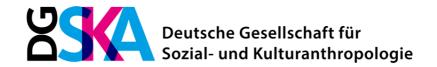
Suzana Jovicic, Universität Wien

In the summer of 2022, Leona (17) created a short film about job applications within my Vienna-based We:Design project, which combines ethnographic and participatory research. The film became a beautiful meditation on coming-of-age, but with almost no reference to job applications. On the one hand, her drifting away from the project focus was a creative exercise of agency – _Leona's film highlighted issues close to her heart. On the other hand, Leona was part of a government-funded scheme that engages unemployed youth in coaching programmes where they learn to adjust to work environments – _to come regularly, fulfil assignments and meet deadlines, which can be challenging for many of the youths involved. The question I raise in this work-in-progress paper is an old but probably unsolvable one: how to balance creating formal structures within which participation makes sense and allowing the participants to drift beyond it? While it is true that the search for an apprenticeship is an existential burden for youths who are stuck in a limbo of endless searching, waiting and rejection, it is also true that Leona's thoughts revolve around other topics. While this question concerns empirical research in general, there is a particular quality to the audiovisual work that makes this exercise of the participants' _agency palpable on an affective and embodied level.

(Non-)Visualizing Harm. Ethics and Epistemic Inequality in Media Spaces of Violent Conflict

Melina Kalfelis, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Koglweogo self-defense groups are the Janus-face of security and justice in Burkina Faso. In contrast to state security and international military interventions, they manage to provide a certain degree of human security by performing conflict mediations and defending communities against *jihadi* attacks. In the first years after their emergence in 2016, they used social media to send photos and videos of public punishments as a deterrence effect. Today, however, they mainly use it to trace criminals cross-regionally and specify new codes of conduct.

The *koglweogo* make an interesting case as agents of (audio)visual sovereignty because they dissolve the boundaries of what international and local communities consider 'good' or 'bad'. In response to their (audio-)visual depictions of punishments, the groups have been praised and scapegoated, attacked, and cheered – especially by international organizations, who accuse them of violating international human rights.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork with *koglweogo* groups in Ouagadougou since 2018, this paper takes an in-depth look at their strategies of audiovisual communication and how these have changed in response to international criticism. In thinking with Rangan Pooja's (2017) work on epistemic inequality and immediations, it will discuss the ethics of visualizing other peoples' suffering – also in anthropology – and explore social media as a space that challenges hegemonic power over the visual representation of harm.
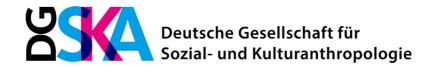
The "Migrant Heroes" of Isaan and the "Translocal Vernacular Migration Archive" of Thai Farmworkers in Israel

Shahar Shoham, Humboldt University of Berlin

Thais' movement to work in the agriculture sector in Israel intensified in the 1990s after Israel further opened its labor market to overseas non-Jewish migrants. Israel's migration policies are based on practices of othering, discrimination, and control, placing migrants as the racialized others to the Israeli "melting pot" ideology.

The paper analyzes the imagined socially constructed figure of "*The Migrant Hero"*, created around the labor migration from the Northeast region of Thailand, also known as Isaan, through cultural products such as songs, videoclips, and images produced around migration experiences in Israel. These are part of what I identify as the "Translocal Vernacular Migration Archive" (TVMA), a collection of cultural and material productions created and curated by Thai farmworkers migrants.

The TVMA, I argue, is an active and productive actor in the Thailand-Israel migration regime. The figure of the Hero, transmitted by the TVMA through generations, provides spaces for creativity, meaning-making, political and future oriented imaginaries, and critique of the social conditions and the experiences of Isaan migrant workers. The paper is based on multi-scaler multimodal ethnography done in Ban Phak Khad, a long-time sending migration village community in Isaan, together with archival research and cultural productions content analysis.

re / despair. Painful encounters in German museums. A video installation

Sebastian Eschennach

Carla Tiefenbacher, Universität Köln

As the collaborative lab "De-centering the Museum", a joint project between MA and PhD students at the University of Köln, the University of the Western Cape (Cape Town), and the University of Bremen, we set out to discover the state-of-the-art in German museums that continue to host so called ethnographic collections. Instead of repair and healing, we found opulence and voids, silence, shame, anger and grief. We found archival strategies and curatorial techniques that continue to actively forget violent and exploitative colonial history. We did not find ways to share our joint experiences with each other. And so we grew more and more silent. Half a year after the study visit, we rejoined to go through the recorded footage. Guided by filmmakers Britta and Sebastian Eschenbach, we recalled, discussed, processed, had conversations we could not have before and finally edited short films on the different museums we had visited. We then showed the films to our colleagues in their home cities, let them comment on it and tell us what they felt and remembered. For this installation, these comments were edited with parts of the original films they were looking at, resulting in a polyphonic dialogue.