

5: Solidarities in Anthropology: Navigating between Relativism and Political Engagement (Workshop)

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Solidarity with marginalized people and the struggles for social justice in the world is an important ethical imperative in anthropology. At the same time, this commitment is contested and widely debated among anthropologists, either for “not going far enough” or for “going too far” and replacing science and objectivity with politics and activism. In this workshop, we want to critically examine the contested solidarities in anthropology from the point of view of researchers’ lived experiences and practices in relation to the everyday social and political struggles of the people with whom they work and interact. Our aim is to move beyond both the normative and objectivist debates about solidarity as an un/desirable political project and to trace the diverse practices of solidarity, support, care and empathy, which we believe are fundamental to ethnographic research. We especially focus on the ways anthropologists navigate theoretical contradictions in practice, i.e. between “insider” and “outsider,” engagement and distance, politics and cultural relativism. How do solidarities with interlocutors manifest in their work? How do ethnographers negotiate forms of intimacy, exchange, and responsibility? How distanced can one stay, and when do researchers see the need to act and speak truth to power? While political engagement is often the result of processes in the field and roles assigned to anthropologists by interlocutors and events, it may also be an ethical decision to transgress and transform anthropology’s legacy of cultural relativism. In both cases, researchers need to reflect on a wide range of methodological and epistemological questions. We therefore invite contributions that illuminate how solidarities are achieved in and through ethnographic fieldwork and writing, what these relationships “do” in the work of anthropologists, how they change the ways researchers relate to ethnographic “data,” and produce new forms of (contested) knowledge.

**“Mozambican Smallholders Cause Global Climate Change.”
An Unpleasant Ethnographic Finding and the Search for Solidary Modes of Interpretation**

Michaela Meurer, Philipps-University of Marburg

When studying local realities of climate change in Northern Mozambique, I mainly engaged with Mozambican civil society and their visions and strategies. In the course of my field research, it became clear, that many civil society actors localize the scientific notion of climate change in a very specific way: in their understanding, a central cause of global climate change is the local smallholders’ practice of shifting cultivation. Mozambican smallholders should thus be the principal actors in measures towards mitigation.

This puts me in a quandary. On the one hand, I see civil society activists whose solidarity is clearly mine – on the other hand, their conceptions imply, that the already marginalised and vulnerabilised rural population will additionally bear the costs for mitigation. On the one hand, the anthropologist in me wants to take this local interpretation seriously – on the other hand, it deeply contradicts my personal ideas of global climate justice. How can I deal with this?

The ethnographic finding is not extraordinary (see Rudiak-Gold 2014) – but the considerations within anthropological literature so far do not offer an adequate interpretation for me. By referring to perspectives of political ecology, my contribution will explore and discuss possible ways of dealing with this dilemma.

Between solidarity and critique: Making feminist ethnography of Pakistani men

Cecilie Mueenuddin, University of Oxford

The image of Pakistani men suffers from a long history of orientalism, portraying them as violent and oppressive towards women. Within Pakistan as well, this image is unwittingly perpetuated by well-meaning liberal segments of the population, as they condemn men’s apparent unwillingness to change and allow women full freedom. However, as anyone associated with Pakistan would attest to, there are many ‘good’ men who work to change themselves, their families, and the society they live in. This paper reflects on the complicated balancing act of combining solidarity and critique, which an ethnographer must maintain in the process of researching and writing about progressive Pakistani men. It argues for the crucial importance of breaking down stereotypes of Pakistani men as unchangeable oppressors through ethnography, while at the same time maintaining the ability to point out ways in which men benefit from the persistence of patriarchal social forms. The paper is based on 13 months of fieldwork in Lahore,

against a backdrop of 15 years of living in and being closely associated with Pakistan, thus being both an insider and a perpetual outsider. Ethnography and analysis of men's reactions to the yearly Aurat March (Women's March) is used as a central example.

Fieldwork Solidarities in an Atomized World: Seafarers' Alienation in the Shipping Industry

Luisa Piart, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology / Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg

Overnight in March 2020, seafarers have become "key workers" whose efforts are essential in the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. Their labour on board ocean-going commercial vessels is more crucial than ever for the delivery of much needed medicine, fossil fuels, food and other essential goods from one end of the world to the other. Yet they are suffering greatly from the pandemic in terms of labour rights violations, trade union protection and worker solidarity.

This paper is based on my seven-month fieldwork experience on maritime labour in German ports in 2021-2022. While container ships, oil and gas tankers are highly securitized working environments, I regularly visited seafarers living and working on board in conditions of extreme isolation. My paper is a reflection on the type of solidarity that I as an anthropologist was able to create with seafarers in this alienating setting, and how it relates to the atomization of their working conditions that prevents collective solidarity to a large extent. Responding to the call of the workshop organizers, I treat solidarity as a critical notion to explore the current struggles for justice in the shipping industry, as well as the premises and promises of anthropological knowledge production in the wake of the pandemic.

A Taste for the Future: Aspirations and Disappointments in Haiti

Marco Motta, University of Neuchâtel

Drawing on research on informal ways of handling conflicts in Haiti, I will describe how certain relationships on the field take the form of a mutual education, and how it transforms the anthropologist's endeavor. I will depart from a series of events that prompted my implication in the creation of a social bakery, which was designed to stimulate a taste for the future in young people by organizing community activities. The project morphed into the constitution of an association which aims at: redistributing unevenly distributed resources; creating synergies between different sectors of civil society; stimulating solidarity economy; developing and supporting without intermediaries projects by and for Haitians;

coping with the vulnerability of ordinary life by providing resources and services; helping stimulate mutual education and empowerment. Yet, in a context heavily marked by structural violence, hopes for a better future are often dashed and projects hindered or prevented. Hence, I will outline some of the tensions inherent in these kinds of aspirations and consider closely what it means to live up to disappointments in the Haitian context, while asking at the same time what it means and entails for the anthropologist to be engaged in such a context.

Insurgent Research: Necessities and privileges

Teresa Jopson, Humboldt University of Berlin

As part of the 'Insurgent Scholars for Humanity International Network' in 2017, I explored and documented what an 'insurgent approach' or method could be: a participatory research that enables participants to shape and own the research itself in order to uphold their best interest. The resulting practice was a collaborative research with community worker Aliya Sakaran on the 'War on Drugs', an everyday source of local violence and insecurity. It was a parallel project to my doctoral ethnography in my birthplace, Davao City, Philippines. Our collaboration was presented dialogue-style at the Anthropology Association of the Philippines' 2017 Conference and co-written in a journal article (2020). In these, we concluded that other research methods can explore an 'insurgent approach' in meaningful collaboration with research partners and responding to community needs. I revisit and critically reflect on the necessities and privileges of the 'insurgent approach' and ask, how 'insurgent' is this approach: how far does it disrupt Western knowledge production that contributes to the local insecurity? How sustainable is this approach: did I just get lucky meeting Aliya? How do we develop just relationships with community research partners? Is it far removed from the reality of academic insecurity in neoliberal academia?

An Engaged Approach to Silence, Care, and Solidarity

Edda Willamowski, Freie Universität Berlin

Sometimes it is not a question if you engage yourself in your field of research but rather how you do it. According to my understanding, there are research constellations in which it is not possible to distinguish between research and engagement. My experience relates to my long-term research on social inequalities in the psychosocial health care system at the intersection of silence, care, and solidarity. Focusing on the affective dynamics of care and crises in diasporic Vietnamese life worlds proved that combining ethnographic knowledge production

with collaborative approaches can form fruitful ways to sensitively approach a silenced topic. One result is a video series to provide culture- and language-sensitive information about psychosocial stress and diverse forms of handling. We chose the title "Open Door" because we noticed so many closed doors that reflected social inequality rooted in our society. During the process, transparently navigating my roles, privileges, and resources was crucial, as well as a careful negotiation of expectations. Being affectively engaged requests critical self-reflection and an awareness that solidarity is a mode of caring. In the end, I see this engaged approach in line with the principle of reciprocity shaping my ethnographic encounters.

Political Solidarities: Creating alliances with the Zapatistas

Franca Marquardt, University of Leipzig

Inspired by the Zapatistas' "journey for life" in autumn 2021 and their encounter with European activists and movements, the article explores the dimensions of solidarity-building for an anti-capitalist transition and how these solidarities are navigated through the fieldwork itself. Solidarity is an affirmation of beliefs and activist practices, as we realise how other people care about the same issues as we do, in different ways. The Zapatistas embody a shift in internationalism that relies on horizontal interactions and a common understanding of the struggle that includes differences. Engaging in participatory research means opening a common discussion on the problems of our times, but also questions of authorship and hierarchies. Indigenous peoples, settlers, and others have different roles in responding to and challenging decolonisation. Thus, the research becomes an ongoing process of acknowledging the significance of indigenous teachings without appropriating their claims. I will explore how activist research plays out in the engagement with social movements, through participatory ethnographic fieldwork. As we share a similar moral ground as our research participants, objectivity becomes impossible as we advance a more collaborative project of fieldwork and writing.

Shall we or shall we not? How conflict situations urge for situated anthropology and practices of collaboration

Sascha Cornejo Puschner, Humboldt University of Berlin

It still is a persistent idea in academia that our neutrality would assure some scientific objectivity in trying to keep the „view from nowhere“ keeping a safe space of non-involvement. This idea has been widely criticized in such diverse

fields as STS and political ecology. Moreover, specific research situations force us to take a position and situate ourselves as researchers engaging in some form with the people and reality we confront. Maintaining such a distance is even more difficult in the case of socio-environmental conflicts, especially in post-colonial societies with indigenous populations affected by persistent extractivism and environmental degradation. As scholars of situations where injustice is the order of the day, it becomes almost irresponsible not to engage in some way. The anthropological theory has developed various ways of making fruitful the degree of anthropologists' involvement, making thinkable different degrees of collaboration and reciprocity as minimal ethical commitments. The paper discusses some of these theoretical propositions concerning my own field experience, situatedness, and collaboration practices with indigenous communities in the north of Chile.