



EASA Medical Anthropology Europe

Seminar Series 2023–2024

4 YEARS OF COVID-19

Challenges and potentials of anthropological research in the later stages of a global pandemic

dr Paloma Gay y Blasco and dr Simbarashe Nyuke

[December 12, 2 PM CET on Webex](#)

It has been roughly four years since the first cases of Covid-19 were identified, a disease which only a few weeks later was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation. The spread of the novel coronavirus Sars-CoV-2 caused **rapid and severe changes** in the everyday lives of people, from strict mobility restrictions and hygiene regimes to isolation, loss of income and social networks, as well as the death of millions of people across the globe. As research conducted at the time out of necessity and/or lack of alternatives due to loss of access to field sites and research participants as shown, the Covid-19 pandemic was and is **also a social issue**, as it – among other things – exacerbated inequalities, political polarization around questions of regulations and vaccinations, and gendered, racialized and socioeconomic hierarchies.

Yet, although the virus still exists four years later and potential long-term effects of the pandemic are only becoming apparent, many have declared the pandemic to be “over” and public, political as well as academic attentions seem to have turned elsewhere. How does this affect (medical) anthropological research and knowledge on the Covid-19 pandemic? What happens to Covid-19 research which is just now being published or conducted? And what insights can (medical) anthropological research on Covid-19 provide beyond the acute pandemic situation?

In the next Medical Anthropology Europe Seminar we will discuss these questions with Dr. Paloma Gay y Blasco (University of St. Andrews) and Dr. Simbarashe Nyuke (University of Witwatersrand), who conducted research on Covid-19 at different times and in different settings and will share their insights on both challenges and potentials of long-term anthropological perspectives on Covid-19.

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Dr. Paloma Gay y Blasco: I am a social anthropologist, and have worked on Romani issues for most of my career. I am particularly interested in the development of collaborative research and writing methods and in opening up academic texts and knowledge to participant critique. I co-authored *Writing Friendship: a Reciprocal Ethnography*, with my Roma research participant Liria Hernandez, a book where we examine each other's lives. In connection with covid, I have co-edited two volumes with Martin Fotta, from the Czech Academy of Sciences, *Romani Chronicles of Covid-19: Testimonies of Harm and Resilience*, and *Ethnographic Methods in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Research: Lessons from a Time of Crisis*. I also work on gender violence and have a new edited collection coming out on *Gender and Violence in Romani and Traveller Lives*. I am now beginning to work on a new book, on a series of online interviews that I carried out with elderly people in Scotland and Spain during April and May 2020, about their experiences of lockdown.

Dr. Simbarashe Nyuke: I am a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Anthropology of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. I have conducted research both for my Master's and PhD studies on migrants, unaccompanied child migrants, violence, existential fear, religion and urbanism. That work informed my first publication titled, 'Shifting Vulnerabilities: Exploring Experiences of Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Johannesburg, South Africa'. My current work is based on a project funded by the German Volkswagen Foundation titled: *Mobility Regimes of Pandemic Preparedness and Response (MoREPPaR): The Case of COVID-19*. This is in partnership with academics from the Free University, Berlin, Germany; Pole Institute in Goma, DRC, and Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea. My interests in fear, spirituality, and insecurity, and relating these to the policing of health informs my engagement in this project. In this project, I conduct research in South Africa, Johannesburg in a township called Diepsloot. Fear dominated the general experiences of Covid 19 regulations in South Africa which was highlighted by the approaches and responses to dealing with the pandemic. Consequently, the South African case focuses primarily on the centrality of policing of health mediated through fear in understanding the extent to which people submitted themselves to the ideas of Covid 19 regulations including total lockdown.

Moderation by dr Ursula Probst from the Freie Universität Berlin.