

Annual Meeting of the Swiss Anthropological Association

# CARE, MAINTENANCE, DECAY

Ways of Attending to Vulnerability  
in a Transforming World

**February 5-7, 2026**

University of Fribourg, Social Anthropology Unit

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Schweizerische Ethnologische Gesellschaft  
Société Suisse d'Ethnologie  
Associazione Svizzera di Antropologia  
Swiss Anthropological Association



Swiss Academy  
of Humanities  
and Social Sciences



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# Care, Maintenance, Decay

## Ways of Attending to Vulnerability in a Transforming World

Facing the ongoing climate change, political and health crises, and societal challenges, humans react in multiple, often contradictory ways to vulnerabilities that arise. This conference aims to explore care, maintenance, and decay as relations that express and produce collective meanings around such vulnerabilities. We will explore how the processes of social and material decay on the one hand, and care and maintenance on the other, intersect across places and times with situated cultural, political, social, and economic practices and how those shape human, material, and inter-species relationships (Tsing 2015; Haraway 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). We encourage discussions on how care, maintenance, and decay are imbued with social, political, and cultural meanings, moral imperatives, and ethical dilemmas. Further, we welcome critical approaches that scrutinize the disruptions, power abuses, and pitfalls that these relations entail and how those link to memories, traumas, power dynamics, and social hierarchies. We also aim to pay attention to the questions of unequal access to care resources, marginalization of certain forms of knowledge and situated understandings of just and functioning care relations.

**Care** relations are embedded within social structures, gender norms, and social values. Interrogating them exposes both the mechanisms of domination and the vulnerabilities that they create. The people and objects taken care of may be vulnerable, and also often the people who do care work. Therefore, care relations extend beyond mere physical provision, encompassing also emotional labour and power relations (Ticktin 2011). Social science studies of care often focus on the unequal division of care labour along class, gender, ethnic, kin, and age lines (Alber and Drotbohm 2015; Roadsides 2023). They highlight the delegation of care to institutions and individuals, whose financial and social provision are not always secure (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004) and who are often made invisible in the process (Benelli and Modak 2010). While drawing primarily on anthropological theories (e.g. Thelen 2015; Amrith 2019) and ethnographic studies, the conference intends also to benefit from critical interdisciplinary explorations of care in environmental, infrastructure, technology, multi-species, animal, gender, youth, and children studies, among others. Spanning multiple spatial and temporal scales, the conference draws attention to what is at stake in the care within and for homes and neighbourhoods, other species, the planet, and indeed the future.



**Maintenance**, as a form of caring for things and relations, lacks the prestige and appeal usually associated with building and construction. While the media and public communications tend to highlight production and innovation of infrastructures, anthropological and historical research (Edgerton 2006) foreground the importance of often invisibilized labour of maintenance and repair in keeping the world going. The labour of maintenance – be it mundane cleaning of public toilets, stacking of supermarket shelves, or sweeping the sidewalks – is frequently considered inferior to the work that goes into building and constructing. Nonetheless, without constant maintenance and personal care, supply chains and infrastructures soon collapse, as do international and family relations. Focusing on maintenance highlights the labour that individuals and collectives undertake to sustain the functionality and integrity of the social and technological world (Mol, Moser and Pols 2010). Beyond the restoration of functionality, repair is shaped by the power relations between users and technologies, offers us insights into the symbolic significance of objects, and can provide an impetus to think about possible alternative scenarios (Strebel and Bovet 2018). Further, feminist scholarship in science and technology studies has highlighted that beyond its technological component, maintenance reveals the complex realities and hierarchies of care relations and situated knowledges. Ethnographic case studies draw attention to how maintenance can induce subordination (Bozzini 2023) as well as reproduce existing power relations, social hierarchies, and exclusions. Thus, maintenance must also be understood and theorized as a potentially harmful action that is implicated in and may perpetuate the dominant social and power structures.

In proposing **decay** as the third leading topic here, we wish to direct attention to the slow and often long-term processes of erosion, falling apart, and ruination. Decay may refer to a gradual decline or weakening of social institutions, cultural practices, or societal norms and values – for example in the context of political repression, colonization, or economic crises (Hage 2021). On the other hand, decay points to processes that reveal political, gender, economic, and other hierarchies built into, or reproduced in, material infrastructures. Various studies demonstrate how material ruination is embedded in eroding social relationships, networks of care, and circulation of knowledge (Navaro-Yashin 2009; DeSilvey 2006; Schwenkel 2013; Joniak-Lüthi 2020). Moreover, material decay often directly links to feelings of loss (e.g. of cultural heritage), remaking of identities, social protest, and more. Yet, at the same time, decay can be productive, fostering creative and generative possibilities. We propose the theme of decay – together with related terms such as breakdown, ruination, weathering, and erosion – as a starting



point to reflect on the condition of political institutions, social contracts, socio-material relations, collective and individual identities, and so on. Mundane maintenance and care are forces that remain in creative tension and close relationship with decay.

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Cover image: A woman making a call in the summer pastures above Tsagaanuur, Mongolia, 2018, Matthäus Rest.  
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## PROGRAM

Venue:

University of Fribourg

Building PER 21, first floor (room A120), second floor (rooms E230, F205, F207)

Bd. de Pérolles 90

CH-1700 Fribourg

### Thursday, Feb 5

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13:00     *Registration opens*

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- 14:00-  
15:30
- **Panel C (Room F207):** Law as Political Labor: Practices and Imaginaries of Legal Care (Insa Lee Koch, Jevgeniy Bluwstein)
  - **Panel J (Room F205):** Holding Together: Care Amidst War and Displacement (Olena Sobolieva, Oksana Ovsiiuk)
  - **Panel D (Room E230):** Caring for Limits in a World of Abundance: The Case of Health (MAS-panel, Nolwenn Mühler, Anna Mann)
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15:30-  
16:00     *Coffee break (in Hall G, second floor)*

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- 16:00-  
17:30
- **Panel M (Room E230):** Erosion of the Social Contract? Privatising, Invisibilising and Limiting Care in the Neoliberal State (Helena Hof, Anna Wyss)
  - **Panel F (Room F207):** Reproducing on a Broken Planet: Care, Ecological Labour, and Kinship (Mathilde Krähenbühl, Edmée Ballif)
  - **Commission Meeting (Room F205)** Anthropology and Education Commission Meeting (Anja Sieber Egger, Moira Laffranchini)
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17:30-  
18:30     *Apéro (Hall A, first floor, in front of A120)*

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18:30-  
19:45     **Keynote (Room A120)** Reuse and Repair as Matters of Urban Care: Shapeshifting in a Time of Climate Crisis

*Keynote Speech by Christina Schwenkel (University of California, Riverside)*

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## Friday, Feb 6

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- 9:00-  
10:30
- **Panel K (Room E230):** Design and Artistic Collaborations in Wartime: Care and Maintenance through Creative Interventions (Dorota Kozcacuk, Katarzyna Grabska)
  - **Workshop (Room F205):** Caring for Data: A Workshop for Anthropologists (Wiebke Wiesigel, Commission de Réflexion Ethique et Déontologique)

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10:30-  
11:00

*Coffee break (in Hall G, second floor)*

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- 11:00-  
12:30
- **Panel Q (Room F205):** Archive is a Verb: On Unsettling Forms of Archival Authority, Resistance, and Liberation (Björn Reichhardt, Andrea Bordoli)
  - **Panel R (Room E230):** Risking Fieldwork With/without Significant Others (Anne Lavanchy, Céline Heini)
  - **Panel E (Room F207):** Remote Care: Caregiving Across Distance, Time, and Borders (Flavia Cangià, Brigitte Suter, Elise Hjalmarson)

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12:30-  
14:00

*Lunch*

**Commission Meeting (Mensa):** Lunch-Meeting of the DocPostDoc Commission (Stefan Binder, Nina Khamsy, Jonas Köppel)

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- 14:00-  
15:30
- **Panel H (Room F207):** Caring for Lands, Lives and Labours: Between Resistance and (Re)production in Agricultural Practices (Simon Diener, Amanda Jousset, Anna Geiser, Jérémie Forney)
  - **Panel A (Room E230):** Speculation, Futurity, the Otherwise: Material Incompletion as Future-Making (Nitin Bathla, Sabrina Stallone, Jon Schubert)
  - **Commission Meeting (Room F205):** CRED Meeting, Commission de Réflexion Ethique et Déontologique (Anne Lavanchy, Wiebke Wiesigel)

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15:30-  
16:00

*Coffee break (in Hall G, second floor)*

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- 16:00-  
17:30
- **Panel I (Room F205):** Caring Beyond Humans: Ecologies and Heritage in Mountain Worlds (Maria Anna Bertolino, Marie Eich, Viviane Cretton)
  - **Panel P (Room E230):** Caring for Urban Infrastructure. Towards a Politics of Repair, Attachment, and Mediation (Kathrin Eitel, Julio Paulos, Loïc Riom)
  - **CUSO (Room F207):** CUSO PhD Meet-Up (Esther Leemann)
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18:00 *Conference dinner and film, co-organized with the Audio-Visual Commission of the SAA (Cinema Korso, Pérolles 15, 1700 Fribourg)*

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## Saturday, Feb 7

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- 9:00-  
10:30
- **Panel B (Room F205):** Mediatorship and Transformational Anthropology: Creating Cultures of Care in Learning and Research Communities (Claire Vionnet, Eda Elif Tibet, Susan Mossman Riva)
  - **Panel G (Room E207):** Infrastructures of Maintenance and the Social Life of Small-Scale Energy Production (Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi, Elisabeth Schubiger, Hannah Plüss)
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10:30-  
11:00 *Coffee break (in Hall G, second floor)*

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- 11:00-  
12:30
- **Panel L (Room F205):** Politics of Collapse: Layering Anthropology and Art as a Practice of Repair in Times of Erosion (Stéphane Blumer, Sónia Vespeira de Almeida, Sónia Mota Ribeiro)
  - **Panel N (Room F207):** Humanitarian Care Beyond Institutions (Gulzhan Begeyeva, Zarina Urmanbetova, Pol Llopart Olivella)
  - **Panel O (Room E230):** Unexpected Acts of Care (Michelle von Dach)
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12:30 *End of the conference*

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## KEYNOTE SPEECH (Feb 5, 18:30-19:45), Room A120

### Reuse and Repair as Matters of Urban Care: Shapeshifting in a Time of Climate Crisis

**Prof. Christina Schwenkel** – University of California at Riverside, USA

In the face of planetary breakdown, reuse and repair have emerged as vital practices of care—ones that sustain cities not through constant renewal, but through attention to what endures, decays, and transforms. This talk explores the dynamic between *weathering* and *shapeshifting* in Vietnam's aging collective housing, where the slow degradation of materials meets the inventive adaptations of inhabitants who refuse to let buildings die. Here, decay is not simply a symptom of obsolescence but a condition of possibility: a material record of endurance, improvisation, and care. By treating decay as *abjection*—as the matter and life that city keepers (planners, developers, policymakers) attempt to cast out as obsolete and unsightly—the talk asks what happens when we extend care to that which has been rejected. Practices of reuse and repair become radical acts of refusal, challenging disposability, speculative redevelopment, and the hierarchies that determine who and what holds value and belongs in the city. In attending to the weathering of buildings and their subsequent shapeshifting, the talk argues that reuse and repair are not merely material but ethical imperatives: matters of urban care that sustain cities as living, collaborative ecologies where value is constantly remade.



## Panel A: Friday 14.00-15.30, Room E230

# Speculation, Futurity, the Otherwise: Material Incompletion as Future-Making

### Convenors:

Nitin Bathla, Sabrina Stallone, Jon Schubert

Incomplete projects and artifacts abound, from unfinished buildings and infrastructures, creative, or academic projects in development limbo, to technological access impeded by sanctions. Such incompletion is often depicted as an obstacle to overcome, and analytically approached as manifesting capitalist debris, decay, or collapsed futures. Going against the grain of these depictions, this panel seeks to explore how incompletion harbours political and analytical potential, not least to overcome Western-centric notions of failure and dysfunction. Embracing incompletion as a method directs our attention to potentiality and the productive nature of gaps, cracks, and ragged edges, vacant lots that are not yet fully overdetermined but leave space for speculating on yet-to-be-built futures. Thinking through incompletion as method, we are interested in shedding light on the spaces and temporalities of care, repair, and maintenance opened up by incompletion. Specifically, we invite papers that seek to understand material incompletion along the lines of speculation, futurity, and the otherwise. Speculation points to capitalism's 'spatial fix' and the need to enclose ever-receding 'frontiers': how does incompletion open to futures beyond the techno-managerial imaginaries that initiate speculation? Our second keyword gestures towards the tyranny of completion, the increasingly authoritarian domination of the future through planning that entails the aim to dominate bodies and lives. Finally, the otherwise directs our attention to the kinds of 'creation' incompletion requires: the many hands that dig in the soil, scavenge copper cables, connect 'illegally' to power grids and tinker with molecules and materials to work with and around incomplete things.

### Papers:

#### **The Atlas of Inhabiting Emergency**

Estefania Mompean Botias ([estefania.mompeanbotias@epfl.ch](mailto:estefania.mompeanbotias@epfl.ch)), EPFL

The Atlas of Inhabiting Emergency, developed within the doctoral research Architectures of Emergency, focuses on the counter-territories of emergency—spatial and social configurations that emerge within, alongside, or against the infrastructures of official



emergency response. Rather than reinforcing the logic of control and closure, these counter-territories activate situated forms of care, improvisation, and maintenance, inhabiting the cracks of emergency governance.

Building on the concept of becoming-emergency, the Atlas traces how informal shelters, community kitchens, ad-hoc gathering spaces, and improvised infrastructures unfold as adaptive ecologies. These are not merely reactive solutions, but dynamic terrains where incompleteness is embraced as a generative condition. Here, temporariness and fragility—rather than signs of failure—become sources of speculative potential, enabling negotiations over space, resources, and collective futures.

Methodologically, the Atlas combines ethnographic observation, critical cartography, and design-based practice to assemble a living archive of these counter-territories. Drawings, photographs, maps, and narratives are gathered not only as evidence, but as speculative prototypes—tools to rethink how we inhabit emergency beyond technocratic prescriptions.

In this sense, and in the spirit of becoming-emergency, the Atlas listens to the textures of emergency: the warmth of improvised blankets, the geometry of tents folding in the wind, the faint hum of a generator powering a shared kitchen. These fragments, gaps, and unfinished architectures become openings—porous thresholds where care takes shape. Between the official map and the lived territory, between the plan and the gesture, the emergency becomes not a temporary rupture, but a sustained terrain of negotiation.

### **On the Rails of Salvation: An Ethnography of Moral Politics, Energy Infrastructures and Future-Making in Argentina**

Fillippo Bozzini ([filippo.bozzini@unil.ch](mailto:filippo.bozzini@unil.ch)), LACS, Université de Lausanne; Chaire Yves Oltramare, IHEID

Technically fixing the climate crisis through the green transition presents itself as the natural outcome of innovative progress of technologies. However, the phenomenon of salvation through innovation finds complicating local settings that are enmeshed into the historicity of infrastructural projects of society. Recent anthropological works highlight energy transition and green technologies as both moral discourses and a process that fix and foreclose the future, one driven by batteries and energy infrastructures paradoxically intertwined with resource extraction. While the transition towards a sustainable green mobility that relies on resource extraction has been documented mainly from the perspective of e-cars, a new line of inquiry proposes analysing the relationship between green technologies and railways infrastructures. This paper presents ethnographic findings on the new Solar Train, powered by lithium batteries. Operating in the Jujuy's province, this innovative sustainably framed technological object is embedded into a context of lithium extraction, competing views of societal projects for the future, indigenous resistance to extractivism and energy transition. The second solar train in the



world, its tracks are found close by rusty wagons, ghost stations, and rails swallowed up by the ground – the remnants of the already existing yet incomplete national railway infrastructure that has been dismantled and forgotten in the last 30 years. Against the backdrop of ongoing Javier Milei's conservative revolution for the Argentine future, this project sheds light on the performative power of energies of incomplete societal projects and the struggles to become a complete infrastructure for the future. This study reveals how the historicity of incomplete infrastructures informs feelings of unfolding politics of future-making that provide a compelling picture for the techno-salvation at work that restricts alternatives visions in the energy transition.

## **Shells, Skeletons, or Future Assets? Incremental Housing Designs in Cape Town**

Laurin Baumgardt ([laurin.baumgardt@epfl.ch](mailto:laurin.baumgardt@epfl.ch)), EPFL

Numerous public housing projects around the world have been constructed under the premise that housing recipients can be empowered by using their ingenuity, improvisation, labor, and capital investments to incrementally complete their housing units according to their own means, tastes, and aspirations. Often labeled as “not-yet houses,” “half-houses,” “expandable houses,” or “starter houses,” these incomplete housing designs and prototypes formalize the “unfinished” as a space of experimentation and speculation with new urban models and building systems, while often relying heavily on residents' labor, time, and capital to complete their skeleton structures (Muzaffar 2024, Van Noorloos et al. 2019). This celebration of residents' resourcefulness and improvisation is often a common, highly mediated narrative among development actors, architects, and scholars. In this paper, I critically interrogate this narrative.

Drawing on long-term ethnographic dissertation research in Cape Town, the paper examines two low-income housing projects in Khayelitsha, one proposed and one prototyped, that purposefully designed unfinished structures. By situating these projects within their developmental politics and broader architectural histories of incremental building, the paper focuses on how architects, residents, and other experts and critics differently imagine and interpret unfinished housing designs. Promoting values such as flexibility, adaptability, and incrementality, these incomplete designs can potentially foster creative self-empowerment, yet also risk becoming burdensome impositions in the guise grow-your-own-house logics. Exploring the blurred horizons between what counts as “finished” and “unfinished,” “formal” and “informal,” the paper discusses the contested politics of incompleteness, showing how incremental housing becomes both a testing ground for residents' ingenuity and a potential vehicle for neoliberal and developmental design agendas.



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## **The Not Yet-ness of Ilisu Dam Project and the Looming Submersion of Hasankeyf Old Town**

Mustafa Akçınar ([mustafa.akcinar@uzh.ch](mailto:mustafa.akcinar@uzh.ch)), ISEK/UZH

Being one of the 'vision' projects of Türkiye's regional South Eastern Development Project, Ilisu Dam flooded the ancient city of Hasankeyf on Tigris Riverbank in 2020. This project was huge in terms of its billion dollars of budget, body of construction and the volume of energy it was producing for the future. On the other hand, it was 'a late coming' project in terms of being in the agenda of Turkish State Planning since 1970s. In this context, this presentation focuses on 2013-2014 spatio-temporal timeframe, in which the incompleteness of Ilisu Dam was producing its own 'not-yet-ness' on the basis of looming of Hasankeyf old town's submersion. The critical condition of Hasankeyf in this timeframe and the dramatic waiting for the submersion are the main focus of the presentation, in which the incompleteness of the dam construction was also creating a touristic flow to the ancient city and a visible political activism against the project worldwide on the basis of ecological and cultural heritage concerns. In this respect, this presentation grasps the 'incompleteness' and 'not yet ness' as an analytical tool to shed on the concepts such as risk, uncertainty and ambiguity, which the inhabitants of Hasankeyf were exposed to, under pressure of and dealing with before the flood of their old village.



## Panel B: Saturday 09.00-10.30, Room F205

# Mediatorship and Transformational Anthropology: Creating Cultures of Care in Learning and Research Communities

### Convenors:

Claire Vionnet, Eda Elif Tibet, Susan Mossman Riva

In the face of mounting global vulnerabilities, climate crisis, political polarization, institutional instability, and the precarity of health and livelihoods, how can anthropology contribute to sustaining cultures of care within the very spaces where knowledge is produced and shared? This panel explores “mediatorship” as a relational practice of care and conflict transformation within academic and applied anthropological settings. It examines how anthropologists as educators, researchers, and facilitators can actively cultivate environments of care, maintenance, and repair, especially in response to systemic decay and fragmentation.

We position mediatorship as a transformational process grounded in holistic and experiential pedagogies that move beyond knowledge transmission to embrace mutual accompaniment, reflexive engagement, and narrative healing. These approaches, we argue, offer powerful tools for attending to vulnerability not only as an object of study but as a shared condition in the spaces where anthropology is practiced.

The concept of mediatorship, as theorized by Riva (2023, 2025), involves guiding individuals and communities through processes of conflict, brokenness, and disconnection toward renewed forms of relationality and coherence. Drawing on ethnographic, autoethnographic, and duoethnographic methods, this panel highlights how mediatorship enables individuals to reconnect fragmented experiences, bridge conflicting narratives, and envision alternative futures. By engaging directly with trauma, institutional injustice, and existential uncertainty, these practices generate what Riva calls “conflict wisdom” an embodied understanding of transformation that arises from within lived experience.

Care in this context is not sentimental but structural: it is an intentional, sustained practice of maintaining ethical, dialogical, and inclusive academic and social relations. In the wake of neoliberal restructurings and institutional neglect, we ask: How can universities become spaces where vulnerability is not hidden or pathologized but attended to through relational care? How might anthropology lead in articulating care not just as content, but as pedagogy and process?

This panel takes forward the work of the Interface Commission for Engaged Anthropologists, which fosters links between academic and engaged applied



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anthropology. Building on its Ascona Workshop (2022) and the ongoing development of the Ascona Charter for Transformative Anthropology, we examine how “transformational anthropology” can be practiced in university classrooms, collaborative research environments, and wider civil society. In particular, we focus on pedagogical templates and research approaches that value vulnerability as a site for learning, relational development, and systemic change.

Panel contributions will reflect critically on:

- How can anthropology sustain cultures of care within and beyond universities?
- What are the ethical, political, and practical challenges of mediating care in settings of systemic decay?
- How do narrative-based methods; autoethnography, duoethnography, storytelling, facilitate care, coherence, and accompaniment?
- What role can multimodal and performative practices play in maintaining and regenerating fragile human and inter-species relationships?
- How might we navigate power dynamics and institutional pressures while fostering care-ful learning environments?
- What new anthropological futures emerge when we center care, maintenance, and vulnerability as transformative rather than deficient?

This panel contributes to the SEG 2026 theme by critically examining how vulnerability is managed, mediated, and transformed within anthropological practice. We frame care and maintenance as pedagogical and ethical imperatives that respond to, rather than escape from, the realities of decay, whether in interpersonal relationships, institutions, or epistemologies.

At the heart of this inquiry is a concern for relationality: how anthropologists attend to one another, to their students, to their collaborators, and to the worlds they seek to understand. In a time of increasing fragmentation and uncertainty, this panel offers anthropology not only as critique, but as a practice of care-in-action capable of sustaining more just, inclusive, and hopeful futures.

We invite contributions that:

- Showcase applied research projects or pedagogical innovations that engage with care and vulnerability.
- Explore mediatorship in practice, whether through teaching, research, community engagement, or artistic collaboration.
- Reflect on the moral dilemmas, institutional constraints, or epistemological tensions involved in practicing care.
- Use autoethnographic or duoethnographic methods to illuminate personal and collective transformations.



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Ultimately, this panel aims to create a dialogical and embodied space of reflection, where we collectively explore anthropology's potential as a mediating force in a transforming world, one that attends to decay not with resignation, but with attentive, sustained care.

## References

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Interface Commission Ascona Workshop (2022).  
<https://www.seginterface.org/newfuturescolloquium>

## Papers:

### **Theatre and Ethnographical Practices Sustaining the Construction of Life in Quibdó (Colombia)**

Claudia Howald ([claudia.howald@supsi.ch](mailto:claudia.howald@supsi.ch)), SUPSI

Theatre practice can be part of ethnographic research, creating spaces for encounter, discussion, embodied knowledge production, but also for care. The contribution reflects on an applied research project involving theatre practice as a way of maintaining and caring for ethical research practices with a youth theatre collective in the Afro-Colombian city of Quibdó. At first, the project was thought as a way to foster dialogue and reciprocity in my doctoral research process, discussing some research insights with the young people of the collective with which I was working for the last few years. Discussions would help focus on a main and significant topic for the young members and lead to the collective creation of a play, to be staged and discussed with a larger audience. However, the experience proved to be a lot more to me and the collective. Performative practices were spaces for experiences and collective embodied knowledge production, in which care was a central dimension, intrinsically part of the process. The project was in itself an act of care and maintenance of the youth theatre collective, which was going through major changes and challenges.



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## **Trusting the Tap: Care, Embodied Learning, and Relational Knowledge in a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Community**

Christian Pierce ([christian.pierce@unisg.ch](mailto:christian.pierce@unisg.ch)), University of St. Gallen

This paper examines Brazilian Jiu Jitsu as a relational learning community, where care, hierarchy, and embodied practice come together to shape how knowledge is produced and shared. Based on ethnographic research with Alliance Jiu Jitsu, one of the largest martial arts organizations in the world, the study explores how trust is built through physical vulnerability, ritual, and interpersonal discipline. Central to this learning environment is the act of “tapping,” a nonverbal signal of submission that represents not defeat but mutual recognition, safety, and growth.

The research is grounded in more than 40 qualitative interviews with instructors and staff across multiple countries, alongside an autoethnographic engagement informed by over twenty years of experience as a practitioner. As a Black American military veteran and Black Belt immersed in the academy, I reflect on how my learning was shaped by mentorship, care, and shared responsibility.

Rather than seeing hierarchy as a barrier to inclusion, this paper shows how structured relationships and ranked mentorship can foster belonging and trust. It also demonstrates that knowledge in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is not simply passed down through technical instruction but co-created through repetition, struggle, and lived experience. Within the broader Brazilian context of racial inequality and globalized sport, the research highlights how care is practiced across difference and how transformation unfolds not only in personal skill but also in social awareness.

By focusing on embodied learning and relational care, this paper contributes to anthropological discussions on how knowledge is mediated through communities of practice and how transformation can occur through trust, respect, and connection.

## **Lived Experience in Research and Care: Building Sustainable Practices of Mutual Recognition**

Lauren Cubellis ([cubellis@wustl.edu](mailto:cubellis@wustl.edu)), Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Peer professionals are individuals with lived experience as mental health service users who have been trained to support others experiencing psychiatric crises. Peer support as a caring practice tackles the inequalities, vulnerabilities, and hierarchies in systems of mental health care. As we witness the increasing global burden of mental illness, and the decay of the welfare state, the transformative potential of lived experience as a form of expertise offers insight into how individuals and communities might heal personal and collective trauma, navigate difference, and build sustainable modes of mutual recognition. Peer support offers a reparative alternative to institutional psychiatric knowledge regimes, making the inclusion of peer researchers an intellectual and methodological imperative.



Yet while this generates diverse multi-professional teams, it also brings conflicts of knowledge production and institutional hierarchy directly into the research process. This must be carefully and intentionally engaged.

In this paper, I offer my 14 years of experience as an anthropologist in these sites of methodological and political transformation, highlighting the challenges encountered in creating institutional space for these practices, and outlining a framework for collaborative knowledge production. This framework draws on the work of Karen Barad and Isabelle Stengers to develop “diffractive workshopping” as a “slow science” that allows multi-professional research teams to not just approach encounters in the field from a collaborative perspective, but to think divergent positionalities, of both interlocutors and researchers, through each other in deliberate and explicit ways. This work interrogates peer support not only as a caring practice in contemporary mental health structures but also lived experience as a mode of dialogic and ethical interaction that can inform how we care for each other in our research processes and academic institutions.

### **Proposing Relational Filmmaking as a Pedagogical Practice for Care-ful Research Communities**

Serjara Aleman ([serjara.aleman@unil.ch](mailto:serjara.aleman@unil.ch)), University of Lausanne; HES-SO Fribourg

In my PhD thesis I develop relational filmmaking as a situated, multimodal and decolonial approach. This practice demonstrates how longterm audiovisual fieldwork can move beyond extractive paradigms, enabling collaborative modes of knowledge production grounded in engagement, negotiation, and shared process. Drawing on Faye Ginsburg's "embedded aesthetics" (1994), coinvolvement (2018), and Audra Simpson's ethnographic refusal (2014), relational filmmaking foregrounds the political and ethical stakes of representation.

Beyond its methodological contribution, relational filmmaking has the potential to function as a pedagogical practice of mediatorship. The approach demonstrates how knowledge emerges not only through observation and description, but through shared processes of making, circulation and ethical negotiation, in which all participants are implicated as co-learners. Dissemination events such as screenings, exhibitions or residencies become pedagogical spaces where care is practiced collectively, and where the anthropological encounter is reframed as open-ended, accountable, and politically situated.

Relational filmmaking also shows how mediatorship can transform conditions of vulnerability and act as a practice of repair. Working with Peruvian women artists, the approach responded to silences and exclusions not by extracting narratives but by creating sustainable spaces for voice, recognition, and authorship. Disagreements and refusals became part of the process, showing how care involves navigating tension rather than seeking consensus.



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In this sense, relational filmmaking contributes to a transformational anthropology of care that sustains research communities through attentiveness, negotiation, and shared creativity. It offers not only a decolonial research method but also a pedagogical pathway for fostering ethical, dialogical, and inclusive academic and social relations, a contribution to building cultures of care within anthropology and beyond.



## Panel C: Thursday 14.00-15.30, Room F207

# Mobilising Law as Political Labor: Practices and Imaginaries of Legal Care

### Convenors:

Insa Lee Koch, Jevgeniy Bluwstein

Speaking to the conference's general theme on 'care', this panel invites panellists to reflect on how the mobilisation of law by social movements, activists and individuals who have been wronged by the system can be understood as modes of care in the face of deepening democratic crises and authoritarian reconfigurations. At a time of deepening inequalities and the growth of anti-migrant, anti-Muslim, and 'anti-woke' sentiments, public authorities are increasingly responding with repression, amongst others through the use of new police powers, protest bans, legislation, the declaration of states of emergency, and the criminalization of individuals, groups, and entire social movements. Repression hits racialised and migrant working-class communities the hardest, such as seen in the policing of the movements for Palestine and Black Lives Matter. But more privileged communities, such as the climate justice activists, have also become the target of police and judicial attention. Importantly, the growing repression for racialised communities and those broadly situated on the left is underpinned by the weaponization of discourses and laws against discrimination, terrorism, political extremism and hate crimes, including but not limited to those of anti-semitism.

And yet, if these developments indicate an authoritarian turn across legislation, policing and the courts, they have not remained uncontested. Social movements, activists, and individuals are turning to the law to resist repression and criminalization (for instance through strategic litigation, class action), at times drawing on the liberal playbook of human and basic rights, at other times putting forward a more radical, even abolitionist justice vision. We can see this for example in the UK where for the first time in history, the court of Appeal accepted public submissions on the grounds of "institutional racism" being at work in the conviction of Ademola Adedeji, arguing that his conviction had been "unsafe" and should be squashed. Similarly, in both Switzerland and in the UK, activist organisations and grassroots groups are organising their own tribunals and hearings on state violence and police killings, with The People's Tribunal in the UK recently announcing a first-of-its-kind class legal action directed at police officers, police chiefs and government departments. Meanwhile, environmental protestors and activists protesting on behalf of Gaza find ways of resisting the repression they across Europe, including prison sentences for non-violent protest and organized crime investigations.



In this panel, we ask how authoritarian reconfigurations – across policing, the courts, and legislation – and reactions to them have turned the law into a hotbed for political debates, making it an arena for some of the most pressing social justice issues of our times. We invite submissions that theorise legal practices and legal imaginations as modes of emancipatory and democratic legal care, theorising both their potential and their limits for bringing about systemic and institutional change in the face of both, a rising authoritarian politics, and a polycrisis of various socio-political-environmental issues. How can we rethink practices of legal care as a form of political labour in the context of the repression and criminalization of activism and protest? What are the strategies and legal arguments deployed by social movement members, activists and defence lawyers? How do they challenge or reproduce the state violence that they are meant to address? And what are the conceptual/analytical possibilities of thinking through legal care as political labour in the fields of anthropology (political, legal, feminist, reparatory and abolitionist) and related disciplines? Relatedly, we would like panelists to reflect on the extent to which juridification of social justice issues from above and below is not merely an indication of the further neoliberalization of politics, but also an indication of a deeper crisis of liberal democracy itself. How can we advance our theorization of the current authoritarian moment/conjuncture through an anthropology of juridification, policing and the law?

## Papers:

### **The Burden of Political Labor and the Pitfalls of Legal Care: A Study of Progressive Writ Petitions Concerning Immigration and Citizenship Matters in India**

Paresh Hate ([pareshparesh059@gmail.com](mailto:pareshparesh059@gmail.com)), Right to Nationality and Citizenship Network

Political labor spans a wide spectrum: from the most spectacular to the most quotidian, from radical ruptures in organizing to everyday negotiation with power. In contexts where social movements are suppressed, law often becomes the last, yet most essential, line of defense against authoritarianism. In India, regressive changes to citizenship and immigration law under an ultranationalist ruling party, supported by xenophobic groups and enabled by a politically weakened opposition, have deepened the marginalization of refugees, stateless persons, and minorities. Amid violence against activists and the erosion of institutional safeguards, lawyers and legal scholars have played a key role in both conceptualizing the shifting legal regime and pursuing protective interventions. This paper examines legal strategies employed by advocates, civil society members, and activists, particularly in writ petitions concerning Rohingya refugees and detainees in Assam who have been classified as “doubtful citizens” or declared foreigners. In the absence of sustained political mobilization around these communities, such legal efforts reflect an earnest attempt to expand protective infrastructure. Yet, some of these



petitions have resulted in adverse outcomes, including deportation orders, despite aiming to secure basic rights within the jurisdiction of the Indian state. Rather than isolating blame within legal tactics, this paper considers the burden and complexity of political labor expressed through legal care. When other political avenues close, legal intervention becomes both a necessity and a contested space that can simultaneously enable and restrict resistance. Drawing on my doctoral research and experience with migrant justice networks, I argue that legal care, in authoritarian contexts, must be understood not as a purely defensive act but as a form of political labor that reconfigures the possibilities for dissent and collective life.

### **Legal Care as the Limit of Justice: Considerations from California's Mental Health Courts**

Jess Cooper ([hello@jmcooper.uk](mailto:hello@jmcooper.uk)), University of Edinburgh

In California, groups of judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and jailhouse psychologists have come together to create mental health courts, novel juridical structures that seek to provide otherwise-unavailable mental health care in lieu of incarceration to people who are experiencing psychiatric distress and who have been caught up in the criminal justice system. These innovative teams seek to turn criminal courtrooms into public mental health clinics – to reroute the state infrastructure designed for punishment instead to a more just telos of care. In other words, in trying to build a more just criminal legal system, court staff worked to build new legal infrastructure: new law.

Based on two years of ethnographic research in two Californian mental health courts, this paper interrogates the hopeful link between new law and justice. Court staff were the first to suggest that their efforts were limited; no one was satisfied with the forms of justice they were able to offer. They interpreted their failures institutionally; that the structures and resources they had on hand were poor and in need of reform. Building on a psychoanalytic theory of ethics, I suggest that no amount of legal activism, care, or infrastructural experimentation would satisfy the demand for justice. Against local idioms, I read my interlocutors as working towards a more progressive politics, but a politics inert to justice. I articulate this argument alongside Joan Copjec's (2018) claims about transgression: if we understand the ethical act to be fundamentally transgressive, such that it illuminates the limitations of the symbolic system at hand, no amount of law-making, however well-intentioned, can ever transgress law. Pointing to this gap raises fundamental questions about the possibility of legal innovation and reform to approach justice.



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## **Caring Through Resistance: Ambivalent Practices of Care in the Legal Teams of Climate Activists**

Lucie Benoit ([lucie.benoit@unibe.ch](mailto:lucie.benoit@unibe.ch)), University of Bern

This contribution will explore how the work of climate activists and their lawyers in resisting criminalisation can be understood as a mode of care. Since 2018, the climate movement has been targeted by the authorities through various criminal proceedings after engaging in disruptive protests such as road blockades and occupations. In response, targeted collectives have set up legal teams to develop group-level strategies and/or provide support to individuals throughout their legal proceedings. Drawing on interviews with activists and lawyers, this paper investigates how the politics of resistance to criminalisation have materialised as practices of care within and around the work of these legal teams. Examples include coordinating proceedings, finding lawyers, 'translating' legal documents, and offering legal advice. However, I also argue that this mode of care is fundamentally ambivalent, as legal teams have also become a contested site of struggle, notably with regard to the choice of legal strategies.

## **Legal Care and Citizenship Deprivation Appeals**

Martha McCurdy ([martha.mccurdy@unisg.ch](mailto:martha.mccurdy@unisg.ch)), University of St. Gallen

The British government is increasing its power to strip citizenship from both naturalised and native-born citizens, predominantly those from racialised and minoritised groups. However, the ability to challenge these decisions is being increasingly hollowed out. Many deprivation orders are deliberately issued while the individual is outside the country. National security cases are heard in closed courts, with secret evidence used against the individual. Governments have tightened legal loopholes, and courts routinely defer to the executive. These developments represent a profound erosion of democratic rights and the rule of law, reflecting a wider systemic crisis. Nevertheless, lawyers and legal organisations continue to challenge these decisions through strategic litigation. Drawing on courtroom observations, case law analysis, and interviews with legal practitioners, this paper examines how legal professionals appealing deprivation decisions practise a form of legal care. This is an important intervention in protecting individual rights, especially given expanding executive and national security overreach, and even when, as one lawyer put it, "the deck is stacked so heavily against the individual." This paper also reflects more broadly on how the law can be mobilised to "rebalance" some of its most draconian applications.



## Panel D: Thursday 14.00-15.30, Room E230

# Caring for Limits in a World of Abundance. The Case of Health (MAS-panel)

### Convenors:

Nolwenn Bühler, Anna Mann

Rising levels of air toxicity, ever widening antimicrobial resistances, and soaring shortages of healthcare staff. What has made the success of medicine – antibiotics, biotechnologies, innovative cures, and well-trained staff – nowadays increasingly show their limits. In a context of interlocked crises and a post Covid shift to budget cuts, discourses about the limits of the health system itself – its costs, its lack of staff, its inability to take care of those with complex needs – no longer come up sporadically in relation to particular issues, but ever more often insisting on systemic, chronic and global tensions and impossibilities. The promises of optimizing health endlessly and longevity seem to crumble apart, as the residues of late industrialism production and consumption activities have become one of the main health threats, that the functioning of the health system is put under growing pressure, and health infrastructures decay. Limits in practices related to health and illness take nowadays global dimensions, pushing us to rethink scales. They also push us to rethink what they are and what they produce in a world cradled by dreams of abundance. Limits, impossibilities and scarcities are indeed often perceived negatively, as countering or even frustrating the idea of endless productivity, infinite resources, technological progress, and abundance. Limits are often seen in capitalist societies as a necessary chore, that is not desirable in itself, but needs to be imposed and dealt with in order to maintain health. Yet what are limits, how are they enacted in practices, and what do they produce in specific contexts? Are abundance and limits always in tension, or is possible to reach abundance within limits?

Medical anthropologists and ethnographers from neighbouring disciplines have complicated the dominant, negative view on limits. They have done so in particular ways though. Scholars have studied how limits, for instance of the fertility of the female body, are socio-materially constructed (Bühler 2021) and emphasised how scarcity, for example of expensive treatments, emerges through the deployment of a particular, namely an economic vocabulary (Light & Hughes 2001). Ethnographers have equally shed light on the ways in which lines like the one between 'living' and 'dying' are negotiated and contested (e.g. Svendnessen 2022; Seymour 2001; Mann 2024) and 'a time to die' produced by bureaucratic infrastructures (e.g. Kaufmann 2005). And not at least have researchers emphasised the creative, improvised make-do solutions healthcare professionals and patients craft in settings of scarcity (e.g. Pasquini 2025; Street 2014; Livingston 2012; Bock & Vindrola-Padros 2021), but also the dynamics of highly unjust



exclusions that unfolds between them (e.g. Simmons & Casper 2012; Johannessen 2018; Chabrol 2018).

In the light of many health-related limits, impossibilities and scarcities being created and exacerbated by settings, infrastructures, and practices of abundance in a few places in the global north, this panel proposes to take the next step. Building on the longstanding tradition in anthropology to engage critically with limits in practices related to human and more-than human health, it proposes to explore how limits are known, enacted and cared for in various contexts, situations, and sites. Drawing on the 'care debate' at the intersection of anthropology and science and technology studies (Mol, Moser, Pols 2010; Martin, Viseu, Myers 2015), we conceptualise "caring for" as a "persistent tinkering in a world full of complex ambivalences and shifting tensions" (Mol, Moser, Pols 2011: 14) that is also a "selective mode of attention (...) cherish[ing] some things, lives, or phenomena (...) [and] exclud[ing] others" (Martin, Viseu, Myers 2015: 627). By focusing our attention on caring for limits, the panel aims at opening up to the discussion about the multiple realities of limits – what they are, what they allow, make visible, or not – and the ways they are cared for, to disentangle them from their negative connotation and understand what they produce, do and recompose in practice.

This MAS panel invites contributions drawing on empirical research related to human and more-than-human health and addressing questions such as:

- How are limits made visible, tangible, and known? Through which tools or objects? How do they materialize?
- How are limits cared for, cherished, and fostered, or neglected and dismissed?
- How are technologies employed in knowing, enacting and/or caring for limits?
- How does care for limits reconfigure the distribution of work, responsibilities and accountability?
- Where and how does a knowing and caring for limits happen and where not? With what kind of effects?
- How does caring for limits make visible and cherishes some forms of health and life and neglects others, whether human, non-human, or more-than-human?
- How does a particular limit relate to ideas and practices of abundance?
- What are the limits that we, as anthropologists, encounter when doing research on limits in health?
- And how can we, as anthropologists, empirically, analytically, and politically by caring for limits interfere in the highly uneven world that we are embedded in?

The panel contributes to the conference's collective exploration of 'care', 'maintenance' and 'decay' by illuminating practices of 'care' in settings related to human and more-than-human health and by engaging with what comes towards the end of maintenance and decay: limits, impossibilities and ends.



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## Papers:

### **Health, Scarcity, and Survival in the Mining Landscapes of Jharkhand: Insights from Ethnographic Field Study**

Shreya Mandal ([mandalshreya20@gmail.com](mailto:mandalshreya20@gmail.com)), Indian Institute of Technology (Indian School of Mines), Dhanbad

This paper examines how limited healthcare resources are encountered and negotiated in the mining-affected regions of Jharkhand, India, where extractive abundance parallels systemic scarcity. Decades of coal, mica, and bauxite mining have generated toxic environments, land subsidence, and displacement, straining already fragile health infrastructures. State interventions, such as rehabilitation and resettlement schemes, promise abundance in the form of housing and medical services, yet lived realities expose the limitations: clinics without staff, relocation sites without basic amenities, and communities continuing to suffer respiratory illnesses, malnutrition, and psychological stress.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork that included household surveys, interviews with communities and official stakeholders, and participant observation across Jharkhand's mining areas, the study traces how care is improvised at the margins of systemic neglect. ASHA workers, local leaders, unqualified practitioners, and faith healers emerge as mediators of survival, redistributing scarce resources and sustaining coherence where the promise of institutional care falters. These practices foreground how communities not only endure scarcity but also actively respond by rendering illness visible, crafting makeshift solutions, and reconfiguring what health means in precarious environments. This paper argues that highlighting the limits in care opens a space for rethinking health and wellbeing under extractive capitalism. It suggests that caring for limits in Jharkhand is about attending to the social, affective, and political dimensions of survival; practices that persist amidst the crumbling promises of abundance.

### **Neurodiversity in China: Care at the Boundary of Normality**

Tao Han ([han.tao@unifr.ch](mailto:han.tao@unifr.ch)), University of Fribourg

This paper examines how emerging Chinese online communities of neurodiverse people organize to seek care for themselves and offer care for others within the constraints of limited healthcare resources. By regarding care as a resource that confers authority to those who define it, and at the same time is of value for those who receive it, the paper explores how the power to define care drives a group identifying as being at the boundary of normality in China. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the neurodiversity movement has evolved into a civil-rights campaign for individuals who see themselves as diverse. In China, children severely affected by autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have for some time been regarded as legitimately entitled to state-supported care. These children are also



neurodiverse, yet as the neurodiversity movement expands, the hierarchy of care is shifting. Neurodiverse adults and parents of neurodiverse children seek to articulate their needs and how society should accommodate them, turning care into an object of negotiation that depends on state responses. The paper shows how online spaces foster an abundance of some resources (information and peer support) while operating within scarcity of others (professional services and state recognition). Resource scarcities become catalysts for innovative mutual-aid practices, and limits on professional expertise transform into opportunities for sharing experiential knowledge. While reliance on state responses can reinforce state authority by delivering certain types of care defined from below, the proliferation of demands from below simultaneously challenges that authority.

### **Pushing Back the Limits of Life and Death & Living Cancer as a Chronic Illness: Confronting Survival Curves with Lived Trajectories in Long-term Stabilized Cancer Patients Aged 70 and Over**

Rose-Anna Foley ([rose-anna.foley@hesav.ch](mailto:rose-anna.foley@hesav.ch)), HESAV

Cancer care in western states nowadays mobilizes the most intense resources, both human and financial. In recent years, the incidence of cancer has continuously risen, due to environmental exposure to cancer-causing substances and aging population, although new therapies have also been multiplying. If oncological progress to some extent allows a stabilized evolution of illness and cancer is now considered by the medical community to be, in some cases, a chronic illness, this notion is still often debated.

This ongoing ethnographic study is a continuation to our previous studies on the access and 'choices' made around treatments by elderly cancer patients who now account for more than half of all diagnosed cancers in most western countries. By questioning how they integrate a stabilized or even favorable condition along with several types of available treatments, our results tend to show that elderly patients and family caregivers around them are often caught up in progress & experiencing roller-coaster trajectories rather than a fixed state of no evolution. The instability of the stages they are going through allows us to understand the burden it supposes, intertwined or confronting temporalities throughout the stages, as well as the various resources, practical and symbolic, they mobilize in the face of long-term ups and downs.

This contribution will confront the increasingly stable survival curves with daily lived experiences of cancer and their chronicity due to access to new treatments. We will place these aspects in perspective with a larger tension between the pursuit of efforts to push back the limits of life and death in our societies, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, innovation in the field of cancer as part of the quest for longevity and the overconsumption of healthcare in our western contexts.



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## **Bodies at the Limit: Care, Intervention, and the Materiality of Non-Action in Geriatric Medicine**

Luke Stalley ([stalley@soziologie.uzh.ch](mailto:stalley@soziologie.uzh.ch)), University of Zürich

Medical anthropologists and sociologists concerned with limits to life-prolonging treatment have long examined matters of meaning, belonging, value and the politics of non-action in the deliberations of practitioners and patients. The mechanical ventilator, dialysis machine, nasogastric tube – when to stop, when is it better not to start? In such accounts the body is ever present in the negotiations recounted, though its materiality often fades into the background. In this paper, I ask: how are limits established in geriatric medicine and what is made of the body in doing so?

Taking inspiration from the turn to ontology in science and technology studies and its ongoing concern with the materialities of care, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork of geriatric wards in the British National Health Service to inquire how establishing limits enacts and makes the body matter. I present and analyse the limit-making practices of geriatricians in the care of one man I call Mr Jones. I trace the ways that establishing limits to medical intervention enact Mr Jones' body as a normative recipient of care and as an active, contingent counterpart in medical intervention. I argue that with attention to the practicalities involved, limits are normative, world-making interventions themselves, mediating the worlds medicine makes and qualifying the body, not in terms of worth, but as a vital and consequential participant in care.

Caring for frail, multimorbid patients, geriatricians do not draw moralizing or totalizing lines. Instead, establishing limits involves highly situated engagements with the bodies of patients and the myriad technologies that could be used to prolong life. Though limits make visible the undesirable things that both contemporary medicine and mortal bodies may do, in geriatric care both must be handled together. Limits do not dream of a world without bads, but re-orient and navigate the ambivalent relations between technological medicine and vulnerable older patients.

## **The Fragile Culture of Participation in Residential Long-Term Care**

Séverine Soiron-Ballmer ([severine.soiron@unibas.ch](mailto:severine.soiron@unibas.ch)), Institut für Pflegewissenschaften, Universität Basel

S. Soiron, K. Jungo, N. Peduzzi, A. Staehli, N. Reiffer, S. Stenz, A. Orschulko, A. Kaiser-Grolimund, E. Soom Ammann, F. Zúñiga, S. Staudacher

Although civil and governmental organizations in Switzerland are advocating for more participation of older people, little is known about how Residential Long-Term Care (RLTC) institutions can foster participation of their residents - a diverse group with physical or mental disabilities, potentially also socio-economically disadvantaged or marginalized.



Based on ethnographic research involving semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, participant observation with residents, relatives, staff and management, as well as document-analysis in three Swiss RLTC institutions, this paper describes how and by whom participation of older people in RLTC is being understood, discussed, and practiced.

The paper highlights that the perception and practices of management and staff, and to a lesser extent residents and relatives, have a significant influence on the fragile construct of a culture of participation. Participation flourishes when staff adopt an empowering, solution-oriented attitude to care and communicate on equal footing. Adopting a participatory approach improves the well-being of both staff and residents. It enables the residents to play a more active role in deciding how to organize their daily lives, giving them the opportunity to contribute their ideas and wishes. In contrast, as our data show, practices of control suppress residents' autonomy and hinder meaningful collaboration. Such paternalistic practices were often justified by economic pressure, revealing limits of care.

We conclude that participation is primarily based on the attitudes of the various players involved. Based on our results, strategies to promote participation in RLTC should specifically target changes in management and staff attitudes and the creation of a participatory team culture. However, economic pressures and limits within the healthcare system act as a barrier to developing and sustaining a participatory culture, revealing larger systemic challenges that must be addressed.



## Panel E: Friday 11.00-12.30, Room F207

# Remote Care: Caregiving Across Distance, Time, and Borders

### Convenors

Flavia Cangià, Brigitte Suter, Elise Hjalmarson

This panel invites contributions that examine how care is shaped, transformed, and contested when it must be enacted remotely, across physical, social, or emotional distance and over time. We are interested in exploring care meanings, practices, and experiences in contexts where physical copresence is impossible or disrupted due to migration, institutional separation, structural constraints, affective distance, or crisis situations such as pandemics, conflicts, natural disasters, or other emergencies.

Remote care often emerges as a response to physical absence or movement, whether temporary or permanent, and involves continuous negotiations of presence and absence across space and time. Ethnographic studies of transnational families have shown how care circulates across borders, often unevenly, and how “virtual co-presence” becomes part of maintaining kinship. Yet remote care is not limited to global separations: it also emerges in local conditions such as quarantine, hospitalization, incarceration, or long working hours. These diverse contexts reveal shifting relationships between mobility and immobility, not only of people, but also of care itself, and invite analysis of how caregiving evolves across cultural contexts, borders, environments, life stages, shifting social roles, and changing relationships.

Remote care can also unfold amid conditions marked by uncertainty, rupture, and precariousness, raising questions about how caregiving responsibilities are redistributed, maintained, or sometimes abandoned. It can range from improvised or episodic support to long-term or institutionalized maintenance work, and may stabilize over time or dissolve into neglect or intentional withdrawal. This ambivalence highlights the fragile, contested, and dynamic nature of remote caregiving. Our focus is on the practical and material conditions that enable or hinder remote caregiving. These include technologies, infrastructures, laws, policies, cultural norms, and social systems that shape how care happens across distances. Care is understood broadly, encompassing emotional, material, financial, medical, and affective relations that involve not only human actors (such as children, elderly family members, or friends) but also more-than-human actors (including animals, plants, homes, or places). Caregivers and care receivers co-produce caregiving relations through diverse modalities such as remittances, voice or video messages, sponsorship, logistical coordination, ritual gestures, virtual presence, or acts of practical maintenance.



Remoteness, in this view, is not a passive backdrop but an active “field of care” (Bocco 2016), shaped by temporal and spatial negotiations of presence and absence, mobility and immobility. Remote care also extends beyond interpersonal ties to encompass ethical and affective relationships with distant environments and non-human actors, illustrating its multispecies and material dimensions. However, remoteness and immobility may also disrupt or stall care circulation, or cause its decay and collapse, depending on broader infrastructures and constraints.

Importantly, care also includes self-care, the practices through which individuals sustain their own wellbeing amid limited physical support networks. These can include virtual support groups, digital wellness practices, or the strategic use of mobility and remote work, for example, working from home or adopting digital nomadism for reasons related to lifestyle and wellbeing.

We particularly welcome contributions that address:

- How care is maintained or transformed in families separated by distance, whether through migration, illness, incarceration, or other forms of separation.
- How digital and non-digital technologies help or hinder caregiving at a distance.
- How care involves not only humans but also animals, plants, homes, or places, and how these relationships are maintained across distance.
- How remote care changes during different stages of life or when people move, stay still, or are forced to remain apart.
- The moral and political challenges of caring from afar, including situations where care breaks down, is withdrawn, or becomes untenable.

Potential topics include, but are not limited to: virtual parenting, sending material and in-kind remittances, transnational eldercare, remote care for animals or plants, maintenance of homes and gardens from afar, emotional support via digital platforms, sponsorship and care delegation practices, and automated or AI-assisted caregiving systems managing medication, irrigation, or home safety.

By investigating the diverse forms, challenges, and transformations of remote care, this panel seeks to deepen understanding of how care adapts and resists in conditions of distance, mobility, and time, emphasizing its ethical, affective, material, and political complexity.



## Papers:

### **Digital Rituals as Remote Care: Commemorating Loss and Sustaining Bonds on Chinese Social Media**

Ma Cheng ([ma.cheng.anthropology@gmail.com](mailto:ma.cheng.anthropology@gmail.com)), Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, the Free University of Berlin

This paper examines how digital platforms facilitate remote care through ritualized practices that bridge emotional, social, and temporal distances when physical co-presence is disrupted by censorship, institutional constraints, and personal vulnerability. Drawing on ethnographic research on Weibo and Bilibili, I analyze three online memorials: the “tree holes” around Zoufan’s account after her suicide, functioning as confessional support spaces; the “digital wailing wall” under Dr. Li Wenliang’s final post, anchoring daily check-ins and pandemic remembrance; and commemorations for Mocha, a young vlogger memorialized through strawberry-emoji tributes and socialist-inflected videos, which critique economic neglect while redistributing care across urban–rural divides in contemporary China.

These practices mobilize digital infrastructures to maintain virtual co-presence over months and years, transforming commercial platforms into both public symbols and fields of care (Tuan 1977; Bocco 2016) rooted in Chinese commemorative traditions and socialist collective memory. Yet they unfold under precarious conditions: posts risk deletion, accounts vanish, and the circulation of care is uneven. Sustaining these memorials—through commenting, reposting, and creating videos—becomes a form of maintenance, while erasures mark the decay of remote caregiving.

Drawing on Tronto’s ethics of care (1993), Puig de la Bellacasa’s maintenance (2017), Stoler’s decay (2013), and Bell’s ritualization (1992), the paper shows how remote caregiving adapts in crisis, extends to the maintenance of digital legacies as places of memory, and incorporates self-care and ritualized responses through virtual networks. It invites reflection on the transformative potential of digital rituals in maintaining social bonds across borders and time, highlighting how infrastructural fragility, platform governance, and state control shape who can be cared for, how long, and at what cost.

### **Migrant Mothers and Foster Mums. Navigating Remote Care and Motherhood in the Seychelles**

Lucas Gatignol ([lucas.gatignol@unil.ch](mailto:lucas.gatignol@unil.ch)), University of Lausanne

Over the past decades, much has been said about female domestic workers leaving their children behind to work abroad. Earlier studies highlighted the global inequalities underlying these migrations and emphasised the suffering and disruption associated with this separation. However, more recent contributions nuanced the traumatic aspect of



these migrations by highlighting the continuity found in practices of care across distance. The remittances and communication tools shaping these transnational families became a privileged entry point to study care beyond physical presence.

Yet, just as Marxist feminists emphasised the reproductive work needed to turn wages into subsistence, sending money to loved ones may contribute to caring for others but an irreducible aspect of care cannot be carried out remotely. With regard to parenting, some form of physical presence is required to feed, wash and tend to children. Despite ways of maintaining a caring relationship during periods of separation, remoteness often necessitates the distribution of certain care practices. In this paper, I explore the challenges associated with these reconfigurations. I do so based on 13 months of fieldwork among families of Seychellois workers who migrated during the archipelago's late colonial period (1950s–70s).

In Seychelles, remote parenting goes beyond mothers and migrations. Fostering is a common practice, many children spend years away from their birth parents, usually with women of their mother's lineage. Yet, this distribution of daily care still presents challenges in the long run. While remittances and daily reproductive work are both acts of care, they do not grant the same access to motherhood and the privileges this position entails in local representations. When remote care is prolonged by migrations, foster mums tend to overshadow biological mothers in their relationships with children. This weakens claims for reciprocity of care that usually occur in later stages of life.

## **Migrating and Ageing in Switzerland and Tunisia: Transnational Circulation of Material, Financial, and Care Support**

Amel Mahfoud ([amel.mahfoudh@hevs.ch](mailto:amel.mahfoudh@hevs.ch)), HESTS HES-SO Valais/Wallis

Drawing on a qualitative study conducted in both Switzerland and Tunisia, this paper explores the transnational family networks that connect the two countries and extend beyond them. Tunisia is undergoing a rapid demographic ageing process, further intensified by migration (Institut National de la Statistique, 2024). The departure of working-age adults often leaves older parents without close caregivers, making support in later life increasingly difficult. At present, eldercare relies almost entirely on families, with women bearing the main responsibility. Yet, as women's labor force participation grows and individual mobility—both internal and international—expands, providing care for older people is becoming a pressing social issue.

We focus on older persons as recipients of care in a transnational setting, highlighting three situations: (1) those who migrated from Tunisia to Switzerland when they were younger and are now ageing there; (2) those who remained in Tunisia, whose children live in Switzerland and provide support from a distance; and (3) those who moved from Switzerland or other European countries to Tunisia during their working lives or upon retirement, and who have chosen to grow old there. Comparing these three contexts



allows us to shed light on the opportunities and challenges older people face when giving and receiving family support, as well as the strategies they and their families develop to sustain ties across borders.

### **Penalty for Caring, or Capitalization of Indifference? Entanglements of Emotions and Resources among Belarusian Migrants**

Andrei Vazyanau ([andrei.vazyanau@ehu.lt](mailto:andrei.vazyanau@ehu.lt)), European Humanities University, Vilnius, Lithuania

The presentation analyzes tensions between different practices of care among Belarusian migrants who can't travel to Belarus due to the risk of political repressions. I focus on experiences of Belarusians who used to practise care beyond the family space – in civic society, grassroot communities, education, career, politics, art etc. – to explore how personal history of caring before the migration increases vulnerabilities and leads to social and material loss. In particular, my interest lies in how the migrants are deprived from care about their relatives – unable to meet them in person, to send them remittances, and to come to their funerals. In this analysis, I elaborate on antagonism between penalty for caring and capitalization of indifference. For this, I also consider the cases where people refused from civic participation and later had more opportunities for caring about relatives.

As a category of my analysis, indifference is not simply antithetical to care, or the absence to emotions. Instead, "not caring" is actively produced by effort of different actors. I trace how caring causes loss of emotional and other kinds of capital on the basis of two parallel ethnographic projects – one focusing on romantic lives of repressed Belarusians and another one dedicated to politically motivated dispossession they face. Against this background, preference for indifference turns out to be beneficial in many cases. Although indifference is often mentioned as a characteristic of authoritarian society, I'm going to demonstrate that migrant groups can be penalized for „having cared“ by hosting liberal democracies. For this, I draw attention to how unfavourable bureaucratic and economic policies as well as blaming discourses in my field in Lithuania target primarily those who dared to care.



## Panel F: Thursday 16.00-17.30, Room F207

# Reproducing on a Broken Planet: Care, Ecological Labour, and Kinship

### Convenors:

Mathilde Krähenbühl, Edmée Ballif

Amid ongoing environmental breakdown, reproductive choices, family making and daily parenting are imbued with new material constraints and ethical dilemmas. On the one hand, the ordinary exercise of care is disrupted by natural disasters (Roberts et al., 2023), toxic environments (MacKendrick, 2018) and the rise of domestic environmental labour (Farbotko, 2018). On the other hand, many young adults prefer to forgo parenthood because of climate anxiety and/or to care for the planet (Sasser, 2024). Imagined and experienced environmental catastrophes reshape meanings and practices of care embedded in reproduction and family-making. Caring for future generations now often includes considerations for the maintenance and care for a decaying planet and its other-than-human inhabitants.

Although ethnographers are well equipped to analyze the intersection between environmental decay and the daily experience of reproduction, anthropologists have been shy in developing an understanding of reproducing on a broken planet (Tsing et al., 2017; Bharadwaj, 2023). In this panel, we want to explore how individuals and communities navigate their reproductive decisions in (perceived or actual) environmental breakdown. Are people hesitating to have children and how do they weigh their choices? Are people migrating in the quest for a better environment to raise children and who has the means to look for the “good place” (Dow, 2016)? How do parents arrange their daily lives to meet ecological demands, and do we observe the emergence of a new parenting culture? We welcome propositions and ethnographies from all national contexts and environmental scales, from the home to the planet.

More specifically, we want to elucidate the relationship between environmental decay, family maintenance and care. Although care often refers to the intensive emotional and reproductive labour carried out in the family sphere, we want to ask how it articulates with environmental catastrophe and ordinary ecology. How does care for other species intersect with care for biological children? What kind of ecological labor counts as care? When ecological labour takes the form of subsistence practices (Pruvost, 2021), how does it redistribute care in the family and international chains of consumer goods production? Is environmental breakdown creating the opportunity for alternative forms of care or does it, on the contrary, reinforces structures of power and inequalities?

Indeed, asking how environmental changes reconfigure what counts as care goes hand in hand with asking who does care work and ecological labour. We are thus, welcoming



papers that discuss the social organization and distribution of care, following gender, class and race.

Finally, we want to pay special attention to the relationship between the environment, care and kinship. Alongside appeals to develop inter-species kinship to restore environmental justice and feelings of responsibility (Haraway, 2016), environmental degradation offers the opportunity to interrogate kinship. While it has been argued that climate change is queering kinship in the sense that it forces people to develop less normative alliances outside the cis-heteronormative family to adapt to uncertain times – such as natural disasters and pandemics – (Roberts et al., 2023), we want to ask: is environmental catastrophe changing care and kinship or does it highlight their intrinsic plasticity?

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## Papers:

### **Childfree in a Climate of Change**

Aditya Bharadwaj ([aditya.bharadwaj@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:aditya.bharadwaj@graduateinstitute.ch)), Geneva Graduate Institute

Burgeoning climate change is seeding deep ambivalence toward birthing children on a planet facing a grave environmental crisis. A refusal to give birth on a planet deemed unfit for childbearing and childrearing is beginning to garner societal support. Not only is climate change shaping human fertility and reproductive health outcomes; it is also birthing an ethic of care that seeks to weigh the benefits of life reproduction against the threat of a planet in climatic decline. These assessments are becoming increasingly ensconced in both immediate and distant environmental contexts. This paper investigates these emerging shifts that frame “childfree living,” whether as a direct consequence of biological inability or as an expression of free will in the face of planetary crisis, to argue that such developments are shaking up the way we imagine the true impact of climate change, from molecular to anthropogenic and planetary levels. The paper contends that these emerging panics are no longer confined to the familiar anxieties of “overpopulation” or “low fertility” often voiced by nation-states through policy action and political commentary, but rather are poised to shape-shift the very texture of a biopolitics stabilised over the twentieth century.

### **Refusing to Have Children in a World in Crisis: Analysis of Ecological Justifications for not Becoming Parents**

Mélanie Bania ([melanie.bania@unilim.fr](mailto:melanie.bania@unilim.fr)), Université de Limoges - Laboratoire du Gresco

The issue of childfreedom for ecological reasons is increasingly being discussed in the media and scientific circles. While some studies analyze how environmental concerns influence fecundity intentions, others question the legitimacy of ecological reasons for choosing to be childfree (Veaux & Roux, 2023). In France, although INED (Bouchet-Valat & Toulemon, 2025) shows a correlation between climate concerns and a decline in the number of desired children, there are still no precise figures to quantify this phenomenon. In the USA, in 2020, 14.3% of adults without children cited climate change as a “major reason” for this choice. In my qualitative corpus of 50 childfree, 90% mention the environment as a reason for not having children.

This choice is based on a deep environmental awareness ranging from the degradation of ecosystems to the climate crisis and the increasing scarcity of natural resources. This decision is often motivated by intergenerational altruism: it is not so much a refusal to have children for oneself as a concern for the future generations and the preservation of life.



The childfree discourse also fits into a (neo-)Malthusian logic linked to debates on overpopulation. Although this notion is scientifically controversial, it is often incorporated in a cautious and nuanced way into childfree views. Some go so far as to identify with antinatalist movements or even advocate for the voluntary extinction of humanity. Also, childfree people question consumerist lifestyles, considering that overconsumption and overproduction have a greater impact on the environment than birth rates themselves. The everyday practices of childfree people reflect a desire for ecological consistency: adopting vegetarian or vegan diets, engaging in animal causes, consuming locally (short supply chains, bulk stores), frequent use of second-hand markets, attention to natural and fossil resources, and selective sorting of household waste.

### **Social Reproduction in the "Make America Healthy Again" Moment**

Norah MacKendrick ([norah.mackendrick@rutgers.edu](mailto:norah.mackendrick@rutgers.edu)), Rutgers University

Previous work on social reproduction and environmental health has pointed to the role of mothers in precautionary consumption to cope with the effects of a broken regulatory system that allows environmental chemicals in food and consumer products, including those marketed to children. This research shows how mothers, by virtue of their primary role in family foodwork, are reading ingredient labels on food packages to find hidden toxic ingredients, growing their own food, shopping for organic fruits and vegetables, and seeking to minimize their children's exposure to endocrine disruptors in plastics and other materials. They see precautionary consumer labor as a reasonable response to a system that has failed to protect public health while maximizing profit for the chemical and agribusiness sectors. In the United States, precautionary consumption was found to be located mainly among upper-middle-class families holding left-leaning liberal values, such as support for racial and economic equality, and who support a strong regulatory state that steps in to protect public health from chemical risks. In recent months, the rise of the Make America Health Again (MAHA) movement—a health-focused social movement that is an offshoot of far-right Trumpism (or MAGA)—promotes the same precautionary consumer practices with some clear differences. In this paper, we examine what distinguishes MAHA from the precautionary consumer left. We find that both camps value maternal foodwork and blame corporate greed and ambivalence for putting children's health at risk. Both support eliminating endocrine disruptors in consumer goods and value homemade, unprocessed, organic food. Yet there are key distinctions related to ideologies of the state vis-à-vis risk, gender ideology, and degrees of engagement with conspiracist thinking. Our paper outlines these distinctions and theorizes what social reproduction represents in the MAHA moment.



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## **Greening Procreation: Gendered Reproductive Labour in Zero-Waste Families**

Lucile Quéré ([lucile.quere@univ-paris1.fr](mailto:lucile.quere@univ-paris1.fr)), Université Paris 1

This paper examines how environmental concerns intersect with gendered inequalities through a focus on procreation. While environmental inequalities have often been analysed primarily through the lens of social class, this study integrates gender as a central dimension. It adopts a procreation-centred perspective, encompassing the practices involved in having or not having children - conception, contraception, abortion, pregnancy care, birth, breastfeeding, childcare and education - and the norms and meanings that shape them.

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted among zero-waste families in French-speaking Switzerland, this paper analyses how reproductive labour is transformed and redistributed when ecological commitments are integrated into family life. Practices such as adopting “greener” contraceptive methods, home birth, extended breastfeeding, communal living or alternative schooling illustrate attempts to align procreation with environmental values. Yet this “greening” of procreation does not necessarily imply a disengagement from the medicalisation of reproductive processes, whose variations will be examined.

Findings reveal that the incorporation of environmental concerns into the domestic sphere often reinforces women’s reproductive workload, while fathers tend to invest in tasks that carry greater symbolic or social value, particularly those involving the transmission of environmental awareness to children. The additional demands - time, physical and emotional labour, material resources - generate new forms of negotiation within couples and families. These tensions can result in emotional strain, conflicts or even marital and intergenerational ruptures, leading to a reconfiguration of family roles, including those of grandparents.

By linking environmental issues with gendered reproductive labour, this paper provides an understanding of how ecological commitments may perpetuate gender inequalities in everyday family practices.



## Panel G: Saturday 09.00-10.30, Room E207

# Infrastructures of Maintenance and the Social Life of Small-Scale Energy Production

### Convenors:

Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi, Elisabeth Schubiger, Hannah Plüss

This panel explores the social, legal and political entanglements that emerge in the long-term maintenance of small-scale, decentral energy infrastructures such as micro hydropower, solar, wind, or biogas systems. Promoted globally as sustainable solutions to climate change and rural development, these small-scale energy systems are often touted for their local embeddedness and technological autonomy. Yet their long-term viability depends on far more than technical performance.

At stake are the various vulnerabilities that emerge around small-scale, decentral energy production. We are interested in learning how energy producers succeed in maintaining the infrastructures over longer time spans, and why some fail. In our understanding, maintenance involves more than just technical upkeep. It encompasses the ability to ensure the continued running of energy infrastructures through the creation and circulation of technological knowledge, as well as the upkeep of access and usage rights to land, air and water. It also involves maintaining relationships, institutional frameworks and political and social alliances.

We ask: how and which energy communities emerge around infrastructure projects, and which relationships can foster them over long periods of time? What kind of collective engagements and exclusions emerge in the process? And how do questions of legitimacy and historical authority shape local energy production? What negotiations over ownership, control, and accountability take place to ensure these infrastructures do not decay or become sites of conflict? How do responsibilities shift between state, private, and community actors? And how do local and overarching legal systems interact, especially when it comes to land and water rights, electricity distribution, and access to financial support? How communal or customary claims and needs at times compete, and at other times reconcile with formal regulations. We welcome contributions that attend to the complexities and challenges of the infrastructures of maintenance, i.e. the social, technological, legal and political arrangements that sustain small-scale energy infrastructure through time.



## Papers:

### **How to Care for Cutting-edge Technology Ruins? The Case of Tidal Power Wrecks in Canada**

Jeanne Féaux de la Croix ([jeanne.feauxdelacroix@unibe.ch](mailto:jeanne.feauxdelacroix@unibe.ch)), University of Bern

New technologies such as wave- and tidal power are widely promoted as promising green energy production at sea. Yet technology testing hotspots such as Canada's Bay of Fundy already feature a whole range of cutting-edge marine technology in ruins. Ranging from community-led marine energy projects to university- and industry-based deployments, what can we learn from these wrecks? What does it take to maintain (or abandon) new forms of renewable energy at sea? How have emotional, biographic, financial and policy investments and risks been negotiated in relation to ocean energy boom and bust? How do the ways these wrecks are commemorated and forgotten affect other sustainable energy projects?

Based on participant observation, online interviews, event ethnography and media reviews since 2023, this paper discusses three case-studies, with a particular emphasis on comparing the role of infrastructural, oceanic and social scales in shaping the birth, life and decay of tidal turbines. I examine how the tidal power dream is affected by island community struggles for energy independence, high-stakes fisheries (especially lobster) conflicts, evolving relations with First Nations land and sea stewards, and the push- and pull around decarbonizing Canada.

Drawing on Innovation Studies as well as its critiques, the paper highlights potential learnings from failed social and institutional interactions geared towards establishing, maintaining and growing new energy production sites. The talk puts forward modes of investigating these questions that are co-produced with the coastal communities who are immediately concerned with these ruins, and discusses what forms of analysis and learning are digestible for different audiences. It proposes global community archiving of these infrastructural ruins as a mode of care, at the intersection of academic research, community and environmental activism.

### **Account(ability) and Promises: Maintaining Solar Mini-grids in Kenya and Senegal**

Emilie Etienne ([emilie.etienne@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:emilie.etienne@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr)), Université Grenoble-Alpes; Research Centers Pacte & Gael

Solar mini-grids for rural electrification are technically designed to last at least ten years, or even twenty if the most fragile components are replaced. However, their effective lifespan rarely reaches ten years (André-Bataille et al., 2020; Berthélemy & Maurel, 2021;



Semis, 2020a). Several authors have looked at the maintenance, or sustainability of mini-grids, focusing on technical, economic, institutional and socio-cultural aspects (Fajardo et al., 2023; Feron, 2016; Ilskog, 2008). They tend to consider mini-grids from an autarky perspective, envisioning them as bounded socio-technical system that includes the infrastructure, its users, and those directly responsible for maintenance. For example, the notion of “cost-reflective tariffs” implicitly assumes that payments from mini-grid customers will cover operational costs, without relying on external subsidies.

My research questions this perspective of autarky: I incorporate political dimension to reveal multi-scalar accountability issues around the maintenance of solar mini-grids. The need to report (account for), the creation of monitoring instruments (accounting, be accountable), enable us to approach maintenance issues from the viewpoint of actors linked together by responsibilities, sanctions and incentives. I make the following two propositions: on the one hand, the ideal of autarky paradoxically leads to strong interdependence between actors, and on the other, socio-technical constraints are transferred primarily to the most fragile actors in accountability chains, namely users and operators. Despite their often-degraded functioning, however, mini-grids hold together thanks to “fictional anticipations” (Beckert J., 2016) that bind actors together through narrative and calculative devices and interpersonal relationships.

Results are based on my PhD research, which adopts a qualitative approach to unveil maintenance issues of solar mini-grids in Kenya and Senegal.

### **Keeping the Lights On: Maintenance, Water Rights, and the Afterlives of Micro-Hydro around a Mega-Dam in Northern Pakistan**

Munib Rehman ([m.rehman@unibas.ch](mailto:m.rehman@unibas.ch)), University of Basel, Department of Urban Studies

This paper traces how small-scale energy infrastructures—micro-hydro schemes, household solar, and diesel–solar hybrids—are maintained in villages downstream and adjacent to the Suki Kinari hydropower project in Pakistan’s Kaghan Valley. Drawing on documentary research and preliminary interviews, and based on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork (Nov–Dec 2025), I show that “maintenance” exceeds technical upkeep to include the circulation of repair know-how, evolving claims to water and land, and shifting responsibilities across state agencies, private contractors, and community committees. Following breakdowns (monsoon debris, siltation, parts scarcity) as analytic openings, I trace the legal and moral economies that sustain—or strain—local energy commons. I argue that the long-term viability of decentralised power depends on “infrastructures of maintenance”: social alliances, procedural literacies, and legitimacy work that keep turbines and relations turning. By placing small-scale systems in the shadow of a mega-dam, the paper asks how decentralised energy communities persist, morph, or dissolve



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amid contested water allocations and new grid imaginaries—squarely within Panel G's brief on the social and legal entanglements of maintaining small-scale energy.

### **Clean, Charge, Care: The Many Dimensions of Maintenance Around Small Scale Hydropower Infrastructure in Rural Peru**

Hannah Plüss ([hannah.pluess@unifr.ch](mailto:hannah.pluess@unifr.ch)), University of Fribourg

This panel proposes to define maintenance as the ability to ensure the continued running of energy infrastructures. Taking this concept as a starting point, this paper sheds light on the different acts maintenance includes, ranging from mundane everyday tasks such as cleaning, repairing, or charging fees, up to complex decision-making processes in critical situations. It does so based on twelve months of multiscale fieldwork in and around small-scale hydropower plants in different parts of the Peruvian Andes.

As several actors working with community energy infrastructure, such as the authorities, NGOs, and the user community itself confirm, maintenance depends as much on technical as on social aspects around the infrastructure. Like this, the focus on maintenance becomes an analytical entrance that not only allows us to understand the logic behind the many acts and decisions around an infrastructure but also makes other, more complex dimensions apparent. Namely the processes of learning, teaching, and knowledge exchange, the adaptation to a changing political, ecological, and legal environment, and the (re)building of a community of care with changing personal or institutional engagements but with a constant commitment to the infrastructure.

Finally, I want to ask for the implicit idea of success or failure behind the definition of maintenance. What can we learn from situations of stagnation or decay? Do we do justice to the complexity of the social life of infrastructures if we make success or failure dependent solely on their lifespan? Or, are there other aspects to take into account?



## Panel H: Friday 14.00-15.30, Room F207

# Caring for Lands, Lives and Labours: Between Resistance and (Re)production in Agricultural Practices

### Convenors:

Simon Diener, Amanda Jousset, Anna Geiser, Jérémie Forney

While agronomists and economists often emphasise productivity, efficiency, and outputs, approaching agriculture through an anthropological lens of care (e.g., Mol et al., 2010) brings into focus vital but frequently overlooked aspects of farming: If agriculture is seen as being fundamentally a relational practice between humans and other living beings, then care must be understood as a central dimension of this relationship. Whether manifested through attachments to land, attentive and affective relations with animals, plants, soils, or other non-humans, or through the role of farming in sustaining communities, care is deeply embedded in agriculture.

The (re)production of life through caring practices is also a crucial means of confronting ecological degradation and systemic neglect. Practices such as combating erosion, repairing contaminated soils, or resisting land expropriation foreground the material and political stakes of care. Soils, for example, are not just passive substrates, but living, relational entities whose degradation reflects broader forms of structural violence (eg., Nygren et al., 2022), including forms of coloniality, such as environmental racism (eg., Shostak, 2022, Waldron, 2018). These situated practices of care - expressed, for example, through agroecological, regenerative, or even technological interventions - demonstrate how the farming community actively engages in maintaining and restoring the conditions for life. At the same time, such practices often remain undervalued, with those performing this labour receiving little recognition and compensation. This perspective invites a critical rethinking of how care has been marginalised by systems of control, commodification, and technocratic governance in agriculture (see Singleton, 2010), revealing that care is not only relational and life-sustaining but also entangled with asymmetries of power.

As theorists of care have demonstrated, care operates both as a site of (re)production and of resistance (e.g., Hill Collins, 2017; Laugier, 2010; Lynch, 2022; Tronto, 1993). Care practices can challenge exploitative logics while simultaneously remaining entangled with them. In agriculture, this tension between resistance and (re)production is also present, e.g., by offering alternatives to extractive economies while also helping to sustain them (see Tsing, 2015). This poses the question of how farmers navigate the contradictions of care: resisting market-driven, productivist imperatives while



simultaneously engaging in the (re)production of living beings as a means of market participation.

The lens of care also recognises others' life and their capacity to reproduce life. It is deeply entangled with temporal cognition, where past, present, and future converge (e.g., Gell, 1992; Rose, 2012). Farmers' perceptions and practices are shaped, among others, by memory and embodied experience, with many understanding themselves as intergenerational custodians committed to preserving knowledge and sustaining the land for future generations (e.g., Gill, 2013). As we have already mentioned, this vision and commitment unfold within a capitalist system that privileges simplification and control over complexity, attentiveness, and long-term sustainability (e.g., Ingold, 2021; Chagnon et al., 2022; Krzywoszynska, 2019; Puig della Bellacasa, 2015). As a result, care-driven approaches to farming are increasingly difficult to uphold.

A telling example of these tensions is the growing use of the language of care in sustainability frameworks, agri-environmental policies, and NGO-led interventions, where care is often reframed as a managerial objective within top-down governance structures (e.g., Murray Li, 2007; Sultana, 2022). This raises critical questions about the meaning of care when it is imposed through institutional agendas, as opposed to emerging from farmers' situated practices of resistance, reproduction, or relational commitment.

This panel invites anthropologists and interdisciplinary scholars to explore care as an analytical lens for understanding the complex entanglements of agriculture. We encourage contributions that engage with how agricultural practices embody contested and uneven relations of care and power across multiple scales: From interpersonal and intergenerational relations within farm families and rural communities to multispecies entanglements with territories, soil, plants, animals, and other more-than-human actors. We welcome contributions that address, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- How do different actors define, enact, and reproduce practices of care and maintenance in agriculture, especially in contexts of transformation or decay?
- How do different actors navigate and/or contest the tensions and contradictions between logics and practices of care and other logics and practices promoted by dominant structures and narratives?
- How do social scientists and practitioners engage with and reflect upon their own caring practices (whether as researchers, facilitators, or participants) in the uneven and power-laden landscapes of agri-environmental governance?



## Papers:

### **Between Soil, Clients, and Whims of The Sky: The Frictions of Care on a Moroccan Agroecological Farm**

Andrea Mathez ([andrea.mathez@unil.ch](mailto:andrea.mathez@unil.ch)), Institut de géographie et durabilité, Université de Lausanne

'Care' is sometimes understood as a moral human project, based on ethical decision-making in the negotiation and management of our more-than-human relations. While such practices are often entangled in powerful configurations, adopting care as an analytical lens also offers a way to think both through and beyond them. I do so through the case of the agroecological farm Dari in Morocco, managed by Mohamed and Irene, whom I have known for a decade and with whom I conducted ethnographic research as part of my PhD on Swiss and Moroccan farms at the margins of state planning and agro-industry. I explore how Mohamed and Irene transformed a pastoral land inherited from Mohamed's parents into one of the most biodiverse agroecological farms I have encountered in Morocco, offering their clients a wide variety of products throughout the year. Mohamed sees it as his responsibility to provide healthy food tailored to their clients' specific requests and needs, yet this ethic can collide with managing scarce water and financial resources. I also show how caring for the soil, for each other, and for customers is challenged by the uneven and power-laden landscapes of agri-environmental governance—corrupt officials, modernisation policies, and rural poverty—as well as by emotions such as pride and disappointment fracturing relations with family, neighbours, and colleagues. I argue that at the farm Dari, relations of care not only sustain agroecological life but also generate frictions, mediated by (non-)ethical decision-making caught in monetary, temporal, and emotional struggles in a climate-deregulated world.

### **Dialectics in Sustainable Agropastoralism in Northern Kenya— The Case of Sacred Water**

Samuel Weissman ([sam.paul.weissman@gmail.com](mailto:sam.paul.weissman@gmail.com)), Unit of Social Anthropology, University of Bern

Sometimes I think god doesn't want to bring the rain here, because it just causes more conflict', says Wilson Lerantillei, my research assistant, on our way back to the village. It was a particularly harsh dry period and as soon as it rained and plants sprouted, herders from all around would move into place, graze and browse their animals and conflicts would ensue. People would die. However, if it didn't rain, people would die. It seemed an impossible situation. Rain is supposed to be a blessing, now it had become a curse.

The god that Wilson refers to is enkai in the Maa language and also means rain. In a sense, what he is saying is that god does not want to appear. God as rain is an actant being. Therefore, when discussing the implications of rains staying away, my interlocuters



would not necessarily refer to climate change or some overarching phenomena to explain what was happening. Most would argue that people were losing respect. Respect toward each other and toward their non-human and more than human fellow beings. In their world view, all beings are connected relationally. Not taking care of these relationships can invite misfortune and on the scale of society can have massive repercussions.

I would like to address this logic that runs against naturalist and capitalist notions in this context in northern Kenya. For conservation actors, taking care of landscape means taking care of wildlife and practicing sustainable agriculture and herding. Care is aimed at fixing and maintaining a pure nature imaginary where humans need to be minimally or non-invasive at best. In the Maa-peoples understanding, however, this seems counterintuitive, since care is not less but more active participation in the relational shaping of landscape as a form of commoning. However, fragmentation of the commons is affecting the ability to maintain more than human landscapes and oppressive regimes brought through conservation are making care increasingly difficult.

### **Respectful Care of Maize: The Persistence of Agrobiodiversity in the Mixe Highlands of Oaxaca**

Gabriel G. Roman ([gabriel.roman.graton@ulb.be](mailto:gabriel.roman.graton@ulb.be)), Université Libre de Bruxelles

Care has been a central concept for understanding the way humans relate to cultivated plants in indigenous worlds. Anthropological literature has drawn notable attention to how such caring practices are often marked by duality and mutuality, especially in contexts where plants are endowed with agency or personhood. In this paper, I aim to shed light on an alternative, tripartite, and asymmetrical mode of vegetal care which I call respectful care. Drawing on ethnographic data from a Mixe indigenous community in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, I show how, even though Mixe maize is not attributed human interiority, their flourishing depends on agricultural rituals and on reverent and meticulous care. Such human care does not only affect the plant directly, but it is also through it that cultivators display their respect for Ēnaa, the thunder deity who is maize's parent, creator, and giver. If respected, Ēnaa, in turn, cares for the maize as well. Conversely, if the maize is disregarded, for instance if it is left on the ground, wasted, or stepped on, Ēnaa may respond by taking one's harvest away. Respectful care can be defined, thus, as a relation among humans, plants, and deities through which human engagements with the plants also activate the deity's agency with either beneficial or detrimental effects. These relations permeate Mixe daily agricultural life and are key to understanding local resistance to the encroachment of market-oriented, productivist logics in their fields. Indeed, although the younger generations have largely abandoned agriculture, pursuing more profitable activities, particularly through migration, elderly cultivators continue to care for their diverse seeds and to display their respect to their deities. Such conceptualization of respectful care, thus, underscores the consequential links between



indigenous cosmologies and biodiverse agriculture and offers a counterhegemonic perspective on the entanglement of crop productivity and vegetal care.

### **Pastoral Commons and Care: Socio-Ecological Continuities in the Basque Olhatia**

Alys Cretier ([alys.cretier@unil.ch](mailto:alys.cretier@unil.ch)), Institut de Géographie et Durabilité, Université de Lausanne

This presentation examines practices of care in the use of high-altitude pastures within the olhatia, a specific pastoral common of Xiberoa (Northern Basque Country). Despite the decline of agro-pastoralism, the increasing size of farms, and the influence of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), local communities continue to manage summer pastures collectively. Land is approached as a shared resource, inseparable from generational succession and the continuity of pastoral practices, enabling regimes of attention and care that link ecological stewardship with social reproduction.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork, the presentation highlights how care is enacted: through the naming of places as attentive engagement with the land, intergenerational transmission of knowledge and skills, and the inclusion of animals and plants as active participants in the socio-ecological fabric. These practices show that care extends beyond humans, embedding pastoral activity in multispecies and ecological continuity.

Investing in the commons requires sustained attention to the world and its affordances. By collectively taking responsibility for the socio-ecological future of the territory, communities develop shared ecological intelligence, defining action parameters and common values to ensure the durability and care of both resource and community.

This approach reveals an ontology of the commons, grounded in intergenerational transmission of embodied knowledge and care practices, inscribed in a form of dwelling rooted in the collective experience of place.

### **Caring for the Soil Through Drones: Exploring Small-scale Producers' Alternative Agricultural Practices in Rural China from a Socio-technical Perspective**

Ruishi Zhen ([ruishi.zhen@unifr.ch](mailto:ruishi.zhen@unifr.ch)), Unit of Social Anthropology, University of Fribourg

China has a long indigenous tradition of ecological agriculture, characterised by a wealth of knowledge and practices regarding sustainable soil management. However, traditional practices of improving soil health have been in decline since the introduction of 'green revolution' technologies in the 1970s. The Chinese state's food security strategy and the acceleration of land consolidation for large-scale mechanised farming under the productivist agricultural regime have further limited the space for small-scale ecological



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agriculture. In this paper, I adopt a socio-technical approach to analysing a case study of alternative agricultural practices to care for the soil through the tinkering with small-sized drones. The preliminary empirical material draws on my work experience as an ecological farmer in a small rural enterprise between 2021 and 2022, and my ethnographic fieldwork in rural Guangdong between October and December 2024, including in-depth interviews with alternative producers, and participant observation on drone applications. In contrast with the adoption of industrial spraying drones by large-scale capitalist producers to maximise agricultural productivity and output, small-scale alternative producers assemble, adapt and reprogramme small-sized drones to implement soil conservation measures, including spreading biochar into the soil and sowing cover crop seeds. Through drone innovation, small-scale alternative producers exercise their 'creative agency' to revitalise ecological farming traditions and resist productivist agricultural practices by large agribusinesses. From a socio-technical perspective, this paper contributes to the literature on alternative food networks (AFNs) in the field of anthropology and sheds light on the specific social and technical resources and embodied skilled practices that small-scale producers utilise and perform in processes of preserving and reproducing traditional practices of care and maintenance in agriculture.



## Panel I: Friday 16.00-17.30, Room F205

# Caring Beyond Humans: Ecologies and Heritage in Mountain Worlds

### Convenors:

Maria-Anna Bertolino, Marie Eich, Viviane Cretton

Mountain ecological practices are increasingly entangled in a web of environmental, social, and political pressures. On the one hand, they face mounting vulnerability: lack of generational renewal, social isolation, institutional withdrawal, and the accelerating impacts of climate change. On the other hand, their cultural and ecological value is receiving renewed recognition.

Recent UNESCO inscriptions of mountain sites in the List of World Natural and Cultural Heritage (1972) and of mountain practices in the List for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) reflect a growing concern with preserving mountain ecosystems, material assets and the ways of life as forms of living heritage, rooted in ecological knowledge, multispecies entanglements, and practices of care.

At the same time, landslides and rockfalls – linked to melting permafrost and glacial retreat – have revealed the material fragility of mountain terrains. These events highlight not only the vulnerability of infrastructures and ecosystems but also the precariousness of the social, multispecies, and affective relations embedded within them. They raise urgent questions about how care and maintenance are enacted, imagined, or sometimes overwhelmed in the face of ecological breakdown.

Within this context, a multiplicity of gestures of support – often informal, discreet, or marginalised – have emerged. These include informal and affective forms of support such as volunteering, mutual aid, hospitality, non-monetary exchange, as well as activist practices, such as those linked to climate justice. Whether enacted by locals, newcomers, or transient participants, these practices sustain not only ecological maintenance and food production, but also social bonds, seasonal rhythms, biodiversity care, and interspecies coexistence.

This panel seeks to explore what it means to care for, with, and through mountain landscapes today. It asks how care is enacted and experienced in Alpine ecologies, and how it intersects with broader dynamics of ancestral transmission, biodiversity management, and the emergence of new environmental actors – including young farmers, ecological and farm volunteers, climate activists and civil society initiatives. We are particularly interested in how these forms of care extend beyond the human, involving animals, soils, infrastructures, waters, weather systems, and plants, and in how they are



institutionalized through policies and heritage organisations at national and international levels.

In doing so, the panel invites contributions that foreground care as a situated, relational, and political practice (McKearney and Amrith, 2023) – one that engages not only with material upkeep but also with emotional labour, sensitive memories, symbolic recognition, and multispecies forms of transmission. It builds on works in social sciences on care and maintenance (Mol, Moser & Pols 2010; Denis and Pontille, 2022), more-than-human ethics (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), and sociological reflections on reciprocity and ecological generosity (Chaniel 2014; 2022).

Rather than framing Alpine regions as remote or nostalgic sites, the panel understands them as dynamic and contested assemblages of relations – to be nurtured, sustained, repaired, or reimagined. We consider care and maintenance not as passive or restorative, but as potentially ambivalent, inventive, and deeply political practices—at once enabling and constraining.

We invite papers that address, but are not limited to, the following three thematic axes:

1. Diverse forms of engagement in mountain care  
How do different actors – volunteers, temporary workers, seasonal migrants, new farmers, artists, researchers, or civil society groups – engage in care for mountain worlds? What drives these engagements, and how do they relate to local knowledge, traditions, or ecological imaginaries? What tensions or solidarities emerge when care becomes a site of negotiation between internal and external actors?
2. The paradox of mountain care, maintenance, and decay  
What knowledges, skills, and embodied practices are transmitted, or lost, in efforts to care for alpine infrastructures, pastures, and multispecies communities? What happens when maintenance becomes unsustainable, or when decay reshapes ecological or social expectations? Can decline itself open spaces for alternative modes of being and relating?
3. Frictions between heritage and (in)visibility  
How do policies of recognition – such as the heritage listing of natural elements and of intangible and tangible cultural assets – intersect with lived realities of care and maintenance? Do such recognitions support or constrain ecological practices? How do heritage discourses influence what is made visible or invisible in mountain worlds – be it gendered labour, non-human agency, or forms of informal knowledge? How are living practices of care affected—stabilised, folklorised, or made resilient – through heritage institutions?



By focusing on Alpine and other mountainous contexts, this panel offers a lens to reflect on how care, maintenance, and decay are negotiated in ecologically sensitive, economically fragile, and symbolically charged landscapes. It contributes to current anthropological debates around unnoticed labour, the ethics of interdependence, and the challenges of caring across spatial, temporal, and species boundaries.

We welcome ethnographic, theoretical, and experimental contributions grounded in mountain or vulnerable landscapes – including, but not limited to, ecological volunteering, intergenerational farming, multispecies maintenance, informal and institutional care practices, and engagements with glacial or environmental fragility. We particularly encourage submissions from early-career researchers, projects rooted in ongoing fieldwork, and contributions exploring visual, sensory, or collaborative modes of inquiry.

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## Papers:

### **"What is freedom?" Paradoxes and Contestations in the Conservation of Alpine Territories**

Mosè Cometta ([mose.cometta@usi.ch](mailto:mose.cometta@usi.ch)), USI, Istituto di Studi Urbani e del Paesaggio

At the beginning of the 21st century, Switzerland introduced legislation aimed at establishing new protected areas, with particular attention to Alpine and rural regions. Only two projects for the creation of a new national park have ever reached the stage of a local popular vote – and both were rejected. Strikingly, each of these initiatives was located wholly or partly in the canton of Ticino, and in both cases the process generated a highly polarised and, at times, toxic public debate about what such projects would mean for the long-term survival of Alpine communities. This represents a clear signal of political discontent and of an underlying fragility in the sense of identity running through Alpine communities in Switzerland, a phenomenon that calls for careful analysis in order to grasp its underlying causes.

Rather than being perceived primarily as measures for biodiversity conservation, these projects were often framed – both by their promoters and their opponents – as instruments of tourism-driven development. For many local residents, this raised what might be called the paradox of "freedom": a concept whose meaning shifts depending on interpretation - hence the question posed by one resident on a newspaper: "what is freedom?".

This presentation takes as its starting point the discourses of those who opposed the creation of these parks. By analysing their arguments, it reflects on what it means to genuinely care for Alpine communities and their historical trajectories and intersections, while also tracing the complex struggles over cultural and political hegemony that continue to shape the governance of natural spaces in Switzerland.

### **Ensuring Care, Insuring Nature: Alpine Pastures under Climate Change in the Surselva**

Kiah Rutz ([rutz@vmz.uzh.ch](mailto:rutz@vmz.uzh.ch)), UZH

This paper draws on my PhD fieldwork in the Surselva valley, during which I researched how climate change reshapes alpine livelihoods, specifically agriculture, and influences the debate around the nature-culture divide. Farmers in the Surselva conceive of three-stage farming as "Kulturlandschaft" sustained through multispecies entanglements of soils, plants, animals, humans and infrastructures. Stable winters once maintained this ecology, but warming temperatures and early snowmelt accelerate erosion, landslides, and rockfall that cause structural decay and make physical maintenance and care of pastures increasingly unsustainable.



In response, many farmers turn to climate insurance as a form of legalised care, shifting responsibility for upkeep to municipal and cantonal authorities. While this channels more resources into repair, it also redistributes agency and reframes "Kulturlandschaft" from a lived working landscape to a scenic "nature" valued in tourism. Farmers' obligations to maintain pastures thus serve both as livelihood support and heritage preservation for tourism, altering how farmers relate to the land: less as a resource for themselves, more as a landscape for others.

These transformations highlight both losses and gains in knowledge, skill, and embodied practice. As agricultural work becomes entangled with institutional and bureaucratic infrastructures, ecological care is no longer solely rooted in local labour but mediated through legal, political, and economic processes. This reconfiguration of care and responsibility illuminates the instability of the nature–culture boundary. The Kulturlandschaft, once a hybrid of human labour and ecological processes, becomes increasingly institutionalized as natural heritage. Tracing this transition shows how climate adaptation measures do not simply preserve alpine pastures, but actively reshape ecological relations, social expectations, and the meaning of care in a changing mountain environment.

## **Enduring Violent-care – Human-Beekeeper-Varroa Mites Entanglements in Beekeeping Practices**

Aline von Atzigen ([aline.vonatzen@wsl.ch](mailto:aline.vonatzen@wsl.ch)), Eidg. Forschungsanstalt WSL

Human-honeybee relationships are very particular multispecies entanglements. They oscillate between companionship and domestication, and are characterised by a constant balance between the fascination and admiration for the honeybees' remarkable diligence and sophisticated work organization and the benefit and exploitation of their sweet honey and pollination "service"– all against the background of the painful risk of the bee sting. Ever since the introduction of varroa mites in the mid 1980s the beekeeping practices – and consequently beekeeper-honeybee entanglements — shifted from keeping to protecting. While before the main task of the beekeepers used to be extracting honey, nowadays it is controlling and treating the honeybee colonies. Along with this process the beekeepers' role to "care" for honeybees underwent a fundamental and ambivalent transformation: to care for the honeybees means to harm them.

In my presentation – drawing from field research with professional large-scale beekeepers in France – I will elaborate how the beekeepers practice care by applying different varroa mite treatments. Using the concept of "violent-care" (van Dooren, 2014) I will analyse how the beekeepers deal with the violent aspect of their care practice on different scales – individual honeybee, honeybee colony and species. I will show how the beekeepers, in the context of clear power structures between exploitative beekeeper and semi-domesticated honeybees, deal with the ambivalences of care and the emotional



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implications of the harsh treatments they enact and endure. With the case of beekeeper-honeybee entanglements – a case that continuously attracts a lot of public interest and is therefore morally charged – I will contribute to the discussion and a more nuanced understanding of care as contradictory and paradoxical.

Van Dooren, Thom. 2014. "Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction". Columbia University Press.

### **"We Do That for the Cows!" Caring, Heritage, and Community of Practice during the Alpine Pasture Season.**

Maria-Anna Bertolino ([maria.bertolino@hevs.ch](mailto:maria.bertolino@hevs.ch)), HES.SO Valais Wallis and Regional Center for Alpine Communities studies (CREPA).

In December 2023, the Alpine Pasture Season in Switzerland was inscribed in UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). That same month, I started working on a project titled "Volunteers on the Alps: An Ethnography of Non-Monetary Aid to Mountain Farmers in Valais". UNESCO inscription recognizes the commitment of volunteers in preserving knowledge and sustaining the alpine pastures for future generations, all together with the other actors on the alps and the aid programs which connect farmers and volunteers. Starting from the idea that care is a fundamental capacity that encompasses human and non-human beings within a nature-cultural world, my paper explores and analyses some 'nestled practices of care' toward the Alpine Pasture Season as a living heritage. More specifically, I used a revised version of Tronto's grammar of care as a framework that also allows to investigate new heritage paradigms.



## Panel J: Thursday 14.00-15.30, Room F205

# Holding Together: Care Amidst War and Displacement

### Convenors:

Olena Sobolieva, Oksana Ovsiuk

This panel invites contributions that explore how care is shaped in contexts of displacement, armed conflict, and institutional breakdown. We focus on three intersecting areas of inquiry. First, we are interested in how care is practiced in the everyday lives of displaced persons through housing arrangements, mutual support networks, and orientation in unfamiliar systems, as well as how such practices emerge in response to slow, inadequate, or impersonal institutional mechanisms (Solnit 2009). Second, we consider the effects of war on caregiving relations within families and communities: how people care for the injured, the grieving, and the exhausted. We would like to examine how these intimate forms of maintenance intersect with bureaucratic and military systems that often fail to support them (Federici 2012). Third, we consider care as an ethical and epistemic problem in the research process itself, especially when fieldwork is conducted in conditions of absence, repression and violence (Behar 2022). In each of these areas, we explore what it means to support others, to pay attention in times of upheaval, and how care becomes a way of knowing, acting, and connecting when institutional frameworks are insufficient. By tying these threads together, the panel views care as a practice and a study, as a means of relating, responding, and surviving in disruptive environments. We welcome papers that address one or more of these dimensions, grounded in ethnographic research and attuned to the complex intersections of vulnerability, labor, and responsibility.

Together, these topics highlight the importance of care practices that unfold beyond institutional or humanitarian frameworks. They point to forms of mutual aid (Spade 2020), relational care (Tronto 1993; Malkki 2015), and everyday maintenance that allow people to endure and support others in the midst of violence and displacement. These practices often take place in private or hidden settings. They are shaped by gender, class, legal status, and unequal regimes of visibility, and they help sustain social ties and moral obligations that have been strained or broken by war.

This panel explores care as a form of labor embedded in wider political and economic structures. We invite reflection on how caregiving and the ethnographic study of care are shaped by conditions of inequality, disruption, and institutional neglect. In addition to engaging with critiques of humanitarianism that reveal how institutional aid often



overlooks the significance of routine, invisible labor (Ticktin 2011), we draw on scholarship that links care to broader structures of social reproduction (Bhattacharya 2017). These perspectives help us think of care as both a necessity and a burden, as connection and compromise. The panel also considers the role of care in research itself, especially when fieldwork is interrupted by censorship, violence, or forced absence. It asks how ethnographers respond to such conditions, and what responsibilities this creates—toward research participants, and toward the stories that remain untold. Taken together, these concerns position care not only as an object of analysis but as a method, a responsibility, and a fragile resource in times of rupture.

The panel brings together three ethnographic case studies from the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and beyond. One contribution examines how Swiss host families received Ukrainian refugees into their homes, managing not only material arrangements but also the emotional and cultural work of cohabitation (Dr. Ovsiiuk Oksana). These situations, which are influenced by both individual motivations and broader political discourses, display a blend of moral complexity, ambivalence, and solidarity. The second paper focuses on Ukrainian women, primarily wives and partners of injured soldiers, whose everyday lives are shaped by the demands of caregiving (Dr. Tina Polek). Their work includes physical assistance, emotional support, and bureaucratic struggle across disconnected medical and military systems. These women are simultaneously caregivers, advocates, and coordinators, shouldering responsibilities that extend far beyond domestic life and are largely overlooked by formal systems. Drawing on ethnography in eastern Sicily (Aug 2023–Jul 2024), Dr Irene Maffi compares models of care in three NGOs working with migrants—two religious and one secular. Although they offer similar services (legal status, housing, work, healthcare, Italian), their logics differ: a disciplinary regime with rigid rules and hierarchy; an assistance regime of close accompaniment; and a harm-reduction model that limits negative health effects clearly everyday practices without strict monitoring. It shows effects on migrants' lives, too.

Together, these panel demonstrates how the challenges and disruptions of war shape care in a variety of ways that often go unnoticed, such as prolonged caregiving, domestic hosting, or methodological attentiveness. This panel examines how support and care manifest themselves in the fragmented everyday reality of displacement and conflict. We focus on informal and domestic contexts. People and communities respond to institutional failure by constantly supporting each other, rather than through official policies or programs. Care manifests itself in these conditions through relationships, everyday tasks, and spontaneous gestures. Without clear direction or institutional support, care involves balancing hospital visits, paperwork, household chores, and the emotional labor of caregiving.

In line with the conference theme, this panel considers care and support as central elements of human survival and relationships in times of institutional crisis. These practices often go unnoticed. Whether it is care in war-affected homes or the careful



selection of methodology in closed research contexts, they help sustain life and connections in the face of institutional collapse and social upheaval. We invite papers that deepen and complicate these discussions, offering meaningful insights into care, vulnerability, and the ethics of relationships in a changing world.

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## Papers:

### **Between Care and Collapse: Wives of Wounded Soldiers Navigating the System During Wartime**

Tina Polek ([tpolek@kse.org.ua](mailto:tpolek@kse.org.ua)), Kyiv School of Economics



Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has not only caused devastating physical harm but also reconfigured the social fabric around care. This paper examines how Ukrainian women — primarily wives and partners of wounded soldiers — are drawn into caregiving roles that radically reshape their identities, relationships, and everyday routines.

Based on two qualitative studies from 2023–2024, the research explores how women care for men with severe war injuries. These caregivers operate in a grey zone — no longer just civilians, but unrecognized within military structures. Their daily lives revolve around physical assistance, emotional support, and bureaucratic management: attending hospital visits, managing documents, chasing benefits, and pushing for adequate medical care across fragmented public institutions.

Women also navigate communication with military units and veteran agencies, handle disability paperwork, and advocate for their partners' rights — all while caring for children and elderly relatives. They carry this triad of responsibility with little institutional recognition or support, often sidelining their own bodily needs. What emerges is a condition of "bodily inversion," where the caregiver's life is structured entirely around another's damaged body.

This caregiving labor, although intimate and often framed as love, is embedded in structural neglect. It is invisible in formal policy yet essential for holding together the broken interfaces of state, military, and medicine. Through mobile ethnography and interviews, the paper traces how war produces not only wounded bodies but also exhausted support systems — and how care, in such contexts, becomes both maintenance and slow decay.

### **Ukrainians in Switzerland: Life in Hope and Uncertainty**

Oksana Ovsiuk ([kovsiyuk@gmail.com](mailto:kovsiyuk@gmail.com)), Institute of Sociology of the University of Neuchâtel

Since the beginning of 2022, Europe has been facing an unprecedented wave of migration. Thousands (and soon millions) of Ukrainians have crossed the border into the European Union, seeking refuge from the threats to their lives and health brought about by the full-scale war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine. The scale and unusual nature of this migration have posed a real challenge for European countries. Under these circumstances, the Council of Europe activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which provides for a simplified asylum procedure. In March 2022, Switzerland activated protection status S, which gave Ukrainians the right to housing, financial assistance, medical care, and the right to official employment and education. As of February 2025, there were 68,547 people with S status in Switzerland.

Despite the existence of a general system of care for Ukrainian refugees at the federal level, the practical implementation of the guidelines varies significantly from place to place. Local communities are taking their own initiatives to support forced migrants from



Ukraine. This report will focus on the “Ukraine” project run by the municipality of one of the villages in the canton of Fribourg.

Based on this case study, the report will examine the impact of the local community and individual households on the adaptation and integration of Ukrainians. What measures have been implemented at the commune level, and what results have been achieved? What relations have developed between the local population and the newly arrived Ukrainian refugees? What role do host families play in the integration process? What results have been achieved three years after the introduction of S status?

### **“We Do Not Help Them, We Accompany Them”: Multiple Models of Care Among NGOs Working with Migrants in Sicily**

Irene Maffi ([irene.maffi@unil.ch](mailto:irene.maffi@unil.ch)), Université de Lausanne

Drawing on ethnographic research in eastern Sicily (August 2023-July 2024), in this paper I intend to explore the various models of care three different Sicilian NGOs adopt to deal with migrants. Two of these NGOs are religious whereas one is secular. They offer similar services to migrants: they support them to obtain international protection or a residence permit, to find a work and a place to live, to access healthcare services, to learn Italian, etc. However, the models of care they adopt with their beneficiaries are different despite the similarities of the services they offer. One of the NGOs tends to establish a kind of disciplinary regime in which beneficiaries have to strictly abide by a code of conduct which is rigid, hierarchical, infantilizing. Another NGO tends to establish an assistance regime within which migrants become individuals needing to be closely accompanied in various spheres of their lives. The third NGO explicitly follows a model of risk reduction offering services to migrants aimed to prevent some events or at least reduce their negative effects - in particular in the domain of physical and mental health - without strictly monitoring its beneficiaries.

I will compare the effects of these various logics of care on some beneficiaries of the three NGOs and show how they navigate, adjust or reject them to build their new life in Italy.



## Panel K: Friday 09.00-10.30, Room E230

# Design and Artistic Collaborations in Wartime: Care and Maintenance through Creative Interventions

### Convenors:

Dorota Kozcacuk, Katarzyna Grabska

Amidst war and destruction, envisioning a future for affected areas is contentious. Nevertheless, artists and architects are emerging to advocate for displaced populations concerning their survival, return, rebuilding, rehabilitation, and future. The Panel seeks to explore anthropological perspectives on how designers and artists, whether through alliance-building or individual action, reflect on and pursue the (re)building of lives, landscapes and communities plagued by political violence.

The warfare paradigm of the twentieth century attacks every vital condition of life (Sloterdijk 2009). As a result, affected populations are either forced to make the battlefield livable or to flee, often to exist as displaced people in confined self-built shelters or those designed by others on their behalf (Scott-Smith and Breeze 2020; McConnachie 2016). The destruction of lives extends beyond infrastructure damage; attacks on structures, homes, and monuments target cultural practices, customs, and knowledge. These acts of war deliberately erase identity and sever connections to place, history, and community. Conflicts in Sudan, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Ukraine, to name a few, profoundly affect people's sense of belonging and their anchoring in time and space. Amid shattered cities and landscapes, individuals and communities become emotionally unmoored, often cut off from the elements that shape their identity (Clack 2022). Therefore, caring for and maintaining identity requires (re)construction and place-making efforts.

The meaning of place (see Turton 2005) and placemaking for refugees and displaced populations have been a source of anthropological debates, with concepts such as "survival" (Szerszeń 2024), "meantime" (Jansen 2018), "gendered homemaking" (Grabska 2014) or the "becoming" (Hammond 2004). The anthropologists examining post-war reconstruction are explicit about the agency of war-affected populations within the ruins. Zani (2019) detailed life in the former battlefields of Laos, while Bădescu (2015) discussed homemaking in post-war Sarajevo, and Henig (2019) narrated experiences amidst the military waste of post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. These are care and maintenance practices, shaped by gender, class, ethnicity, kinship, and age, in exile or amidst the ruins of people's own homes. However, the post-war moment, as noted by Sarmiento Barletti (2021) in Peru, can evolve into a space of extraction-driven violence. This is particularly



evident in scenarios like the Arabian Peninsula or Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, where post-war infrastructure remains military in nature (Khalili 2018) and fosters the factory-like logic of foreign aid (Attewell 2018). Reconstruction in the anthropological literature is therefore often portrayed as an ongoing effort of affected individuals to reconstitute their identity while subjected to further resource extraction or humanitarian logistics. Studies indicate the individual and collective efforts to sustain the functionality and integrity of both the social and physical worlds; however, these are complex realities with hierarchies of care relations and situated knowledges. This reveals the harmful potential of care and maintenance in such contexts.

Yet, (re)building of lives does not begin when the war ends. The processes of both physical and imagined construction of liveable places occur during conflicts and extend across time and space, spanning various geographical locations. The debates on the role of cultural and artistic heritage as sites of home-making or place-maintaining through time and space despite or in spite of destroyed cities, neighbourhoods and communities (see Finkelstein et al, 2022) are increasingly accompanied by new forms of care and maintenance, such as design and artistic practice, to which we want to draw attention in this panel.

In the context of the Ukraine War, the Kharkiv School of Architecture relocated to Poland and formed the Urban Alliance, developing the concept of "Building Back Better"—not just focusing on rebuilding Russian-controlled areas, but also envisioning a future free from Soviet architectural influences. Another global alliance of Architects for Gaza was formed after the October 2022 Gaza War began. Over 300 designers worldwide volunteered to collaborate with Palestinian governorates in Gaza. Despite ongoing attacks, mayors of besieged, displaced Palestinians, lacking essential services, healthcare, and food, urged this coalition to consider Gaza's post-war reconstruction with the sensitivity often missing in large humanitarian interventions. In the context of the current war in Sudan (since April 2023), artistic and architectural interventions emerged to respond to war through maintaining artistic spaces of expression in Sudan and in exile (see Furmann 2024; Shadad and Grabska 2024). Myanmar conflict generated a similar intervention of artists in documenting, narrating, and imagining a post-conflict nation.

This Panel examines design and artistic collaborations during wartime and violent conflict. Envisioning futures in conflict-affected regions involves both displaced artists and designers who (re)activate their practices and supportive ones eager to rekindle hope for these areas of decay. Design coalitions increasingly support those under siege, prioritising the well-being of local communities; however, they depend on international solidarity ties and financial assistance. Consequently, care provided by designers and artists across dispersed geographies is embedded within social and economic frameworks, norms, and values. The care and maintenance via imagining post-war and post-conflict cityscapes, cultural sites, and communities occur within intersecting power relations, across different geographical locations, with unequal access to resources.



The Panel invites submissions that articulate design and artistic coalitions and networks that come together voluntarily and spontaneously to envision the aftermath of conflict, while its end remains unseen. Within this context of active destruction and far removed from the geographies in question, we wish to explore what care and maintenance mean:

- How do design alliances that support aspirations for imagined futures take shape, and what structural and social norms are they embedded in?
- How do artists and designers negotiate their relationships with war-torn or conflict-ridden places and communities, and how are they shaped by gender, kin, ethnicity, class, age, and social connections?
- How are value systems negotiated within the design and artistic collaborations, and how do those impact the principles of care and maintenance for communities, environments, and design practices?
- How do collaborative artists and designers, along with their creative interventions, challenge, reconfigure, or reproduce existing power relations, social hierarchies, and exclusions in war-torn and conflict-affected places and communities?

## Papers:

### The Beauty of Care

Elena Orap ([Elena.orap@gmail.com](mailto:Elena.orap@gmail.com)), Institute for Human Sciences (IWM Vienna)

The Beauty of Care is the Ukrainian project at the Venice Architecture Biennale (2023), a case of documenting artistic and architectural practices emerging in wartime. The exhibition presented initiatives such as converting abandoned buildings into housing, protecting cultural heritage, rethinking domestic spaces for survival, and collectively rebuilding homes. These stories are told through familiar objects arranged scenographically: a living room with a communal table made from a door, bathtub with a duvet and pillows, taped window - each element embodying practices and forms of care.

These practices share more than functionality, articulating values of solidarity, responsibility, and the continuity of identity under conditions of displacement and destruction. For architects and other creatives immersed in the realities of war, caring becomes not only a response to vulnerability but also a mode of expression. It shows how design and art become ways of connecting with people and building relationships, where the art of living becomes a way of rethinking what is essential and non-essential, what should be preserved, or reconfigured.

Beauty of Care focuses less on the results and more on the process of creating protection. Through stories of ideas, actions, and solutions, we want to show the world different ways of creating spaces of care, in order to remind us of the fundamental purpose of



architecture and to broaden the understanding of the role of architects in society — even beyond war.

Situating *The Beauty of Care* within anthropological debates on design and artistic collaborations, the presentation explores how such initiatives emerge, what social and structural norms they are embedded in, and how they redefine the roles of architects and artists as agents of care. It also considers how these practices resonate internationally, challenging dominant humanitarian and reconstruction paradigms that often prioritise efficiency over lived experience.

### **When Architects for Gaza meet Gaza Architects - A Moment of Care**

Dorota Kozaczuk, Graduate Institute, CH

“We must thank you very much. It’s so precious what you’re doing for the people of Gaza.” It was 26th February 2025, the war in Gaza had been in its sixteenth month, the ceasefire with Israel was not holding, and US President Trump had just posted that Gaza could become “the Riviera of the Middle East”. A dozen Gaza architects and urbanists who had fled to Egypt were sitting in a small room in Megawra, Cairo, with three international architects. They gathered around a table with a laptop and had just finished listening to the introduction of the content displayed on it. Those Gaza architects and urbanists were now enrolled in an architecture workshop in Cairo, and the speaker, a British architect, had just finished presenting a project for a cultural complex in the centre of Gaza City.

At the start, we had 60 volunteers divided to work on two sites. The British architect said, “I will showcase one site - the cultural complex.” He added, “I have been trying to contact people who know the site. I told my team, ‘Let’s get moving so we can present it to others.’” The plans he showed were made at the request of the Mayor of Gaza by a humanitarian group, the Architects for Gaza. They were in effect developed and drawn by international volunteers, none of whom had ever visited Gaza. Throughout, designing Gaza through a participatory process, characterised by care, was of utmost importance to counter grand neoliberal and neocolonial narratives. In Megawra, the British architect seized a unique opportunity to engage in a participatory design process; despite it being a short and fragile moment, he consulted with designers from Gaza on designs made for Gaza. This was the first time the plans, developed by some of the world’s top architects, received feedback. In this brief window of time, the British architect was fulfilling his duty of care—the highest ethos of architectural practice.

But this moment was also much more, for the design of the international architect was in tension with reflections of the displaced Gaza refugee architects, urban designers, civil engineers, and archaeologists. During the joint Global Free Unit, the Office of Displaced Designers and Architects of Gaza workshop in Cairo, the Palestinian participants were encouraged to consider returning to Gaza and its recovery. Reflecting the workshop’s



title, Palestinian architects were invited to explore “Rebuilding Home, Street, and Neighbourhood.” The subsequent weeks of collaborative thinking marked a modest step towards a spatial understanding of trauma and recovery. The workshop’s invitation to reflect on return and rebuilding motivated Gazan architects to express the painful and polarised notion of home that only Gaza architects could evoke, let alone represent.

In this context, the discussion of the plan prepared by foreign architects—an optimistic, colourful collage featuring a stadium, a park, a market, a mosque, and a public realm, on which not a single Gaza architect had worked—did not spark controversy; instead, I observed a compassionate engagement. The talk provides insights into the three-hour presentation by Architects for Gaza to their colleagues from Gaza. It also highlights acts of care through the exchange of ideas, verification of data, details, and creative involvement. I open up a possibility of thinking about care as a discussion of architectural detail as much as consideration of impossible concepts for the future. In these collaborative moments, every architect, regardless of nationality, is in a mutual relationship of compassion and solidarity.

### **Imagining the Future: Provision of Care and Maintenance Through Artistic Interventions in the Sudanese War**

Katarzyna Grabska, Graduate Institute, Geneva

Care in the context of war is often discussed in the literature as a form of humanitarian assistance either provided by international or national organisations, or as more informal vernacular forms of humanitarian interventions. Much of such care focuses on safety, provision of food, shelter, water, and medical care. Humanitarian policies and research often overlook the role of local and translocal cultural actors—artists, curators, and cultural practitioners—in war and humanitarian crises. While art is increasingly acknowledged in peacebuilding, its role in humanitarian contexts remains depoliticized and viewed as non-essential. Humanitarian efforts typically focus on immediate survival, but art and artistic interventions offer alternative perspectives on life’s value beyond survival. This paper examines the role of artists, curators, and cultural institutions in responding to the ongoing war in Sudan. Since April 2023, over 8 million people have been internally displaced and more than 3 million became refugees. Amid this crisis, Sudanese artists in Sudan and the diaspora have emerged as key actors, providing financial aid, facilitating safe passage, preserving cultural heritage, and supporting artistic practice. Artistic intervention have also focused on imagining the future in spite of the war-torn present of Sudan, thus contributing to safeguarding Sudan’s cultural memory. Based on long-term ethnographic and collaborative research with Sudanese artists since 2013, I explore cultural individual and collective efforts as a way of caring for communities affected by war. I investigate how these efforts and creative interventions challenge, reconfigure, and/or reproduce existing power relations, social hierarchies, and exclusions



in war-torn Sudan and in the diaspora. In what ways imagining a post-war Sudan through artistic interventions impacts the principles of care and maintenance for war-torn communities, environments, and artistic practices? Finally, I ask what new hierarchies of values of life and moral economies emerge, offering deeper insight into sustaining life during crises.

## **Ethnography as Care and Co-Creation: Writing about Crimea's Cultural Life under Occupation**

Olena Sobolieva, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel

How can one write about Crimea's cultural life when access is limited and words can cause harm? This talk outlines ethical and methodological choices for working at a distance with Crimean Tatars — the Indigenous people of Crimea — under security constraints. I address three knots: collection, representation, and responsibility.

Occupation and war often halt research in practice: access is scarce, risks rise, and representation becomes ethically fraught. Silencing, erasure, and information blockages are not only conditions of violence but also its instruments. The challenge is to keep speaking about the community in ways that counter erasure without endangering people. Collection relies on secure channels, anonymised contacts, sustained correspondence, ongoing risk assessment, and prior agreement on thematic boundaries. Representation includes the right to silence, composite portraits, shifted time markers, minimal identifiers, and shared editing with a right to withdraw. Responsibility entails assessing publication consequences, delaying sensitive disclosures, maintaining encrypted archives, and arranging internal community review.

I propose ethnography as care and co-creation. Care is attentiveness to vulnerability, tempo, and silences. Co-creation is producing knowledge together: negotiating formulations, returning results, and supporting community initiatives. Such practice keeps space for Crimean Tatar cultural life without exposing surplus detail or creating additional risk.

The aim is to present ethnography as a practice of support that preserves a public space for fragile initiatives, builds relationships, strengthens networks of mutual aid, and safeguards the long-term security of people and data. Analysis operates within declared bounds of responsibility: it marks uncertainty, postpones sensitive publication, and transparently accounts for method and risk.



**Panel L: Saturday 11.00-12.30, Room F205**

## **Politics of Collapse: Layering Anthropology and Art as a Practice of Repair in Times of Erosion**

### **Convenors**

Stéphane Blumer, Sónia Vespeira de Almeida, Sónia Mota Ribeiro

As the ground itself begins to crumble — ecologically, politically, conceptually — collapse ceases to be a rhetorical metaphor and becomes a shared condition. In a context of planetary erosion, shrinking democratic spaces, and exhausted social imaginaries, anthropology and the arts converge not only as cross-fertilising disciplines but also as symptoms, sensors, and strategies of unravelling. This panel proposes a grounded understanding of decay as a creative and combinatory force, while avoiding both over-aestheticisation and exploitative strategies towards chaotic situations. It aims to approach collapse not as subject or object to scrutinise, but as generative terrain — an unruly space to inhabit, trace, and recompose.

A Politics of Collapse evokes a field of interventions populated with unstable roles and unfinished rituals: an infra-political choreography not meant to stabilise the ruins of too-late capitalism, but to surface what resists, persists, or composts it. A Politics of Collapse does not centre on decay itself but traverses it — cutting through violent façades of value extraction, cooptation of authenticity, and neoliberalisation of care and resilience.

Creative practices, especially those rooted in critical studies and grounded experimentations, have increasingly mirrored ethnographic modes of inquiry. Conversely, anthropology's turn to multimodality, and collaborative aesthetics reflects a shared need to address fraying worlds through more embodied, affective, and partial tools. Layering artistic mind-set with ethnographic skill-set is decisive to resist both the instrumentalisation of creativity as a solution-making device and the individualist or extractive logics that continue to haunt both academic, and cultural production. This layering enacts what could be called a 'transepistemic perspective' — one that goes beyond disciplinary traditions without subsuming one under the other, traversing dissonant fields of knowing and sensing.

Artists and anthropologists increasingly converge around a commitment to situated knowledge, where the politics of representation, embodiment, and intersubjective experiences are central. These fields attend to the empirical tension between opacity and visibility, and to the ethics of speaking with, rather than for others. In exploring how knowledge is produced and felt, they mobilise shared methods such as autoethnography, audiovisual, performance, archival and sensorial research, and speculative or



collaborative writing. These convergences reveal a focus on care, marginality, and proximity, and on the qualitative assemblage of the inquiry itself. What emerges is not only a set of overlapping tools, but a common sensitivity to the relational, the processual, and the more-than-visible.

We invite contributions that open conceptual and methodological fault lines across anthropology and the arts through engaging decay not as a sign of failure to be corrected, but as a condition that demands new forms of attention and intention — including illegality, activism, or curated abandonment. Whether established in audiovisual, performance, alternative writings, and other mediums, we welcome artists, anthropologists, and other contributors whose multimodal approaches to collapse — as heterotopic and speculative temporality — map how these intersect with broader processes of extraction, discrimination, and environmental injustice.

Rather than aiming for consensus or forward planning, this panel wishes to expose careful trouble-making — an ecology of gestures, encounters, and disruptions — and look for contributions that rethink transformation not through idealised solutions but through practices embedded in attention to uncertainty, vulnerability, and complexity. We particularly seek hybrid forms of research grounded in long-term collaboration, field-based materialities, and tensions between knowing, making, and unmaking.

Our panel departs from the following inquiries:

- How (do) artist and ethnographic practices intertwine when interdependencies — material, symbolic, or interspecies — collapse?
- What happens when multisensory, situated experiences of collapse take precedence over abstract representation and discourses?
- How (can) transepistemic approaches challenge the anesthetisation of chaos and the technocratic management of care?
- How (can) a Politics of Collapse reframe dominant governance models of accountability and repair in public and private life?
- To what extent can we normalise multimodal methods in anthropology and, conversely, cultivate more ethnographically grounded practices in artistic research — those capable of deepening our human, more-than-human, and material attachments to collapse?



## Papers:

### **Running within the Ruins: Divergent Rhythms in a Disabled World**

Ana Ferreira Santos ([ritasantos2000@hotmail.com](mailto:ritasantos2000@hotmail.com)), ISCTE-IUL - CRIA

This paper explores how divergent bodyabilities generate alternative ways of inhabiting collapse—not as a metaphor, but as an experience lived through the body. Divergent bodyability, developed in my doctoral research, describes how, in the face of environmental and social collapse, new and urgent ways of navigating space emerge through embodied improvisation. Following on Arseli Dokumacı's idea that people with disabilities experience a "shrinkage" of their environment, I approach collapse not as a dramatic event but as a continuous material condition of friction, restriction, and negotiation.

As a case study, I present *Bodies of Experience*, a collaborative installation developed with Paula—an amputee woman and founder of ANAMP (Associação Nacional de Amputados). The project began with a simple desire: to run again. Through a series of exercises and embodied experiments, Paula attuned to the rhythms shaping her relationship with her prosthesis. What she had previously experienced as collapse became, through these interactions, a poetic source of knowledge. Her body did not need to run faster or farther—only to affirm the freedom of running in whatever form was possible.

Rather than offering solutions or romanticized aesthetics, this paper proposes a grounded, realist view of embodied collapse. It reflects on how crip practices and artistic collaborations expose the material constraints of neoliberal disablement while revealing alternative modes of existence. It asks: how can ethnographic and artistic practices rooted in bodily experiences can help to understand systems or environments that are in imminent collapse?

- To have access to the project please visit: <https://anasantos.eu/>

Dokumacı, Arseli (2023). *Activist Affordances: How Disabled People Improvise More Livable Worlds*. Duke University Press.

### **An Epistemology of Landscape as Lens and as a Tool**

Roberto Cabot ([robertocabot@gmail.com](mailto:robertocabot@gmail.com)), Associated researcher EHESS/CNRS LACI-LAP

The concept of landscape as an anthropological object of study allows to think human society and its political evolution in a larger frame, not putting humanity at the center of all existent, but seeing it as one element among others that form the landscape. Artistic



observation and anthropological analysis bring up a decolonial and non-specicist concept of landscape, that offers a clear vision of erosion and tools to think repair.

### **Undisciplined Practices: Art, Environment and Anthropology**

Sónia Vespeira de Almeida, ([sonia.almeida@fcsch.unl.pt](mailto:sonia.almeida@fcsch.unl.pt)), CRIA NOVA FCSH /IN2PAST  
Sónia Mota Ribeiro, ([soniamotaribeiro@gmail.com](mailto:soniamotaribeiro@gmail.com)), CRIA NOVA FCSH /IN2PAST

This paper discusses how artistic practices have addressed contemporary environmental issues. Understanding these practices, especially the visual arts, as analytical devices for capturing the world, we question how artists produce knowledge within the framework of an epistemological shift in contemporary art, steered by interdisciplinarity. Returning to the question that permeates Nicolas Bourriaud's latest book (2021): 'À l'heure de l'Anthropocène, quell pourrait être le role de l'art?' The importance of art and anthropology in attending to the issues of the Anthropocene is unquestionable, but more than acknowledging their contributions, we seek to identify how they cross-pollinate in the construction of undisciplined knowledge. Indeed, we can uphold they have contributed in eloquent and dissipate ways to the renewing of thought and action on climate collapse, seeking to undermine hegemonic and normative views of the contemporary. These creative journeys thus generate polyarchic spaces of experimentation to address the range of issues that are aggregated within and adjacent to the Anthropocene, problematizing their interconnections and intra-actions (Davis, Turpin 2015). The fields of art and anthropology remain open, and it is important to continue thinking about what we want to take from them.

### **Scenes and Stances within Art (Crumbling) Worlds**

Stéphane Blumer ([stephane.blumer@ehess.fr](mailto:stephane.blumer@ehess.fr)), Associated Researcher CICS.NOVA  
University of Lisbon & EHESS-LAP, Paris.

This presentation questions how cultural workers might respond to eco-social breakdowns without perpetuating extraction and inequalities. It is based on a series of workshops and teachings in artistic studies and anthropology conducted in Portugal and Italy. Participants—comprising designers, artists, musicians, architects, curators—negotiated the frictions between systemic thinking and situated practices, blending critique with creativity through group debate, manifesto-writing and experimental fieldwork. The sessions were built into laboratories where fiction, performance, and visual knowledge interweaved with ethnographic attention to specific context.

From these encounters, a series of provisional positions toward collapse took shape. Some approached it romantically, evoking ruins, fragility, and a certain melancholy of endings. Others fetishised apocalyptic transformation, treating breakdown as revolutionary openings. More dissected collapse as a political narrative—constructed,



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instrumentalised, and in need of counter-actions. Finally, there were those who traced its material drivers in extractivism and inequality, insisting on repair and alternative models of living.

These are not fixed categories, but overlapping and intersecting stances exposing relevant contradictions, which sometimes invert each other. They mark the ways artists inhabit collapse: not as a metaphor, but as a terrain of practices. This paper reflects on how collapse is sensed, staged, refused, or reimagined in creative research. What emerges is less a conclusion than a repertoire of gestures—ranging from refusal and opacity to illegality and ambiguity—that unsettle dominant narratives of resilience and open space for other futures.



**Panel M: Thursday 16.00-17.30, Room E230**

## **Erosion of the Social Contract? Privatising, Invisibilising and Limiting Care in the Neoliberal State**

### **Convenors:**

Helena Hof, Anna Wyss

One of the core promises of the state is to take care of its inhabitants. Across many countries, we observe however a growing tendency of the state to withdraw from its responsibility to ensure access to basic infrastructures of care, such as health, social services, and the concomitant education and training related to it. In this panel, we explore whether what we observe is an erosion of the social contract and how this takes shape. We aim to identify key mechanisms that contribute to and enable the retreat of state responsibility for caring for its residents, including: (a) legal precarisation, such as the increasing insecurity of residence statuses that push individuals into conditions of temporariness and instability, while facilitating both exploitation and exclusion from social welfare; (b) gendered and racialised ascriptions of undeservingness, which serve to legitimise the precarious conditions many are subjected to; and (c) the neoliberal restructuring of care infrastructures, which involves the delegation of care responsibilities to private actors – often accompanied by invisibilisation, lack of oversight regarding labour rights, and increased potential for exploitation.

Drawing on different studies, this panel reveals how these mechanisms manifest in the everyday across different country contexts and in different care sectors. For instance, transnational labour markets are one central way of outsourcing and rendering invisible care, particularly via intermediary agencies and split family households. The lack of a specialised labour force – not only in the medical field but also in construction and other physical and technological infrastructures necessary for well-being and functioning services – has led to a growing demand for migrants with specific skills. These workers are often subject to temporary legal statuses that make long-term planning and access to secure livelihoods in their country of residence increasingly difficult, thereby rendering both their own lives and the provision of care increasingly precarious. At the same time, access to state care in the sense of social security is becoming increasingly conditional, limited to those deemed deserving – once again reflecting a neoliberal logic that excludes individuals from the social contract who are considered unprofitable. Those deemed undeserving are increasingly excluded from care



infrastructures and this panel seeks to examine the concrete processes through which such exclusion is enacted and legitimised. In particular, we are interested in how ascriptions of undeservingness lead to denying certain groups access to care infrastructures, and how such denial is shaped by racialisation, migrantisation, as well as classed and gendered assumptions – thereby reinforcing structural inequalities within welfare regimes.

Potential panel presenters are encouraged to submit original research that addresses the following areas of interest, which include but are not limited to:

- How do new and emerging narratives surrounding care and maintenance shape meanings of responsibility, rights, and deservingness, as well as the boundaries for inclusion in states characterised by demographic ageing and highly differentiated citizenship policies?
- How have digitalisation, flexibilisation, and changing labour market demands recalibrated care arrangements, the provision of care facilities and services, and potentially caused new care relationships between the state and public and private sector stakeholders?
- How do regulatory frameworks, including laws and public investments in care services, influence lay people's expectations and aspirations regarding the social contract? How do interpretations of these regulations and ensuing social, political, and economic practices differ among different minority groups, especially those at risk of marginalisation like receivers of social welfare, migrants with a temporary legal status, or those under precarious working conditions or in sectors at risk of automation?
- How do social categories of difference such as race, legal status, gender, age, or class unequally affect people's room of manoeuvre when in need of care?
- And how does access to care differ across countries that are shaped by different institutional care arrangements and norms?

## Papers:

### **Intergenerational Care Infrastructures between Innovation and Bureaucratic Constraint: Case Studies from Japan and Switzerland**

Samira Hüsler ([samirasalome.huesler@ost.ch](mailto:samirasalome.huesler@ost.ch)), Research Associate, Institute for Ageing Research, Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences; PhD Candidate in Japanese Studies, University of Zurich

Alternative models of care are increasingly being explored by welfare states in response to demographic ageing. This paper examines intergenerational care institutions – specifically nursing homes that integrate childcare facilities – in Switzerland and Japan.



While both countries are shaped by ageing populations, they differ significantly in their welfare state traditions and institutional frameworks.

Based on more than 100 qualitative interviews and extended ethnographic fieldwork in Japan and Switzerland, this research explores, among other aspects, how these hybrid institutions emerge, what structural barriers they face, and how questions of state recognition, funding, and regulation shape their trajectories.

Intergenerational models of care, although integrated into broader care systems, often remain precarious. Operating mostly within the private sector, they lack formal institutional anchoring and are frequently subject to bureaucratic hurdles. Their ambiguous status highlights the difficulty of reimagining care infrastructures within rigid, path-dependent welfare regimes. Despite differing institutional logics, both Japan and Switzerland tend to structurally constrain the implementation of innovative care practices, revealing the limitations of prevailing social contracts around care.

These findings highlight how state withdrawal from infrastructural responsibility does not only manifest through exclusion and exploitation, but also through the non-recognition and marginalization of alternative care models. By focusing on the bureaucratic and institutional obstacles faced by intergenerational care initiatives, the paper contributes to broader debates on how welfare states renegotiate responsibility, deservingness, and inclusion in times of socio-demographic transformation.

### **Governing Vulnerability through Ambivalence: Support Measures for Migrant Domestic Workers in and Beyond Crises**

Christina Mittmasser, Chimienti Milena, Gauttier Emma, Carbajal Myrian  
([christina.mittmasser@hesge.ch](mailto:christina.mittmasser@hesge.ch)), HES-SO University of Applied Sciences and Arts  
Western Switzerland, School of Social Work Geneva

As dual-income households become the norm and welfare provision retrenches, many individuals and families struggle to reconcile paid employment with caregiving responsibilities. Increasingly, they outsource domestic care work— such as cleaning, childminding, and elder care. This labour is highly feminised and racialised, and often performed by migrant women, some without legal residence rights. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed their vulnerabilities with particular intensity. This presentation examines how ambivalence shapes social policies for migrant domestic workers in Switzerland, focusing on support measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our analysis draws on 56 interviews with policymakers and civil society actors, and 91 interviews with domestic workers, both with and without legal status, across four cantons. We identify three key dimensions of ambivalence: the conditionality of support, its short-term nature, and the risks and uncertainties entailed. We argue that this ambivalence is not unique to the pandemic but reflects a broader pattern of governance. Thereby, the vulnerability of domestic workers is limited yet sustained, rendering them a reliable workforce within the



domestic care sector. Our study contributes to an intersectional understanding of welfare governance and its role in reproducing social inequalities in an ongoing care crisis.

### **Invisible Welfare, Visible Labour: Negotiating Livelihood, Care, and Aspiration in China's WeChat E-commerce**

Haichao Wang ([289800653@qq.com](mailto:289800653@qq.com)), University College London, UK

This paper explores how Chinese low-income women engaged in WeChat-based social e-commerce negotiate livelihood, care, and aspiration under pressures of neoliberal restructuring. Based on years of ethnographic fieldwork with women primarily involved in selling skincare products, household goods, and maternity-related commodities that are themselves deeply gendered--I argue that social e-commerce functions less as a domain of digital empowerment than as an infrastructure through which welfare-like provisions are privatised, rendered invisible, and marked by gender.

The agents--often college students, young mothers, and low-income workers--are expected to undertake extensive unpaid labour: nightly training sessions, "self-use" demonstrations of products, and the disciplined curation of their "WeChat Moments" feeds. These practices operate as substitutes for institutional support, redistributing pedagogical, affective, and health-related responsibilities onto informal women sales teams. Central to this process are the discourse of *suzhi* (human quality) and the ideology of "learning and diligence" prevalent in contemporary China. Within this political-moral framework, failure is frequently attributed to personal laziness or lack of competence. Such responsabilisation legitimises that withdrawal of wider social protection, reframing structural inequalities as individual shortcomings.

Meanwhile, the aesthetic, emotional, and pedagogical labour that sustains these networks is naturalised as "self-improvement" and rendered invisible in public narratives. IT corporate interventions and volatility of visibility algorithms further undermine women's livelihoods, while obliging them to engage in further unpaid upskilling to adapt.

This ethnography illustrates how the deserving/undeserving divide, the delegation of care to informal actors, and the invisibilisation of reproductive labour intersect in the everyday struggles of Chinese women under digital capitalism.

### **Transnationalizing the Social Contract through 'Global Nursing'?**

Helena Hof ([helena.hof@uzh.ch](mailto:helena.hof@uzh.ch)), Melanie Jäger ([melanie.jaeger@uzh.ch](mailto:melanie.jaeger@uzh.ch)), University of Zurich

The demographic deficit has put liberal democracies around the world at risk of failing to uphold the social contract. While globalization, digitalization, and automatization have changed fundamental processes of work, certain occupational sectors have proven to be indispensable. Among these, nursing, at the intersection of care and health, is among



those with the most significant labor shortages globally. Furthermore, the scale and speed of demographic aging in industrialized countries are striking, indicating increasingly urgent labor demands. This study examines the neoliberal restructuring of care infrastructures at the example of what the authors term 'global nursing'. Care responsibilities are increasingly delegated to private actors, which entails an increasingly transnational recruitment process of nurses. The presentation builds on an ongoing qualitative interview study with migrant nurses in Switzerland. Data from in-depth interviews with foreign nurses as well as one expert interview with a department head of a migrant-employing medical institution demonstrate that foreign nurses leave poor working conditions in their (mostly European) home countries and value the high standards and supposedly more ethical working conditions of their Swiss medical workplaces. However, the narratives also reveal how attractive wages lure nurses to Switzerland, which warrants unpacking the transnational provision and distribution of care. Foreign nurses do not only perform care work but also come with expectations such as ethical workplaces and being accepted in a new home country. Thereby they stake claims to being both providers of care – as nurses – and receivers, as residents with rights to be cared for by the state. As such, the globally operating care regime unsettles the meaning of a (traditionally domestic) social contract.

### **Who Cares about those Who Care? Essential Workers and Slow Infrastructural Violence**

Sarah Schilliger ([sschilliger@ethz.ch](mailto:sschilliger@ethz.ch)), ETH Zürich

Carole Ammann ([carole.ammann@unilu.ch](mailto:carole.ammann@unilu.ch)), Universität Luzern

In this paper, we interrogate the erosion of the social contract through the experiences of urban essential workers in Zurich, Switzerland. We examine how neoliberal restructuring and intersecting marginalisations make care work invisible and undervalued. Building on 37 qualitative (walking) interviews with non-healthcare urban essential workers—cleaners, shop assistants, childcare staff, and public transport drivers—the research conceptualises their labour as a living social infrastructure fundamental to the functioning and resilience of urban life. Yet, such infrastructural labour is persistently subjected to "slow infrastructural violence": ordinary processes that cumulate in harm and exclusion.

Drawing from our empirical analysis of essential workers' narratives, we develop a typology of four interlinked dimensions of "slow infrastructural violence": (1) invisibility and devaluation; (2) embodied physical and mental strain; (3) economic precarity linked to low wages and instability; and (4) exclusion from essential urban infrastructures such as affordable housing and childcare. This framework reveals how neoliberal governance withdraws public provision, shifting care responsibilities onto individuals and families.



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Essential workers, often migrants and women, thus sustain the city while being denied access to the very infrastructures of care that guarantee their social reproduction. The paper argues that recognising these workers as lively infrastructures—and addressing their exclusion from public care infrastructures—is crucial for reimagining justice and sustainability in “caring cities.” By exposing slow infrastructural violence as a structuring feature of everyday urban life, the analysis enriches debates on the lived effects of the retreating welfare state and articulates an urgent need to place care at the heart of urban policy and planning.



## Panel N: Saturday 11.00-12.30, Room F207

# Humanitarian Care Beyond Institutions

### Convenors:

Gulzhan Begeyeva, Zarina Urmanbetova, Pol Llopart Olivella

This panel seeks to explore how care is mobilized, enacted, and imagined beyond formal institutions across various socioeconomic and political contexts. We are particularly interested in forms of support, solidarity, and redistribution that emerge at the grassroots level outside the framework of institutionalized humanitarian aid, NGOs, or state welfare systems. We take up the Annual Meeting's themes of care, maintenance, and decay to ask: How do people craft meaningful and resilient systems of humanitarian care amid the erosion, dysfunction, or delegitimation of formal infrastructures? How does the concept of care transform when enacted in response to perceived humanitarian needs? How is such care translated into action through grassroots imaginaries, local traditions, and everyday social solidarities? How does the interplay between care and humanitarianism unsettle fixed definitions and open new analytical pathways?

In humanitarian studies, anthropologists have explored the emergence of the "human as an embodied object of care" (Li 2021), while humanitarian aid is often recognised "an ethos, a cluster of sentiments, a set of laws, a moral imperative to intervene, and a form of government" (Ticktin 2014). Highlighting the "unintended consequences of humanitarianism", Miriam Ticktin and other scholars have advanced a critique of humanitarianism, arguing that rather than alleviating structures of inequality, such practices often reinforce dependency and domination (Ticktin 2014). In response to such recognition of the limitations of institutional humanitarianism and the need to explore the alternative modalities of care, Čarna Brković (2017) proposed to pay attention to the historical diversity of humanitarianism through what she terms "vernacular humanitarianism". The term is conceived as an exploratory and open-ended concept able "to capture under the same conceptual umbrella the diverse forms of helping that combine local notions of gift, duty, and responsibility with a universalizing claim to aid humanity" (Brković 2020).

Within such practices, recent studies have further highlighted the inherent ambiguities and tensions stemming from their hybrid nature. Till Mostowlansky (2020), for instance, suggests that vernacular humanitarians often operate in spaces that defy neat categorization navigating between blurred boundaries of institutional and informal modes of humanitarian aid. As he puts it, they "are never fully integrated, and yet never fully disconnected from the humanitarian-development complex" (Mostowlansky 2022). Darryl



Li (2021) similarly demonstrates how local acts of care often often transgress the categories of development, humanitarianism, and charity, while Ticktin (2014) underscores how these forms of humanitarianism evolve as “morphing” projects enacting various practices, temporalities and types of resources.

Building on this scholarship and foregrounding the multifaceted nature of humanitarian care from below, this panel invites papers that examine how such care practices are grounded in local values, shaped by situated epistemologies, and animated by historically developed visions of social and moral order. Rather than positioning such practices against the background of formal institutions, we seek to critically engage with entanglements between different modes of care. We welcome papers that explore various aspects of care practices at the intersection of kinship, faith, neighborhood ties, historical imaginaries, and ethical traditions. Together, we hope to spark a conversation that further challenges the binary between institutional and vernacular forms of humanitarian aid and reconsiders what humanitarian care means in times of institutional decay and crisis.

## Papers:

### **Refugee-led Organisations in Uganda: Solidarities of Care Along Ahared Vulnerabilities**

Sophie Nakueira ([nakueirasophie@gmail.com](mailto:nakueirasophie@gmail.com)), FLIA, London School of Economics

Uganda, currently hosts more than 1,900,000 million refugees in Africa and is hailed as a model country because of its generous refugee policies. However, due to its poorly resourced humanitarian aid system and ever-increasing number of refugees because of its proximity to countries in conflict, Uganda's humanitarian system has largely failed to provide adequate protection to refugees. Its humanitarian system largely relies on donor funding and aid assistance which is implemented by the UNHCR, international government organisations and the government is provided to the 'most vulnerable' refugees. Over the years, aid funding had dwindled due to allegations of aid fraud and most recently due to USAID funding cuts under the Trump administration. This paper aims to empirically examine how refugees mobilise and enact care within a system that largely excludes them from western-centric forms of care that use pre-determined universal categories of vulnerability. How do solidarities of care emerge in contexts where refugees hail from different nations, ethnic groups and socioeconomic status? Using the example of refugee-led organisations, the paper will show how this emerges in a refugee settlement in Uganda. It will show how refugee-led organisations, enact, contest and mobilise diverse forms of care and how this complicates conventional understandings of who should provide humanitarian care, definitions of legitimacy and who counts as vulnerable, and therefore deserving of care. The paper will problematise the contestations that arise when values that shape refugee-led organisations and are situated in cultural



codes such as 'Ubuntu' conflict with western-centric institutional values of care. Particularly, it will show how concepts of kinship and nationhood are unsettled by solidarities that emerge from shared vulnerabilities in a very diverse refugee settlement.

### **Interplay of Faith, Medicine, and Society: A Reflection on the Baptist Mission Medical Services and Community Transformation in Yorubaland, 1907–1986**

Olufemi Ogunbode ([otogunbode@lautech.edu.ng](mailto:otogunbode@lautech.edu.ng)), Ladoko Akintola University of Technology Ogbomoso

This study explores the Baptist Mission Medical Services in Yorubaland from 1907 to 1986, focusing on the intersection of faith, medicine, and social change. Initiated by Dr. and Mrs. George and Lydia Green, the Baptist Medical Centre in Ogbomoso was the first facility to integrate Western medical practices with Christian evangelism in Yorubaland and Nigeria. This dual mission challenged indigenous Yoruba religious and healing practices, creating tensions and reshaping social attitudes towards health. The research aims to trace the historical development of the medical services, examine how healthcare and evangelism influenced Yoruba religious and social life, evaluate the impact on indigenous healing traditions, and assess contributions to education, public health, and community transformation during colonial and post-colonial periods. Employing a qualitative historical approach, the study utilizes primary sources such as missionary archives, hospital records, and oral interviews alongside secondary literature. The research sheds light on the role of faith-based medical missions as agents of societal transformation, revealing their lasting influence on healthcare, religious practice, and cultural identity in Nigeria. The findings aim to contribute to broader scholarship on faith-based medical missions in Africa, highlighting their complex role in transforming healthcare delivery and cultural identities in Yorubaland. This study deepens understanding of how the Baptist Mission historically shaped both medical and spiritual landscapes in the region.

### **Later Life Humanitarianism and the Maintenance of Rural Water Infrastructures in Tajikistan**

Swetlana Torno ([torno@mmg.mpg.de](mailto:torno@mmg.mpg.de)), Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Research on later life in different global settings demonstrated how older people invest their available time resources to support their communities, for instance, by volunteering in formal and grassroots local charities, maintaining community gardens, or caring for frail and young family members when institutional facilities fall short. This paper sheds light on the role senior citizens of the ex-Soviet Central Asian state of Tajikistan play in maintaining vital local infrastructures in the context of the erosion of public facilities and outsourcing of former state responsibilities to local communities, especially in remote



areas. More specifically, it centers on the story of Muzaffar, a 69 years old resident of a village in Western Tajikistan, who used to work in the public water quality control during the Soviet period and today administers the public water supply and respective fees collection in his village. When asked about the nature of his work, Muzaffar presented it as charity and a responsibility for which he does not get paid. His statement points towards a tension between local understandings of state responsibilities and the state's delegation of infrastructural work to individual citizens, ultimately transforming communal care-work into humanitarian acts. Drawing on Muzaffar's and other cases, I will discuss how my interlocutors variously mobilized moral orders such as Islamic charity and individual responsibility to situate their care-work and highlight the central roles Tajik senior citizens play in maintaining local infrastructures in the context of mass labour migration of the young. This paper builds on 16 months of ethnographic research in rural and urban Tajikistan, with the latest fieldwork conducted between 2022 and 2024 and focusing on the transformations of ageing driven by internal and transnational labour migration of younger generations.

### **Imagination Across Cultures: Hypno-Imaginative Techniques as Knowledge Transfer for Care and Peacebuilding**

Annick Python and Marta Hegyaljai ([association@hypnosehumanitaire.com](mailto:association@hypnosehumanitaire.com)), Association Hypnose Humanitaire

This paper explores how neuroscientific knowledge on stress, trauma, and emotion regulation can be translated into culturally sensitive practices of care in post-conflict contexts. Drawing on fieldwork in South Kivu (DRC) and training initiatives in Switzerland, we examine how hypno-imaginative techniques—guided imagery, self-hypnosis, and narrative metaphors—serve as vehicles for knowledge transfer across cultural boundaries. Grounded in neuroscientific findings on how the brain processes fear, memory, and stress, these methods highlight the power of imagination and metaphor as universally accessible yet locally adaptable tools. Through participatory workshops and collaborative trainings, we show how peer groups integrate these techniques into their own cultural frameworks of healing, often reviving and reaffirming pre-existing strategies for stress relief, resilience, and social cohesion.

We argue that imagination operates as a cross-cultural bridge: while grounded in neuropsychological mechanisms, it finds expression in culturally specific metaphors, stories, and rituals. In this sense, hypno-imaginative techniques do not replace local concepts of care but create dialogical spaces where biomedical knowledge and indigenous practices co-construct pathways of resilience.

By situating this work within anthropological debates on knowledge transfer, idioms of distress, and the politics of care, the paper positions imagination as both a scientific



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insight and a cultural practice, enabling communities to manage trauma and envision futures of peace and repair.

Keywords: knowledge transfer; imagination; neuroscience; idioms of distress; cultural translation; resilience; care; peacebuilding.



## Panel O: Saturday 11.00-12.30, Room E230

# Unexpected Acts of Care

### Convenors:

Michelle von Dach

This panel explores the complexities of care by examining actions and practices that may appear ethically dubious or contradictory to conventional understandings of care and therefore unexpected. Unexpectedness here refers to those practices that defy normative expectations, emerging in the shadows of decay or ruination, or condition of profound vulnerability. It reveals the limits of existing ethical and institutional frameworks, for example, acts that seem like abandonment or harm may, in their situated logic, be the only viable form of care. It invites attention to the otherwise overlooked, ethically uneasy, or socially unintelligible practices that challenge dominant frameworks of what care looks like, who performs it, and for whom. We delve into instances where care manifests in unexpected ways, such as acts that would have never happened in other conditions, that seem to risk harm or reinforce inequalities. By analyzing these unconventional practices, the focus is on highlighting the often paradoxical side of care. Some of these practices can themselves unexpectedly and unintentionally result in decay and rupture. Acts carried out with the intention to care, whether institutional, interpersonal, or improvised, can reproduce harm or consolidate asymmetries. In these cases, care does not merely defy normative expectations but complicates the very idea of care as inherently benevolent or reparative.

This panel, therefore, invites contributions that reflect on care as a terrain of tension and contradiction, where the boundaries between healing and harming, support and control, preservation and disintegration are continually negotiated. By focusing on care's ambivalent manifestations, the aim is to unsettle idealized accounts and foreground its entanglement with broader structures of power, precarity, and transformation.

The papers should investigate the moral logic underlying these unexpected acts of care through ethnographic case studies. The focus extends beyond the act itself to encompass the dynamic between caregiver and care recipient, even exploring human-non-human or human-animal interactions. Unexpectedness of care emerges along three interconnected dimensions.

### Affects Around Care Acts:

Care is often framed as a benevolent and nurturing activity, associated with compassion, empathy, and the fulfillment of needs. However, anthropological research reveals that



care can take on unexpected forms, challenging our preconceived notions and raising critical questions about its ethical dimensions (Mattingly & McKearney). Acts of care are not always gentle or nurturing; they may be entangled with violence, coercion, or the forging of unthinkable alliances. Practices that might appear neglectful or even harmful from one perspective can be understood as care by those involved, revealing the complex interplay between care, power, and morality. This affective ambiguity unsettles the classical view of care as inherently positive and highlights its contradictory and sometimes ethically uneasy dimensions.

#### Situations of Vulnerability and Decay:

In moments of acute crisis, care may be mobilized by unexpected actors or in extraordinary ways. The urgency of dramatic situations—environmental disaster, forced displacement, or structural breakdown—can disrupt established routines, prompting improvised or spontaneous acts that defy institutional or societal expectations. In situations of hardship—whether material, social, economic, or environmental—acts of care may emerge in surprising and unconventional ways. New practices and gestures of care take shape in response to environmental degradation, forced displacement, structural precarity and uncertainty, marginalization, or the anticipation of future crisis (Biehl and Eskerod 2005). We welcome contributions that investigate care as a situated and collective response to adversity, and that foreground the agency and creativity of individuals and communities navigating extraordinary conditions.

#### Type of Relation:

Care is often assumed to occur within human relationships, yet it can arise in surprising relational configurations. Acts of care may unfold between humans, but also extend toward environments, natural ecologies, and non-human beings (The La Bellasca 2017). These more-than-human and cross-boundary connections challenge dominant assumptions about who can give or receive care and expand our understanding of care's scope.

The panel seeks to highlight practices that are improvised, fragile, and yet deeply meaningful. Whether arising from environmental collapse, displacement, structural precarity, or the anticipation of such situations, these unexpected practices of care invite us to rethink resilience and relationality from the ground up. We are interested in examining acts that might be perceived as neglectful, coercive, or even harmful, yet are understood by those involved as expressions of care. These practices often involve different and contradictory affects, encompassing both compassion and control, empathy and exploitation, highlighting the complex interplay between care, power, and morality. Such practices may include not only material or emotional support but also moments of sudden recognition, unexpected solidarities, and the forging of unlikely friendships or alliances—forms of relational care that arise in the interstices of rupture and uncertainty.



Attending to these entangled relations allows us to consider how adverse conditions give rise to practices of care that transcend conventional human-centric frameworks. Ultimately, this panel aims to illuminate how care operates not only as a moral or affective disposition, but also as a situated mode of world-making that becomes especially salient in moments of rupture. We welcome ethnographic and theoretical contributions that engage with care as a creative, relational, and often unexpected practice in the face of uncertainty.

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## Papers:

### **Caring for Formerly Absent Neighbors: The European Bison “Comeback”**

Jean Bacchetta ([jean.bacchetta@unine.ch](mailto:jean.bacchetta@unine.ch)), Institut d'Ethnologie, Université de Neuchâtel

Rewilding activities in Europe have been focusing on the reintroduction of so-called “keystone species” to territories where they have been absent for centuries. Most notably, the European bison has been part of a continental-scale initiative to repopulate its former grazing grounds, from Portugal to Siberia, with more intensity in the last thirty years. As much as re-establishing the population of an almost lost species, rewilders and conservationists argue for multiple ecological and social benefits that may come along with its presence in ecosystems.

In this article, I will question what status bison are given in different countries across Europe, focusing especially on fieldwork in Switzerland, Denmark, Spain and Romania. Through ethnographic observation and interviews with communities actively involved in bison conservation and reintroduction, I ask how we can share space and resources with this “megafauna” in landscapes that are overly anthropogenic. What conflicts and problematics emerge when these initiatives are undertaken? What other forms of interaction are born from these new interspecies “entanglements” (Tsing 2017)?

Fieldwork has shown that in some cases, these interactions can be defined as a form of “more-than-human commoning” (Bresnihan 2016) that happens through interactions of care (Nieto-Romero et al. 2023). These new care-intensive relationships tend to blur the distinction between wild and domestic, posing ethical questions of intervention and emotional involvement from communities closely involved with projects.

Can we imagine a future where bison are part of commons and share resources and space with human communities? What new perspectives on interspecies care relations can we learn from bison conservation projects and how can we make these projects beneficial to human as well as non-human communities?

### **High-Tech Dairy Care: Vietnamese Entanglements of (More-than) Human Care Through Technology and Beyond**

Nadja Kempter ([nadja.kempter@uzh.ch](mailto:nadja.kempter@uzh.ch)), University of Zurich

In Switzerland, romanticized notions of dairy farmers knowing their cows by name and maintaining a personal connection to the animals have a long history and strong symbolic significance. Large-scale industrial dairying is still absent from Swiss Dairy production, where small-scale farming and alpine dairy production are still a core of dairy and its image in Switzerland. This is often put in stark contrast to large-scale and industrial dairy production, which is on a steep rise in countries such as Vietnam.



In Vietnam, care in dairy production is connecting different actors and beings and is renegotiated through newly established technologies on large-scale dairy farms. This paper explores the changing dynamics of human and more-than-human care in a mountainous village in the country's north. Caring for one's animals, caring for one's family, and the state's duty to care for Vietnamese farmers – which is firmly rooted in the country's communist history and political system – are all entangled with new emerging forms of high-tech farming. While maximizing profit on large-scale production and showcasing modern methods of milk production are core goals I observed on an industrial farm, I argue that the perception of high-technology-based care in dairy as detrimental and further exacerbating exploitative capitalist livestock systems must be examined more critically. How do consumers and farmers in Vietnam perceive good dairy care, and for whom? I will explore the question of what it means to care in Vietnam's dairy production, who cares for whom or what, and how technology is influencing the understanding of care in Vietnam's small-scale and large-scale dairy production.

### **Care Through Cultivation: Unexpected Acts of Forest Care**

Esther Leemann ([esther.leemann@uzh.ch](mailto:esther.leemann@uzh.ch)), University of Zurich

The paper argues that Bunong swidden cultivation in northeastern Cambodia embodies unexpected, uneasy forms of care for forests—practices repeatedly misunderstood and marginalized by dominant conservation and development frameworks. The Bunong are often stereotyped as “Caretakers of the Forest,” celebrated for spirit forest conservation and resource collection, yet their tree felling for swidden agriculture—a key part of their identity—is dismissed. Building on Aeberli (2021), I contend that for indigenous swidden cultivators “taking care” is inseparable from agricultural activity; felling trees and cultivating land are acts of care, rooted in reciprocal relationships with land, spirits, ancestors, and community.

Integrating care theory (Stevenson, Tronto, Aeberli), own ethnographic research, and foundational swidden scholarship (Tsing, Dove, Conklin), the paper reconceptualizes forest care through indigenous ontologies and relationality. Drawing on Stevenson’s distinction between anonymous (biopolitical) and relational care, I analyze why practices of swidden are so often misrecognized or erased by external actors, who reduce care to statistical forest cover and miss the relational, context-specific care embedded in such cultivation. The proposed framework moves beyond binary thinking that opposes human presence to conservation, advocating for the recognition of indigenous forms of environmental care as legitimate, constitutive of alternative ways of knowing and being-in-relation with forests.

The empirical core examines how elder and younger Bunong in Mondulkiri reinterpret cultivation as care for land, forest, community, spirits, and ancestors amid changing landscapes, land loss, and new opportunities. Ultimately, swidden cultivation is not a



contradiction but a core expression of care, demanding a shift away from simplistic conservation paradigms toward a concept of forest not as wilderness, but as a living archive of human activity, memory, and care.

## **When Care Hurts: Community Building and Burden of Care in Coliving Community**

Phuong Nguyen ([phuong.nguyen@isek.uzh.ch](mailto:phuong.nguyen@isek.uzh.ch)), University of Zurich

When is it not okay to care for members of your community? In many communal contexts, solidarity is fostered through vulnerability, storytelling, and the sharing of intimate lives. In my research in a coliving community in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, these practices were cultivated as forms of care – rituals meant to generate closeness and belonging. Yet, vulnerability and emotional openness could just as easily be turned into disadvantages, unsettling rather than sustaining relationships. Acts of “caring” through narrative created hierarchies of suffering, compelled confessions, and produced exclusionary dynamics when individuals resisted or failed to perform vulnerability in expected ways.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in coliving – a housing model promoted by real estate startups, where small private units are combined with expansive communal spaces – I explore how residents were both encouraged and subtly coerced to “live in community”, through community events as well as the shared use of space. Yet what appeared as benevolent practices often generated violence. In one striking instance, withholding information in the name of care for one resident imposed heavy emotional burdens on another, showing how protection for some could translate into harm for others.

By tracing how care blurred the line between healing and harm, this paper contributes to broader discussions of unexpected and ethically uneasy practices of care. It highlights how, in conditions of precarity and the pursuit of belonging, care emerges as a terrain of contradiction: simultaneously supportive and destructive, reparative and violent.

## **‘I Want to Keep it Like my Home’. Hagia Sophia and the Politics of Care and Exhaustion**

Violante Torre ([violante.torre@unil.ch](mailto:violante.torre@unil.ch)), University of Lausanne

This paper examines the entanglements of care and exhaustion in the life of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul. Since its reconversion from museum to mosque in 2020, the building has been celebrated as a symbol of coexistence and used as a nationalist emblem. Yet its daily functioning depends not on institutions but on the invisibilised practices of everyday actors. Drawing on ethnography with cleaners and guides, I read these routines as a politics of exhaustion that sustains the monument while wearing down the bodies that keep it (Sultana 2020; Mutluer 2019). Care here is ambiguous and ambivalent. Acts such



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as carrying Qur'ans, resetting barriers, mending carpets, or feeding cats make the building a 'matter of care' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), but one saturated with fatigue and precarity. They generate attachment, yet territorialise the monument against visitors, as workers claim authority, draw insider lines, and govern atmospheres. Rather than restorative, these acts disclose a politics of exhaustion. Workers call it 'home', yet also describe the toll of chemicals, abuse, and rhythms. Guides cultivate connection with visitors, yet also face depletion under questioning, gendered hierarchies, and demands to embody mediation and disposable service. Care becomes paradoxical: it sustains the monument while also producing inequality, vulnerability, and exhaustion. I frame care as obligation and dependency (Weil 2021), as amid over-visitation, hierarchies, and split mandates, care becomes response and exclusion, consolidating asymmetries even as it holds the place together. These practices compose power, making the landmark porous to precarity while differentiating insiders from outsiders (Gökariksel and Secor 2020). Foregrounding exhaustion, the paper unsettles idealised views of heritage labour and advances an embodied approach to landmarks as contested. Hagia Sophia shows how unexpected acts of care reproduce a world-making of both affective attachment and inequality.



## Panel P: Friday 16.00-17.30, Room E230

# Caring for Urban Infrastructure. Towards a Politics of Repair, Attachment, and Mediation

### Convenors:

Kathrin Eitel, Julio Paulos, Loïc Riom

Urban infrastructures—sewage networks, transit systems, energy grids, public housing, and digital platforms—are not only technical or logistical systems; they are deeply entangled in social, material, and affective relations. This panel explores what it means to care for urban infrastructure, inspired by María Puig de la Bellacasa's (2011) expanded notion of care. Rather than viewing care as mere maintenance or kindness, it is approached as an ethical, political, and relational practice of world-making.

Across the globe, urban infrastructures are bearing the weight of climate-induced risks, aging structures, digital vulnerabilities, and socio-economic inequalities. Yet these challenges do not merely reveal technical failures. They expose competing claims, imagined futures, and conflicts of attachment. The closure of a highway, the repurposing of a power station, or the maintenance of a crumbling housing block are not just decisions—they are sites of projection, mediation, and contention.

Rather than centering urban infrastructure (work) solely within the common frame of urban justice, we propose to approach it through the politics of caring: of attending, maintaining, contesting, and reimagining the lifelines of the city (Denis and Pontille 2025). Such a perspective brings into focus the uneven and mediated distribution of care, the invisibilised labor of maintenance, and the affective and symbolic attachments through which infrastructures are valued—or abandoned. It also foregrounds the tensions of infrastructural life: between use and decay, permanence and obsolescence, investment and neglect. Understanding urban infrastructures as matters of care moreover implicates to speculatively commit to neglected things.

We welcome contributions from anthropology, STS, urban studies, architecture, geography, and related fields that explore:

- Practices and epistemologies of care: How do humans (e.g. waste pickers, sanitation workers, system administrators) and other non-human infrastructure caretakers make urban life possible? What situated knowledges, tools, and routines guide their work? How do care practices shape and contest the boundaries between technical, social and political world?



- Attachments and publics: How do people relate to infrastructures—through memory, affect, or protest? What imaginaries or controversies emerge around decaying or disappearing infrastructures? What forms of public-making are sparked by infrastructural transformation or neglect?
- Tensions and transformations: How is care for infrastructure negotiated amidst austerity, ecological transition, or privatisation? What are the frictions between maintenance and dismantling, repair and letting go? How are these debates mediated across scales—temporal, spatial, and political?

By examining infrastructures as matters of care, this panel seeks to deepen our understanding of how cities are held together—not only through capital or policy, but through embodied labor, contested values, and the fragile, situated practices of care.

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## Papers:

### How to Care for Drainage and Irrigation Canals?

Ognjen Kojanić ([kojanic@eu.cas.cz](mailto:kojanic@eu.cas.cz)), Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences

This paper focuses on the practices of care for water management infrastructure in the Pančevo Marshes (Pančevački rit). The Pančevo Marshes is a peri-urban area north of the Danube River in Belgrade, Serbia's capital and biggest city. The area has been drastically transformed through infrastructural development since World War I, which enabled the establishment of large-scale agroindustrial production. It has been urbanizing rapidly in recent decades; between 1981 and 2022, the number of inhabitants more than doubled, from around 33,000 to around 69,000. Moreover, there has been a significant growth of industrial activity. The canal infrastructure that was originally developed for drainage and irrigation has been appropriated by residents and industries in the area that lack access to the local sewage network, which is limited and underdeveloped. The canal network now serves as a recipient for household sewage and wastewater from factories. Furthermore, the agroindustrial company that was in charge of the canal network in the socialist period has been partially privatized, creating gaps in the infrastructural



provisioning in the Pančevo Marshes. The canal network is haphazardly maintained and the planned expansion of the meagre sewage system and the construction of wastewater treatment facilities are endlessly deferred. As the experience of socialist planning and modernity recedes into irrelevance and the dreams of future infrastructural development fail to materialize in the Pančevo Marshes, locals are struggling to care for the canals. I examine residents' practices such as protests, cleanups, and communication with state officials to understand how they renegotiate expectations and responsibilities in relation to infrastructure by attending to the non-human others who inhabit the canals; the sewage, sludge, and garbage that are clogging them; and the water fluctuations due to climate change.

### **Speculative Times: Social Exclusion and Water Infrastructure in Urban India**

Abhilasha Jain ([abhilashajain@gmail.com](mailto:abhilashajain@gmail.com)), London School of Economics and Political Science

Caste analysis reveals an enduring logic of caste hierarchy in determining access to water, marked by a dehumanising idea of contamination. Before there was any theorisation of environmental pollution and contamination, there was an institutionalised belief in contamination by Dalits (formerly untouchables) in India. The paper elaborates, the necessity of one, understanding water through a hydrosocial logic; and two, to take the incommensurability of risk, and vulnerability as a starting point instead of a problem to be overcome.

By discussing the political economy of water tankers that supply water to unplanned, and 'informal' settlements in the city of Delhi, I argue that the informal water tanker economy in Delhi is not a stop-gap solution for the failure of the state but a co-produced 'hydrosocial cycle' where colonial infrastructures and neoliberal policies actively create unequal access to water. This system reinscribes caste hierarchies and produces unequal risks and vulnerabilities, challenging universalised narratives of climate change crisis and prompting an imagination or vision of the environmental future from an anti-caste perspective driven by the question of who gets to design the future in the face of climate change. Moving from speculative infrastructures to speculative fiction (and fabulation). I discuss Dalit literature to suggest future is not an empty temporal category but one that is filled with the imaginaries of the past and the soon-to-be past. These speculations ask of us to transform a system that has historically imagined them as pollutants scavengers and dispensable but to also generate a different imaginative and relational care when other realities rupture our sense of temporal horizons.



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## **Ecology of Maintaining the Housing Infrastructure in Aktau: Practices of Ignoring the Breakage and Making-things-work**

Daria Volkova ([volkova.daria.v@gmail.com](mailto:volkova.daria.v@gmail.com)), Institute for European Urban Studies, Bauhaus University Weimar

In Aktau, Kazakhstan, almost the entire water supply, including fresh water, heating, and electricity, has been provided centrally through one power plant. The city has been tightly dependent on the same infrastructure built in the 1970s, which has not yet been centrally modernized or repaired to eliminate the constant state of breakages. The current infrastructural breakdown is also settled within uncertainties regarding the retreat of the Caspian Sea. Those involved in maintenance are in the constant state of negotiating what should be repaired, how, when, and at what expense.

This paper is based on in-depth interviews with the residents of the Soviet-built micro-districts of Aktau, maintenance workers, experts, and authorities; ethnographic observations of maintenance work; the analysis of laws and public discourse; and archival research. Further exploring the concept of ecology (Domínguez Rubio 2020), this paper details the conditions under which actors engage with maintenance. Looking at the maintenance practices holistically, I situate it within seemingly the duality of two maintenance practices: ignoring the breakage and making-things-work. This case allows us to explore the boundaries of dysfunctionality (Martínez and Laviolette 2019) and pay particular attention to breakages as an intrinsic part of every infrastructure. This paper pays specific attention to the labor conditions, material, and bureaucratic situatedness of maintenance. Additionally, it questions the notion of resilience in a setting of constant breakages and decay, and undermines the romantization of coping.

## **Infrastructures of Care and Contestation: Ethnographic Insights from Urban Regeneration in Aosta**

Giulia Mascadri ([g.mascadri1@campus.unimib.it](mailto:g.mascadri1@campus.unimib.it)), Università di Milano-Bicocca

This article presents the first months of anthropological fieldwork as part of a collaborative doctoral program between the Municipality of Aosta and the University of Milan-Bicocca, in two formerly working-class neighborhoods characterized by social housing, multicultural population, decay, and abandonment. After years of unmet demands for redevelopment and constant (self-)maintenance also by residents, these areas are now the focus of an ambitious urban and social redevelopment project aimed at improving quality of life, promoting civic engagement, and limiting social marginalization.

The evolving context offers an ethnographic perspective to examine how infrastructure, even minimal ones — residential buildings, pedestrian paths, gardens, and public squares—transform into objects of care, attachment, and conflict. Responsibility for public space is negotiated between residents, institutions, and social actors, creating situations of cooperation or friction between generations, new and existing residents, residents and



migrants, giving rise to symbolic and political reappropriations of the city. A key case is represented by two skyscrapers, declared unfit for habitation and subsequently evicted, which later became symbols of occupation and defiance of institutional authority, and are now being demolished. Their destruction, along with the construction and enhancement of new structures, reactivates affective memories, imagined futures, and controversies over how the neighborhood should be transformed, resonating with critiques of "abstract" technocratic planning (La Cecla 2015) and calling for "soft" regeneration (Granata 2021). The study demonstrates how infrastructure care goes beyond technical maintenance and includes techniques of mediation, resistance, and survival, as well as the hidden relational work carried out by local social cooperatives.

### **Beyond Ageing: The Emergence of an Ecological Approach of Infrastructure's Fragilities**

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The need to reinforce urban infrastructure maintenance policies in northern rich countries has long been directly linked to the ageing of networks. From this perspective, the mere passage of years, sometimes associated with neglected or deferred maintenance, is seen as a natural, almost mechanical factor of degradation.

Drawing on an 18-month qualitative investigation conducted among infrastructure managers and regulatory authorities in France (mainly focused on water, electricity and telecommunication), we will show in this presentation that this form of problematization of ageing infrastructures provides a specific framework for the forms of maintenance that need to be put in place. Easily translated into quantified indicators such as age or expected lifespan, it notably focuses on the systematic replacement of network sections. In so doing, it tends to prevail over alternative approaches that take into account many other dimensions of the life of infrastructures and their environment. These approaches, which we propose to call "ecological," have been gaining ground in France in recent years. They nurture a broader definition of the infrastructure fragilities that need to be taken care of. We will show that these fragilities involve at least three dimensions, which infrastructure managers strive to articulate altogether: the nature of the materials from which the infrastructural parts are made (some of which sometimes become problematic and need to be disposed of); the milieu in which the infrastructure takes place (the weather, vegetation, soil and animal life play all a role in the state of infrastructure); and the events that have punctuated the life of the infrastructure (breakages, past interventions...). Rather than fragility, thus, ecological approaches develop care practices that are attentive to situated processes of fragilization, which are never easy to grasp, let alone rationalize.



## Panel Q: Friday 11.00-12.30, Room F205

# Archive is a Verb: On Unsettling Forms of Archival Authority, Resistance, and Liberation

### Convenors:

Björn Reichhardt, Andrea Bordoli

Archives are multilayered entities deeply embedded in, and constitutive of, practices of care, maintenance, decay, and neglect in material and metaphorical terms. They render knowledge, memory, objects, and relationships visible and invisible, perceivable and incomprehensible through ordering, exhibiting and hiding. They do so within the infrastructures that support their very existence.

In recent years, anthropologists, archivists, filmmakers, curators and artists have widely discussed, investigated, and reflected on archives, their sites and their holdings. Centered around objects and their biographies, research on archives often focused on contextualisation and highlighted important debates of provenance and restitution. In this panel, we seek to critically engage with archival authority and thus expose archives' vulnerabilities and hidden histories. Similar to archives being "by definition incomplete" (Ponte 2021: 177), we aim to look at archiving as a practice and process to which there seems to be no end, but countless options. Ann Stoler (2002: 87) invites us to consider "archiving as a process rather than to archives as things. It looks to archives as epistemological experiments rather than as sources." Here, questions of care arise immediately. If "[a]rchives are structured repositories whose dynamics depend on their archivists" (Ponte 2021: 177), we are reminded that archiving is deeply entangled with curatorial practices. Stemming from the Latin word *curare*, which translates as "to care", but also "means to treat, to cure, to look after, to edit, or to organize" (Krasny and Perry 2022: 4), curating relates to complex dynamics of authority and resistance. While curating can be subversive and disobedient, the term's multiple meanings "expose the entanglements of care and control and the implications of the power of exposure or display that are accorded the curator" (ibid.).

So, what do care, maintenance, and decay imply when it comes to archives and their treatments? Can they be sites for remediation? Regarding colonial archives, Stoler further argues, archives are "intricate technologies of rule in themselves" (2002: 87). Archives can furthermore be "contested territories" and thus form sites of control over memory and historical narratives that feed our actions in the present. Maintenance in archival contexts can thus mean maintenance of dominant narratives and power structures reserved for a few while excluding many others who might have much more immediate



and substantial connections to the archive in question. Access vis-à-vis gatekeeping are central issues coming to the surface in this regard, prompting us to ask if archives need liberation through “an access that frees the past from the dominion of memories built by those who hold either political, economic, or social power” (Ponte 2021: 177).

Our motivation in crafting this panel stems from a multilayered interest in audiovisual activities related to archiving. As an academic collective, the Audiovisual Commission of the SAA (CAV) is responsible for the care, maintenance, expansion, archiving, and curating of a collection of ethnographic and documentary films in both digital and physical formats. Curation of the CAV-archive changes with its members, and with a recent restructuring of our leadership from a single- (or at times double-)headed presidency to a coordination collective we hope to foster a conversation around archiving and curating practices that generates prospects for opening archival doors. This is a task that becomes even more urgent in these current times of war, genocide, and environmental destruction. Through experiments in time, careful and introspective gaze, and collective practices of maintenance and (re)ordering, we engage with archival remediation - both as a concept and as a creative practice - in thickening archival substance and objects in a curated effort to resituate them in broader contexts. The aim is to critically engage with archival materials and their sites of existence, proposing a remediation/intervention finalized to unsettle their authority and open up spaces for vulnerability, resistance, and liberation. We particularly invite hybrid interventions combining a presentation with a multimodal component, whether in the form of film, sound, or other non-textual media.

## Papers:

### **Mutant Archivabilities: On the Shifting Ontology of Archives in Violence and Post-violence Contexts in Mozambique**

Ruy Blanes ([ruy.blanes@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:ruy.blanes@iscte-iul.pt)), ISCTE-IUL, CRIA, In2Past

Carla Bertin ([carla.bertin@unil.it](mailto:carla.bertin@unil.it)), UNIL, FTSR, IHAR

In this paper, inspired by Derrida’s famous reflections on the ‘archive fever’ (1996) and Orhan Pamuk’s celebrated book/site Museum of Innocence book (2008), we propose an interrogation on the emotional dimensions of archival objects, responding to two interrogations: what emotions and mobilizations drive an object into an ‘archive’? What kind of ontological shift does the movement generate? We are particularly interested in a specific genre of archive - that which emerges as a form of resistance or coping in the context of political violence. This implies acknowledging archival processes within and beyond official institutions, and a plastic, ‘anarchival’ approach to archive as a place, entity, form or relation (Røssaak 2010; Springgay et al. 2020).

Ruy Blanes will focus on two objects stemming from his ethnographic research in Angola and Mozambique, which appear initially as generic, commercial objects or everyday



banalities - a powdered milk can, a piece of paper - in order to explore their 'memorial potential' and possible integration into a politics of archiving. Carla will discuss her encounter with "dead archives" (Machava and Gonçalves 2021) in a former factory in Mozambique. Their ruination reveals not erasure but the emergence of alternative memories, whose dormant political value can be transformed through archival production. In contrast to these traces of the national politics of forgetting, she also turns to everyday objects—such as a pesticide sprayer—locally valued as "lembranças", which illuminate entangled personal and collective histories.

The case studies will be discussed through a discussion of visual representations of objects. Ultimately, these contributions will hopefully enable a reflection on mutability of archives in terms of thinking through the emotional criteria of archival inclusion/exclusion.

### **Archival Ecologies: Rethinking the Politics of Care in the Anthropocene Audiovisual Remains and Archival Ecologies: Archives, Anthropology, and Visual Activation in Times of Ecological Crisis**

Lee Douglas ([l.douglas@gold.ac.uk](mailto:l.douglas@gold.ac.uk)), Goldsmiths, University of London

On April 25, 1974, everyday Portuguese citizens transformed a military coup into collective popular resistance, thus initiating a revolutionary process that ended the Estado Novo and its empire. Filmmakers, aware of history unfolding in real time, rushed to the streets to record the uprising, forming cooperatives that enabled them to capture radical change. In doing so, they situated film and its associated technologies as tools not only to document and freeze history but also to materialize it for preservation.

Drawing on ethnographic research in Portuguese film archives, this paper grapples with the politics and mechanics of archival practices that, in approaching filmic remains as visual heritage, preserve but also keep from view images that document a complex period of social and political change. Tending to Portugal's archive of revolution, I also consider what images are absent, partial, or erased from these collections, specifically those linked to the everyday experiences of retornados or "returnees" forced to flee former colonies to resettle in Portuguese urban centers. Against the revolutionary backdrop, the figure of the retornado was—and continues to be—unsettling in its ability to accentuate the inherent violence of empire and its rippling aftereffects.

Working across presence and absence, I explore how anthropological experiments with remix and collage foreground activation over preservation, positioning multimodal practice as a method for grappling with archival absence and its spectres. Building on debates about the ecological footprint of film archiving and its extractivist histories (Jacobson 2025) and on Jussi Parikka's re-reading of Harun Farocki's concept of "operational images," I propose an ecological approach to visual archives, not as containers of heritage but as sites of invention and intervention, refusing disappearance



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and enabling us to narrate complex histories in ways that open onto alternative political futures.

### **Guyanese Cotton Craft Collections as Re-sources for Biodiversity**

Charlotte Hoskins ([charlotte.hoskins@anthro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:charlotte.hoskins@anthro.ox.ac.uk)), University of Oxford

This paper offers initial reflections on an ongoing collaborative audiovisual project focused on Makushi cotton craft funded by the British Museum's Endangered Material Knowledge Programme. It seeks to present a counter-narrative to dominant cotton stories by examining how various local cotton varieties are managed, cultivated, and harvested in Guyana's North Rupununi region — a process closely linked to the construction of femininity. Makushi crafters grow and name several cotton varieties, including some brown types, and transform them through drying, cleaning, beating, spinning, and weaving into baby slings and hammocks in diverse patterns and colour schemes. The intergenerational transfer of knowledge about this craft — from caring for plant-based environmental resources to shaping these into specific objects — faces significant disruption, especially due to major shifts in the organisation of time. Indeed, many women discussed how cotton plants are not growing well today. Given its history, the British Museum holds somewhat extensive collections sourced from what was then British Guyana, including these very cotton-craft items. How might these collections be re-appropriated by Makushi craftswomen to foster regenerative effects — particularly when biodiversity is explained to be declining? What relations between Indigenous Peoples in Guyana and institutions like the British Museum are possible today and what forms of contemporary audiovisual archives should be deposited in museum repositories?

### **Rewatching the Archive: Speaking Back and Renarration in The A-Team and Entwicklungsland | Revisited**

Nnenna Onuoha ([donuoha@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:donuoha@fas.harvard.edu) / [hello@nnennaonuoha.com](mailto:hello@nnennaonuoha.com)), Harvard University / University of Potsdam

This paper reflects on two filmic works, from my own practice, that revisit audiovisual materials originally captured about Ghanaian teenagers by Western institutions and individuals. In both cases, the archival footage—once authored from a position of authority—becomes the site of a return and subtle reversal of the ethnographic gaze. In the first film, *The A-Team* (2020), a group of fourteen Ghanaian teenagers revisit videos and photographs from a cultural exchange trip to Mississippi, ten years earlier. What was once framed as a well-meaning cross-cultural exchange now reveals, in retrospect, layers of casual racism and performances of hospitality underpinned by asymmetrical power. And in the second film, *Entwicklungsland Revisited* (2025), two



Ghanaian elders reflect on a 1970s BBC Schools Documentary for which they and their families were filmed to exemplify the lives of “rich” and “poor” families in the newly developing country. Fifty years on, they speak back to the footage, reframing what it meant to be seen by the imperial lens.

These works move beyond retrieval to acts of recontextualization, critical reflection, and at times refusal. Once silent or spoken over, the protagonists speak back to the archival footage, making visible the afterlives of documentary capture and confronting the epistemic violence produced by historical “truths.” Visual strategies such as drawing over photographs in *The A-Team* and rewinding footage in *Entwicklungsland | Revisited* both destabilize the authority of the archival record and compel audiences to encounter the images through altered perceptual frames. Inspired by Trouillot’s insight that silences are actively produced at every stage of historical narration, and by Stoler’s invitation to consider archives as ongoing epistemological experiments, this paper foregrounds the instability of the archival record and the affective labour required to remain with difficult images.

## **Rumble in the Archive – Postcolonial Curation and Relational Aesthetics in an Ethnographic Museum**

Alexis Malefakis ([malefakis@vmz.uzh.ch](mailto:malefakis@vmz.uzh.ch)), Völkerkundemuseum Zürich

Rohit Jain ([rohit.jain@unibe.ch](mailto:rohit.jain@unibe.ch)), Design Film Kunst, Hochschule Luzern

The Völkerkundemuseum Zürich – like all ethnographic museums – is enmeshed in colonial and postcolonial entanglements. Considering the “postcolonial amnesia” (Purtschert) and “white innocence” (Wekker) in Swiss publics and institutions, only in the last few years the walls of neutrality and denial have started to crack.

In this context the project *Rumble in the Archive* offers an intervention into postcolonial Zurich by developing a collaborative curatorial platform that reframes the museum from an ethnographic showcase into a site of memory work and of imagining and fashioning new postcolonial relations in Zürich. Residents and communities are invited to co-create a public archival space that connects the museum with marginalized realities that hitherto have been silenced (Trouillot). Artists, activists, and scholars from diasporic communities get access to collections, spaces, and resources to develop interventions, re-situating objects, histories, and relationships through new perspectives.

Inspired by the concept of the museum as a contact zone (Clifford) where different histories, perspectives, and social positions meet, the project takes a radical approach to relational ethics (Sarr/Savoy) and affective communities (Leela Gandhi). The traditional focus on the care of objects is shifted to an understanding of care as the building and sustaining of human relations between the museum and communities. Using the concept of radical democratic museum (Sternfeld), the boundary between museum and society is blurred.



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Rumble in the Archive challenges the authority of the museum by redistributing interpretive power and foregrounding the expertise of diasporic and source communities. The project engages with archives as transformative processes and redefines what care, maintenance, and access can mean in a postcolonial city.

The presentation shares insight into the process of Rumble in the Archive at the interface of curation, transformation and public anthropology.



## Panel R: Friday 11.00-12.30, Room E230

# Risking Fieldwork With/out Significant Others

### Convenors:

Anne Lavanchy, Céline Heini

This panel discusses how we negotiate the overlapping of private and professional statuses through the lenses of "risk". Since the institutionalisation of anthropology, the (patriarchal) emblematic figure of the brave lone fieldworker has been a myth. Early anthropologists like Malinowski were supported by colonial administrations and staff, Levi-Strauss was part of a collective mission research and Descola was accompanied by his spouse, to name a few examples. Recently, anthropologists have acknowledged this reality by discussing the vantages and pitfalls of accompanied fieldwork, analysing how being with children in the field shapes relationships and therefore the research itself, opening spaces and encounters that would have remained otherwise hidden or unreachable (Korpela et al., 2016).

Acknowledging ethnographers as multi-sided entities (Schild et al., 2024), we propose to move a step further to consider the articulations of risk-related issues with the presence of "significant others" in the field. We have chosen this expression to refer to several situations in which intimacy and professional goals overlap, such as (1) planning for and undertaking fieldwork, while being accompanied; (2) unexpected figures of significant others who might emerge – such as research partners who become lovers, partners or in-laws; (3) significant others who become research partners; (4) finally, staying-at-home partners and lovers might also shape field relationships through their absent presence.

Risk is a relatively recent tool of the bureaucratic governance of research by institutions and funding bodies. The increasing pressures to mitigate research "risks" are part of a generalised "metric paradigm" related to dangers, threats, fear and misfortune (Houdard et al. 2015). This has implications for the kind of methods, field sites as well as topics we choose, the prominence of geopolitical issues threatening to produce blind spots of knowledge for countries considered as unstable. The institutional governance of risks disproportionately affects junior and/or precarious scholars. In a competitive working environment, they are expected to take some risks to be singled out while finding the right arguments to convince institutions and funding bodies about their ability to mitigate risks. In some cases, this governance also reevaluates risks in the light of new "significant others", as experienced by Roth. Her unexpected pregnancy changed her home institution's evaluation of risk, that asked her to immediately come back (2018).



Crossing both topics should allow to explore the pitfalls and dilemmas of planning, conducting and leaving fieldwork with/without significant others we care for. Junior scholars are particularly affected as their precarious academic trajectory spans over the years when they might want, or are asked to, “choose” if they want to have children, or to “settle down” with one partner. Therefore, their current or past experiences are highly welcome. We also include risks related to different kinds of coming out, in relation with normative heterosexuality but also with racialisation-related issues, such as the ones faced by Avanza who was pregnant of her non-white child during her fieldwork with right-wing extremists (2008).

Our panel welcomes proposals reflecting on intersections of risk and intimacy that might address care, maintenance and/or decay. They might address amongst others following axes and possible questions:

Risking fieldwork to take care of ongoing amorous or couple relations:

- How and why do we take decisions to go with or without partner and/or children?
- How and why do we make decisions of explaining or hiding the fact that we were in the field with family members (Korpela et al., 2016)?

Risking fieldwork when building intimate relationships with research partners:

- How do we deal with suspicions of and / or introspection about (s)exotization?
- How do we account for falling in love “in the field”?
- How do we learn the skills of transforming interpersonal field relationships into passionate friendships and even into kinship (Dankwa, 2025, 151)?

Risking relationships because of fieldwork:

- How do we maintain distance relationships?
- How do we anticipate risks for family members accompanying us (disease, natural disasters, political insecurity, accident injury, mental health)?
- How do we deal with significant others’ feelings of being instrumentalized for the sake of our research?

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## Papers:

### **Parent, Partner, Participant: Negotiating Risk, Intimacy, and Authority in Early Childhood Development Fieldwork in Mexico**

Jean-Yves Taranger ([jean-yves.taranger@uzh.ch](mailto:jean-yves.taranger@uzh.ch)), ISEK University of Zurich

This paper offers a comparative, multi-sited account of accompanied fieldwork in early childhood development (ECD) settings in Southern Ethiopia and Oaxaca, Mexico, showing how traveling with a partner and young child reconfigures both the risks and possibilities of ethnographic engagement. Between November 2024 and June 2025, as part of the Saving Brains? project "Applying Ethnography to Early Childhood Interventions", my family joined two field sites: in November 2024, the Borana region of Ethiopia, observing a colleague's research on ECD in a camp for internally displaced refugees; and from October 2024 to June 2025, over eight months of participant observation in Mexico within Un Kilo de Ayuda (NGO), CONAFE's Educación Inicial (government), and IMSS daycare centers (public health system). Our embedded presence opened relational spaces often inaccessible to lone researchers, revealing how care and evaluation practices construct developmental "deficits." Yet being accompanied also intensified negotiations of institutional, interpersonal, and ethical risks. At the same time, being accompanied required constant negotiation of logistical, interpersonal, and ethical considerations, from safeguarding our child's wellbeing to balancing family roles with research demands. In the field, my dual role as parent and researcher shifted perceptions, sometimes fostering trust, other times limiting critique. By tracing how care, maintenance, and decay unfolded across personal and professional boundaries, I highlight the often-invisible labor of significant others and advance debates on risk, intimacy, and ethnographic authority under contemporary regimes of research risk governance.



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## The F Word

Eva van Roekel Cordiviola ([eva.van.roekel@vu.nl](mailto:eva.van.roekel@vu.nl)), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

For years, my academic motto has been “the professional is personal.” Since the beginning of my anthropological journey, I have never been able to fully separate private life from professional practice. The influence of my former husband from Venezuela and my current husband from Argentina, both countries where I conducted long-term fieldwork, shaped not only how I understood local realities but also how I navigated knowledge production itself. Yet these experiences were often excluded from what counted as “proper” ethnographic data, both through disciplinary conventions and my own self-censorship. My turn to other “F words” (film and fiction) offered an alternative space where intimate field experiences could be acknowledged and transformed, while also addressing the silences imposed by academic norms. After securing tenure, I began to integrate family more explicitly into my scholarly writing, recognizing its inescapable role in shaping fieldwork relations and insights. My most recent six-month stay in Venezuela (2023) with my husband and our children, my former husband, and my previous family-in-law brought these dynamics into sharp relief, generating field notes that are saturated with reflections on care, relational responsibility and the ethical entanglements of fieldwork when (former) kinship and research overlap. This paper systematically explores the methodological and ethical implications of bringing family into both creative and ethnographic frames, comparing how each form engages with intimacy, reflexivity and representation. It situates these experiences within broader debates on reflexivity, positionality and the politics of intimacy in anthropology. At the same time, it considers fiction as a possible protective form, one that allows the anthropologist to grapple with the vulnerabilities of field relations while questioning the boundaries of what counts as legitimate knowledge.

## Spectral Ethnography and the Risks of Intimacy in Sites of Memory

Miguel Algranti ([miguel.algranti@gmail.com](mailto:miguel.algranti@gmail.com)), Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA),  
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In Argentina, the last military dictatorship (1976–1983) unfolded as a regime of terror: more than 30,000 people were forcibly disappeared, thousands of children were abducted or appropriated, and clandestine detention centers such as the ESMA became thresholds where life and death were blurred. Today, these sites of memory are inhabited not only by visitors and survivors but also by the spectral presence of the absent, who persist in demanding attention.

It is within this haunted terrain that my research takes place, guided by Derrida’s hauntology. Yet the ghosts I encounter are not confined to archives or walls; they also seep into my own life. Fieldwork has forced me to face three intertwined forms of risk.



First, risking research in order to care for loved ones: my closest collaborator, the daughter of disappeared parents, constantly relives her own wounded childhood as part of our work together. Second, risking the research through intimate entanglements in the field: my growing closeness to her, and the participation of my own daughter and hers in memory-related activities, blur the line between research and shared life. Third, risking my relationships because of the field: my partner's reproaches, my daughter's nightmares after visiting the ESMA and "connecting" with the disappeared, and the echo of my own childhood loss of a dear friend—all reverberate within the ethnography itself.

This paper suggests that such risks are not failures but constitutive of a spectral ethnography: one in which the intimate, the political, and the ghostly are inseparable. The ethnographer is never alone; he is accompanied by colleagues, children, partners, and by the dead who have not yet departed.

### **Navigating Field Relationships: Ethical and Emotional Challenges of Intimacy and Accusation in Conflict Zones**

Christine Olukhanda ([C.Olukhanda@uea.ac.uk](mailto:C.Olukhanda@uea.ac.uk)), University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom

This paper reflects on the ethical complexities of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Chepyuk, a region marked by surveillance, everyday violence, and political instability. As a single female researcher, I became entangled in complex relational dynamics I received romantic attention from multiple men, which created tension and fear among married and unmarried women. Notably, the wife of my research assistant accused me of 'stealing her husband,' placing me in a precarious and emotionally charged situation. These dynamics not only affected my personal well-being but also reshaped my interactions and the data collection process. I ask how we navigate accusations of 'stealing a partner' in contexts characterised by everyday violence?