

CALL FOR APPLICATION



International Summer School in Medical Anthropology
Methods and Analysis Training for Planetary Care

From Disasters to Planetary Care:

What the August 2017 mudslide in Sierra Leone can teach us
about accountability, postcolonial urban experiences, and
healthy cities in the Anthropocene

Fourah Bay College in Freetown (Sierra Leone)

February 4 – February 14, 2019

Funded by the Volkswagen Foundation "Knowledge for Tomorrow"

Organizers:

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Sylvanus Spencer (Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone)

Susan Erikson (Simon Fraser University, Canada)

David Kananizadeh (Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg)

Confirmed Speakers:

Joe Alie (Fourah Bay College)

Marian Burchardt (Leipzig University)

Michael Guggenheim (Goldsmith College)

Richard Rottenburg (WISER, Johannesburg)

Mariatu Rohde (Social Protection Coordinator of the President's Delivery Team, Sierra Leone)

Almudena Marí-Saéz (RKI, Berlin)

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr (Mayor of Freetown)

AbdouMaliq Simone (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity)

Susan Shepler (American University Washington)

The international summer school “From disasters to planetary care” is concerned with the *August 14 mudslide* disaster that occurred in Freetown in 2017. After the experiences of civil war (1991-2002) and the recent Ebola epidemic (2014-2016), the mudslide is seen by Sierra Leoneans as yet another major national tragedy in which over 1000 fellow citizens died. Unlike the Ebola epidemic, it was a *man-made* disaster resulting from the massive degradation of natural and cultural landscapes in and around Freetown. Sierra Leoneans were not surprised that the mudslide took place, but they were quite surprised at the unprecedented scale of the disaster and they generally agree that it could have been prevented. *How* prevention is to be achieved in postcolonial African cities like Freetown, though, poses what urban planners have called a “wicked problem” (Rittel and Webber 1973), and is the subject of the proposed short course.

The challenge – future prevention of natural disasters – is inextricably tied up with issues of the wider urban contexts. Future prevention will not happen without addressing the interlinked issues of impoverished infrastructure, rapid population growth, land shortage, and environmental destruction. In this respect, the mudslide even urges us to radically rethink taken-for-granted assumptions about the ways disasters, postcolonial urban lifeworlds, and infrastructures hang together. This rethinking furthermore requires an engagement with people inhabiting the city as well as with interdisciplinary scholars of urban studies, public health, and the social sciences.

The summer school suggests that pressing theoretical and practical questions about disasters can be answered by ethnographic evidence. Ethnographic sensibilities and method help us see how inhabiting and living with contradictory urban realities contribute to post-disaster response and care. As Mary Douglas argued, we may not be able to anticipate if anthropogenic transformations of nature, like global warming, will lead to the entire collapse of the planet’s ecosystem or not. The more pressing questions must address “what kind of society can be envisaged that will be able to deliver the care” (Douglas 1992b, 259) *in response to* environmental risks and disasters. Keeping with this proposition, we aim to explore everyday practices of human and non-human becoming during and after disasters to illuminate ideas of human and planetary care.

In taking the mudslide as a case, we want to investigate how practices of precarious becoming are accounted for through the production of scientific evidence. In particular, we will interrogate how scientific accounts of the mudslide disaster have been shaped by methodologically and theoretical divergent modes of producing scientific evidence. Here questions arise like What counts as evidence? How is the credibility of scientific authority constructed? How do ethnographic methodologies and sensibilities illuminate disaster metrics?

We, the organizers of the summer school, are an international group of scholars from universities in Sierra Leone, Canada, and Germany and are members of the LOST research group (<http://lost-research-group.org>). We want to promote collaborative and participatory ethnographic research, bringing together a diverse group of faculty, graduate, and post-graduate students with the aim of fostering international exchange between the collaborating universities. In order to foster participatory ethnographic research, the summer school will take place at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

All costs for travels, accommodation and transportation in Freetown will be covered by the summer school.

Application

We especially invite students pursuing a MA degree or early stage of PhD research from various disciplines (anthropology, history, STS, geography, African studies, political science). Applicants should send a motivation letter (2-3 pages) and a CV to Sung-Joon Park (sung.park@ethnologie.uni-halle.de). Applicants should state why they are interested in the topic, what they expect to learn from the summer school and how the summer school enriches their academic program. The deadline for submissions is **November 15, 2018**. All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the selection process by December 15, 2018.