

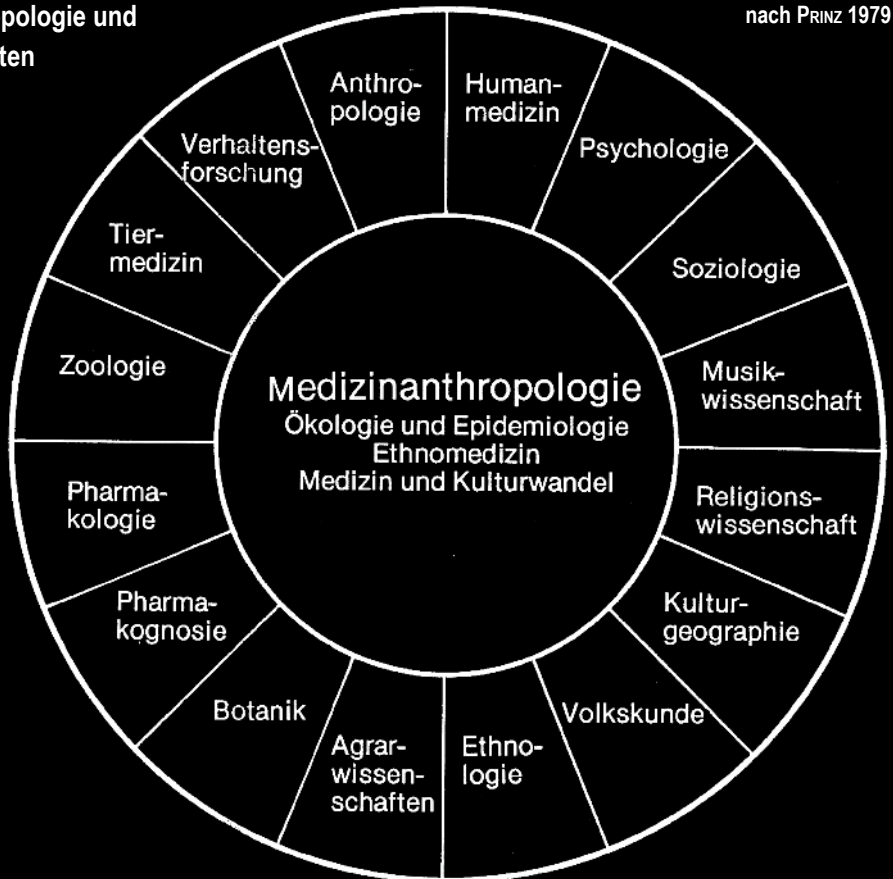
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Zeitschrift für Medizinethnologie • Journal of Medical Anthropology

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Die medizinische Anthropologie und ihre „Hilfs-“wissenschaften

nach PRINZ 1979



AGEM und 60 Jahre

„Interdisziplinäres Arbeitsfeld Ethnologie und Medizin“, Teil I
AGEM looking at Six Decennia of Interdisciplinary Discourses
in “Anthropology and Medicine,” Part I



Zum Titelbild/Front picture *Curare* 37(2014)4

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Die Titelseiten dieser Hefte sind auf der 4. Umschlagseite / The title covers of these issues are on the back cover.

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Journal of Medical Anthropology**


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Report from the Conference “Epidemics Entanglements: Exploring the Interrelation between Cities and Infectious Disease,” Frankfurt am Main, July 24–25, 2014

LINDA MADSEN

The (re)emergence and spread of communicable diseases and an increasingly urbanized and geographically connected world are commonly regarded as being mutually related. Among the central issues of this conference was that cities are not only of major importance when it comes to disease spread. Urban centers are also of major importance for the management and prevention of infectious disease.¹ The conference offered a setting within which researchers from multiple geographical and disciplinary areas could meet and communicate their research on a common field characterized by urbanity and infectious diseases. The shared concern was how species, spaces, pathogens and the governance thereof are entangled.

The conference’s argument of entanglement comes along with conceptions of the city as dynamic, emergent, unbound, relational, flexible and processual, rather than as a static location. It sought to address vital concerns that so far have received little attention, namely “how long-established categories of space, urbanity or locality impact on the way public health thinks about infectious disease control.”² The networked conception of urban life, as “entanglements,” allows for the inclusion of socio-technical arrangements, such as human bodies, viral samples, surveillance data, biomedical standards and lay knowledge to mention but a few. Furthermore, approaching the urban, as entangled, draws attention to the ways that other species are involved in messy urban infectious disease ecologies. It was pointed out that urban environments are inhabited and shaped by a wide variety of biological agents.³ In addition to human crowds, they are populated by influenza viruses and other microbes, by insects, reptiles, fishes, birds, rodents and other mammals. The conference drew attention to how, again to quote from the introductory speech, “we share space and susceptibility with non-human actors,” and how “these constitute an important part of infectious disease etiologies.”

Call and contributions

How do categories of space, the urban or the local impact on the way public health thinks about infectious disease control? How are human-animal-pathogen interfaces enacted differently in various contexts? How are current ontological conceptions of the city reconfigured by locating biological agents inside the social production of urban space?

These were the major questions posed when Jun. Prof. Dr. Meike Wolf and Kevin Hall called for papers for the upcoming conference at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology, Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main. Drawing attention to these pressing issues, the call attracted experienced scholars of anthropology, geography, history, science and technology studies, political science and more. 18 speakers and additional attendees—arriving from South- and North America, the Middle East and Great Britain, Scandinavia, Spain, and several German institutions, to mention some—gathered to share and discuss these and related questions that emerged throughout the event.

The **first sessions**, titled “Disease Ecologies,” was opened by ALEX NADING’S (University of Edinburgh) engaging talk on *The politics of entanglement in Urban Nicaragua’s dengue epidemics*. Drawing on his recently published book, Nading shared material from his ethnographic research in peri-urban Nicaragua.⁴ Through the trope of the *trail*, he discussed how health and place, and human and nonhumans, as well as knowledge and health practices are entangled, and how these actively co-create *landscapes of disease*. NATASHA SZUHAN (University of Melbourne) offered welcome insights into her studies of remote, though no less relevant, disease ecologies of the 19th century Victoria, Australia. Her paper *Typhoid Fever: the murderous product of the natural, settlement and disease ecologies that developed in nineteenth century Prahlan* discussed the interactions between swampy terrain, gold discovery and political, class and sanitary issues in relation to repeatedly devas-

tating typhoid epidemics and Government interventions. Rounding off this first session, BETH GREENHOUGH'S (Queen Mary University of London) paper, *Beyond bioinsecurities? Reflections on endemic human-virus relations*, gave the audience—among which the majority is preoccupied with devastating epidemics and pandemic threats—a timely reminder that infectious diseases are more often than not unspectacular and *common*. Through her study of the research carried out by the British Common Cold Research Unit (CCU) between 1946 and 1990 Greenhough explores human-virus relations where *accommodation*, rather than *eradication*, of virus is at stake. Using the example of the UK's Common Cold Unit (CCU), a medical research facility, she argued that the context through which we engage viruses, including the inner contexts of our own human bodies and their microbiome, is fundamental to how we as a society then understand and respond to them. Sites like the CCU—where rather than seeking to secure bodies and nations against viral infection, emphasize complex interactions between humans, viruses and space—offer new perspectives on urban disease ecologies. Based on her research, Greenhough's asked: Can we learn to accommodate as opposed to exclude viruses from urban environments?

ULI BEISEL (University of Bayreuth) opened the **second session** "Immunity and Public Health" with her paper *Towards an affirmative biopolitics of malaria: human-mosquito interactions and the development of immunity and resistance*. Reading drug resistance as a nonhuman form of immunity, this paper explored the different registers of immunity that come into being when humans attempt to protect themselves from malaria by developing vaccines, and when parasite bodies develop their own form of immunity to human interventions through drug resistance. The paper suggests that reading what is usually understood as "resistance" as immunity might open new ways of thinking about human-mosquito-parasite entanglements, the prospects of eradication and the biopolitical registers at play in malaria prevention and treatment in Global Health today. The next paper focused on other entanglements, namely those between public health governance and the public, in particular (future) parents. It was ELSE GEELLEN (Maastricht University) who presented this paper, co-authored Klaisen Horstman, Hans van Vliet and Pieter de Hoogh, titled

Standardisation of vaccination in the context of democratization of expertise. The paper argued that the combined—or entangled—ambitions of maintaining high vaccination rate and cost reductions work as rationales for increased standardization of the Dutch National Immunization Programme (NIP). Geelen presented results from their empirical sociological study of what they refer to as the "national-local 'chain' of vaccination." Based on their analysis they showed how rigid standardization entails the risk of decreasing public trust (which again entails a risk towards the vaccination rate). KARINE AASGAARD JANSEN'S (Umeå University) paper brought us to the Island of Réunion which, despite its remote position in the Indian Ocean, is strongly entangled with our close neighbor, France. With her paper *Disease securing and stigmatisation during the 2005–2007 chikungunya epidemic in Réunion*, Aasgaard Jansen introduced her ethnographic fieldwork on the island where she has studied this vector-spread added viral disease. Her study shows that, due to a local stigmatization of *chikungunya* caused by the vector's breeding grounds in artificial containers of stagnant water in urban environments on the one hand, and previous French colonial and current public health interventions against vector-borne epidemics on the other, many Réunionese rejected the disease's etiology despite widespread and easy access to public health information regarding its mode of transmission.

The **third and final session** of this first conference day concerned "Politics of Inclusion/Politics of Exclusion." HENNING FÜLLER (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg) opened the session with his paper *Biosecurity and the city. Post-SARS Hong Kong and the governing of un/healthy bodies*. Taking what is being referred to as the recent or ongoing securitization of Global Health as his backdrop, Fuller discussed changing rationalities of biosecurity as these confront with circulations of vectors and un/healthy bodies in the exemplary and complex context of post-SARS Hong Kong. The paper did also offer reflections on the related and central issues of pre-emption and resilience, which are the major matters of concern in his habilitation project "Geographies of Biosecurity." ANTONIO CARBONE'S (Center for Metropolitan Studies, TU Berlin) paper *Buenos Aires at the time of cholera. 1867–1869. Fear, pity and urban space* offered another context for studying and discussing biopolitics. The main

goal of Carbone's paper, which dealt with the first appearance of cholera in the city of Buenos Aires in 1867, was to show how the anonymous challenge of cholera in a rapidly growing city changed the way in which control over population was conceived and applied. His main hypothesis was that control was relocated at the level of the subjectivity. Concluding the paper he furthermore argued that emotions—such as fear or compassion—were among the main dispositives that made this relocation possible. CRISTINA BASTOS (University of Lisbon) managed well to keep the attendees attentive until the very end of this first and intense conference day with her paper *Brothels, Hostels and Hospitals: the city streets of syphilis in early 20th century Lisbon*. Through her spatial approach to the areas of commercial sex and clinical assistance to syphilis, and her narrative approach to epidemic-like episodes of connected cases, coupled with archival data and literary sources, Bastos' paper discussed the entanglements of epidemics and cities—in this case syphilis and STDs in pre-penicillin Lisbon.

The point of departure for the **second day's first session** was "Articulations of Emergence." Thus MÁRCIA GRISOTTI'S (Federal University of Santa Catarina) paper *Emerging infectious diseases: challenges for understanding and communication of risks* addressed vital ambiguities of the concept, emerging infectious diseases. Through two case studies, of bovine tuberculosis and abdominal angiostrongyliasis, Grisotti demonstrated the ambiguities of "emergence" and the social construction of its risks. NATALIE PORTER (University of New Hampshire) focused on entangled desires of the Vietnamese government to both demonstrate decisive action, and protect urban markets, in controlling the emerging infectious disease, avian influenza. Her paper titled *Commerce or containment? Avian flu and the politics of poultry market closures in Hanoi* offered insights from her multi-sited fieldwork in Vietnam. Porter introduced "viral economies" as a heuristic for understanding the economies of pandemic planning. Her analysis illustrates the intersecting economies in which H5N1 viruses circulate in Vietnam—economies that are simultaneously and inextricably biological, commercial, and moral. Viewing *containment* through the framework of *viral economies*, Porter emphasizes the entanglements of modes of production, ownership and exchange that surround H5N1 viruses and their

management. KLAUS SCHEUERMANN (Technische Universität Berlin), LEON HEMPEL (Technische Universität Berlin), EDWARD VELASCO (Robert-Koch-Institut, Berlin) and TIM ECKMANN'S (ibid.) presented, as the title of their paper promised, *Perspectives and problems of digital epidemiology*. As a point of departure, the paper addressed how entangled technological developments are enabling both increased global mobility of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases and, at the same time, higher potentials for surveillance e.g. by various means for digital epidemiology. Furthermore, the paper addressed relevant ethical, social and juridical aspects of data protection, and it discussed how digital epidemiology entails a broad and heterogeneous public health issue that overlaps, or as the authors suggest, potentially infringes upon, national security. FRÉDÉRIC KECK'S (Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale, Musée du quai Branly) paper *Hong Kong as a sentinel post for pandemic flu* addressed implications and vital entanglements of a territory acting as a sentinel post. Keck discussed Hong Kong as a dense urban space, a proliferating nature, and an intense web of communications involving microbiologists, farmers, administrative staff, poultry merchants and consumers, birdwatchers and Buddhist authorities, to mention some. A major concern raised in this paper was how biosecurity measures have contributed to the transformation of urban infrastructures, and human relations to wild and domestic birds.⁵

The **fifth and final session** "Biosecurity and Preparedness" started with ANDREW DONALDSON (New Castle University) presenting his paper *Cities in an age of biosecurity: Infrastructures ecologies and assemblage*. Considering borders as instruments for inclusion and/or exclusion and containment on the one hand, and, simultaneously and on the other hand, taking cities as entangled rather than bounded territories, this paper analyzed the political discourse and rhetoric of "biosecurity." Particularly noteworthy was Donaldson's addressing of the concurrent changes in the ways disease are framed as security matters and reframing of security itself. The paper emphasized how urban security and biosecurity hinge on (under-explored) anticipatory practices that increasingly draw on a new "calculus of risk" and are embedded as infrastructure. Donaldson suggested that entanglements of infrastructure, security, disease and urban life might be explored through the concept of "urban syndemics." NICK

BINGHAM (Open University) presented an article co-authored together with STEPHANIE LAVAU (The University of Exeter), titled *The object of regulation: tending the tensions of food safety*, which is among the extensive outcomes of the recently completed "Biosecurity Borderland Project."⁶ In his presentation, Bingham shared their in-sights from ethnographic work among food safety officers inspecting British restaurants. The presentation focused on the shaping of meat as a material object of regulation. It discussed *what* this object of regulation is composed of, and *how* it is composed.⁷ Drawing on and expanding upon Foucault's notion of "poly-functionality," among others, they have studied the careful negotiation of the deliberate and desirable (meat flows) and accidental and the undesirable (associated pathogen flows) functions of meat networks—and the tending of these flows. The presentation emphasized how food safety of the future is folded into present preventive, precautious and preparatory modes of securing, and how this involves "tending tensions", dealing with "stretching", and avoiding "tipping points" in the sense of pathogens reaching consumers. MAXIMILIAN MEHNER (Philipps-Universität Marburg) made a convincing argument for the relevance of zombies for epidemic and pandemic preparedness (thus put the reviewer's disinterest in and prejudices towards zombies to shame) with his paper *Zombie survival: preparing for and acting upon imagined epidemics*. Based on analysis of the US-American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) public preparedness program, "Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse" and field work conducted at Germany's first public "Zombie-Survival-Camp," Mehner analyzed images of disease and urban disaster and of the practical acting upon of these. He demonstrated various analogies between people infected from a new pandemic in a simulation setting and zombies in a role play context, and he showed how elements from preparedness manuals inform popular literature on zombies and contrary how zombies work as what he referred to as a visual clue for disease preparedness. The final presentation of this conference was given by SVEN OPITZ (Universität Hamburg), who introduced his latest work on *Regulating epidemic space: the nomos of global circulation*.⁸ Taking as a point of departure David Fidler's diagnosis of SARS as the arrival of "the first Post-Westphalian pathogen," Opitz analyzed how WHO's International

Health Regulations (IHR), as a legal regime designed to prepare for pandemic envisions the globe as a topology of transmission. He discussed how processes of de- and re-territorialization fold into each other in the administration of epidemic contagion, and how this involves "forms of legal world-making." Through his presentation, Opitz showed how the contemporary *nomos* of the earth takes the form of a *nomos* of global circulation that applies its regulatory force to the post-human materialities (infrastructures and objects of mobility) of global microbial traffic.

Summary

Despite the relatively narrow focus of this conference, on the entanglements of urban life and infectious diseases, which offered a program of strongly related and, for most if not all attendees, exceptionally relevant papers, it is hard to summarize the contributions. Complexity, though might serve to connect each one of the presentations. The conference contributions have shown how urban life, infectious disease and their entanglements are about complexities that might be seen as mutually influencing each other; as emphasized by others, infectious diseases are about interactions and intra-actions.⁹

We have heard about the complex entanglements of infrastructure, security, disease and urban life (Donaldson), of disease and biosecurity rationales (Füller), we have heard how biosecurity measures have contributed to transform urban infrastructures and relations to wild and domestic birds (Keck), of the complex entanglements of increased global mobility, diseases and the surveillance thereof (Scheuermann), of pandemics and global health governance (Opitz), of mutual relations between the past, the imaginary and the images of the real future (Mehner), of the entangled complexities of colonial past and current public disease control (Aasgard Jansen) of entanglements of modes of production, ownership exchange and virus management (Porter), and of the tending of complex relations between regulations and its object (Bingham).

We have also been reminded of the relation between the *common* (cold) and the extraordinary (pandemics) (Greenough). In this regard, it is worth mentioning a particular move that several participants had noted through their research, and which was brought up during the discussions: that in rela-

tion to disease governance, prevention has become a matter of preventing spread to new places rather than preventing diseases to evolve in the first place. Thus, we might note a move *from prevention* of something new, *to control* of something that are becoming normal.¹⁰ In relation to this, (re)emerging diseases tend to be about (re)emergence on new places, just as much as, or even rather than, emergence of new diseases. Keeping in mind the entanglements of disease, security perception and (global) governance so thoroughly addressed throughout this conference, realizing this move does not necessarily mean accepting it as an unquestionable and unavoidable reality. Rather, the contributions of this conference demonstrated that the entanglements of urban life and infectious diseases have vital biopolitical implications – and thereby emphasize the pressing need to take disease governance into interdisciplinary and international academic scrutiny.

Furthermore, during this conference it has also become apparent how the entanglements of urban health governance and infectious diseases challenge conventional models for disease governance and public health systems, how they involve altered domains for national and international security, and how they challenge disciplinary boundaries. The well founded presentations offered during these two days shows that substantial contributions are already present. Still, the complex and dynamic nature of societies and diseases, and as this conference has highlighted, their entanglements, demonstrate the pressing need for comprehensive academic attention on disease governance in general and the entanglements of urban life and infectious diseases in particular.

Notes

1. Meike Wolf in her introduction speech, Frankfurt July 24, 2014.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Please refer to HINCHLIFFE & WHATMORE (2006) for further reading.
4. See ALEX M. NADING (2014).
5. A related essay by KECK and related contributions by others is published in the issue of *Limn* titled “Sentinel devices” (KECK & LACOFF 2013, <http://limn.it/issue/03/> (accessed on 29.12.2014).
6. NICK BINGHAM & STEPHANIE LAVAU (2012): biosecurity-borderlands.org (accessed on 11.01.2015).
7. BINGHAM & LAVAU (2012), p. 1590, *emphasis in original*.
8. SVEN OPITZ, 2015 (*forthcoming*).
9. STEVE HINCHLIFFE *et al.* 2012.
10. See also LINDA MADSEN (2015), Grisotty addressed local difference in the perception of a disease as “emerging” or endemic.

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