

## 5 - What on Earth! Outrage and Anthropology on a Disrupted Planet

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This work group will reflect and exemplify how research in the context of research group EA:RTH, as indicated by the subtitle, is based on ethnography (fieldwork-based) and dealing with a topic related to disruption of the planet in one way or the other, be it climate change, environmental change, abuse of human rights, armed conflicts, forced migration, etc.. It has grown out of a book project in which chapters deal with *outrage*, as an object of study and/or as a dimension of critical anthropological research, by attending reflexively to the question “who is outraged here and why?” We want to try to trace the changing constellations between wonder, urgency, advocacy and outrage in anthropology from salvage anthropology to the Anthropocene. There is no doubt that ‘outrage’ is also an almost obvious reaction to the forms of polarization covered by this conference.

The rhetorical question “what on Earth (is happening)?” indicates surprise or wonder and sometimes the start of a moral outrage or disapproval. “What on Earth” relates to the puzzlement that is anthropology’s classic trademark. What is happening and what makes people tick in that place? In what world could this particular thing happen “as a matter of course”? These conventional “small questions” of anthropology usually lead to the bigger (and political) issue: could the world be otherwise? We would like to suggest that the conventional anthropological wonder implied by the rhetorical question “what on Earth is happening” has become a literal and acute concern in the Anthropocene. At a time in which humans are arguably a geological force of nature, the question “what on Earth” combines a standard anthropological inquisitive puzzlement about human worlds with the concrete question: “what is happening to the Earth?” and the moral concern “how on Earth could this happen?”. Answering this simultaneously inquisitive, concrete, and moral question in ethnographic practice implies a re-focussing and retooling of anthropology. It means attending to local and planetary scales at the same time. It also means attending to the connections in time and space between human worlds and geological, environmental and nonhuman worlds.

## **'They are killing our future children': Local and global implications of a land invasion in Namibia**

*Jennifer Hays, Professor of Social Anthropology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway ([jennifer.hays@uit.no](mailto:jennifer.hays@uit.no))*

In May 2009, a group of cattle-herding families illegally entered the Nyae Nyae Conservancy in northern Namibia with their livestock, violating several local, national and international policies and laws – including those upholding local land and resource rights. The conservancy is managed by the Ju/'hoansi, an indigenous hunter-gatherer community, and is one of the only places in the world in which such a community has access to their ancestral land and control over their resources. It is often presented as a model case for community land rights. However, none of the protections that are supposed to be in place are being upheld, and the numbers of cattle in the area are continuing to increase, with devastating effects. As reflected in the title, the Ju/'hoansi clearly see the continuation of this state of affairs as spelling their demise. What they find shocking is the complete disregard being shown for the laws regarding land and resource that have been carefully negotiated with the government.

The Nyae Nyae area is also significant globally – it has been identified by leading scientists as among the Earth's few remaining intact ecosystems. There should be enormous interest in upholding their rights – why is nothing happening? Based on long-term ethnographic research, this presentation takes a close look at this seemingly small-scale event, taking place in a remote area of the world and contextualizes it historically and globally. What are the driving forces behind these national and international patterns of increasing violations of indigenous land rights? How can we connect this to the increasing recognition of the inherent value of their land tenure systems? At what level can these questions be addressed?

## **Ethnographic action. Collaborative applied anthropology among war refugees**

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Agnes, a teenager from the Central African Republic, was babysitting her siblings when the village was attacked. The rebels set fire to their huts and killed people. She fled in panic, through the forest, ending up in a village in Cameroon. She looks into the camera, saying: there was war, we didn't have shoes and food, we were afraid. I came to Cameroon, I married, got a son, the baby died, and if you say you want to understand how we live, what are you going to do about that?

Yes, what on Earth can we do? The situation in this part of Africa is desperate. Droughts, conflicts, radicalization, an opioid crisis and increasing violence are among the many challenges. The crippling fact is that the many marginalised groups and communities have no arenas or opportunities for developing inter- and intra-community solidarity. To increase the anthropological impact factor it will not be enough to «tear down "The Wall"» as Thomas Hylland-Eriksen (2020) suggests, we have to do more than "tell compelling stories trying to convince those who can make changes."

This paper will present one concrete example from an ongoing project, Sahel on Sahel, in which representatives from local communities, having experienced violent conflicts in the region, are taught to make collaborative, character-driven films. The presentation will thus discuss how ethnographic action, fieldwork-based knowledge, and video-based ethnographic methods may contribute to meet these challenges.

## **From Outrage to Mobilization: China's Environmental Action following Food and Health Scandals**

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China's food scandals were much cause for political outrage towards practices that had led to harm and much uncertainty about food safety in China, contributing to a national interest in boosting environmental initiatives. From melamine in milk that led to the hospitalization of countless infants to exploding watermelons, gutter oil and human hair in soya, these scandals reached headlines internationally, stigmatizing food and health safety in China. Central to this outrage is the question of morality – what does it take to transgress a moral boundary from tolerable to unacceptable? And how do producers (i.e. local farmers and food chains) impacted by the outrage cope with its stigmatizing effects? This paper takes a sociotechnical approach to reflect over the environmental action that followed outrage in public responses to food scandals in China. Tracing the development from outrage towards said scandals in public media to assembling stories of efforts toward a safer and more environmental China, this investigation will unpack imaginaries of progress and betterment that undergird new ways of coping with uncertainty in the stigmatized domain of food and health in China. I argue that efforts towards environmental action reveal coping mechanisms that work to counter the underlying stigmatization of "Made in China" in new and innovative ways. Examples of such efforts include rural China's blockchain chicken farms, organic certifications (i.e. organic tea), as well as high-tech chopsticks that sense food contamination. These methods and innovations attend to situated uncertainties that reveal a complex interplay between public outrage and local, moral imaginaries, including technological solutionist claims that hinge on the promise of novelty and progression. At the same time, this progression causes a polarization between affordable produce and expensive but 'safe' produce.

## **Climate change, COP21, and Imagining the Future**

*Richard Fraser, Postdoctoral Fellow in Social Anthropology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway ([r.fraser28@hotmail.com](mailto:r.fraser28@hotmail.com))*

In this talk I explore the social and cultural dimensions of the COP21 climate conference in Paris. In it I ask: what might an ethnographic lens offer in revealing the wider culture (and cultures) of global climate change - and how might we connect this to the rhetorical question "what on Earth (is happening)?" and the bigger (and political) question: could the world be otherwise? Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out at the COP21 site - as well as at various locations and actions around Paris at the time - I describe the structural setting of the event, the physical presentation of the space by the COP institution, and the engagement of diverse actors including academics and politicians, NGOs, civil society groups, indigenous representatives, activists and others. In the process, I argue that COP itself can be seen as a cultural performance - with ritualistic, liminal, and symbolic dimensions which afford space for debate and action. In conclusion, I show how ritual and performance offer a useful lens through which to understand the performativity of global climate change politics and the importance of human culture for imagining hope, change, and alternate futures.

**“This is not a forest.” – exploring ethnocentric and biocentric interfaces of ecosystem management through ethnographies beyond the human**

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“This is not a forest. It is a meadow”, the biologist stated to the anthropologist as we approached a forest-like cluster of trees during a mapping fieldtrip in Northern Norway. The statement was related to the mapping methodology of an environmental scheme, Nature-in-Norway, NiN, which is a national strategy for documenting the status of biodiversity, due to the Convention of Biodiversity (CB) and to the ‘shrubification’ (the expansion of shrubs and trees) on previous pastures and farmland. The paper will explore the reasoning behind the statement juxtaposed to a local management scheme, national designated agricultural landscapes (Utvalgte kulturlandskap I jordbruket, UKL) in a coastal Sámi community in Finnmark. The data illuminate and question the harmonizing and polarizing role of nature science models in cultural landscape management, and the difficulties and potentials these create for local practitioners maintaining and stewarding outlying field areas.