About Curare Corona Diaries

A Collection of Diaries in the Strict Sense of the Term

On March 18, 2020, the editorial team of *Curare. Journal of Medical Anthropology* launched a call for (auto-) ethnographic Corona Diaries in the strict sense of the term which record what is happening in one's own environment. More than 100 authors from at least 25 different countries participated in the project. The diaries will be published continuously within the next weeks.

We launched the call for the diaries shortly after a pandemic of a coronavirus recognized as novel was declared. We expected a unique opportunity to generate ethnographic material that makes it possible to reconstruct collectively, in retrospect, what was happening right now and what we could and still cannot comprehend at this moment of crisis. The situation in individual countries was and still is developing differently, and countries increasingly closed their national borders, which made it interesting and important to look from a comparative perspective at what was happening in similar and different ways in individual countries.

The retrospective interpretation of what has happened will probably be and already is quite controversial in the public sphere when it comes, among other things, to assessing how this situation was handled and the consequences of crisis management, as well as drawing lessons for the future. This kind of daily ethnographic recording will be all the more important for this discussion. Therefore, we looked for correspondents from different countries who observe their own everyday life and that of others, who follow media coverage, save media documents, and record what is happening. Most important: We looked for records of one own's reactions and those of one's environment on a daily basis and not retrospectively, to ensure that parts of the "indexicality" of the process can be reconstructed later. That

means, we looked for diaries “in the strict sense of the term“ (cf. Bronislaw Malinowski). The authors did not have to be a trained anthropologist. Important for us was the daily or almost daily protocol based on the current state of knowledge, practices, and experience. This protocol did not necessarily have to be long – short and very short notes were also appreciated. They could be descriptions of situations, descriptions of one’s own behaviour and the behaviour of others, notes of conversations, reflections, fragments of thoughts. The diary could be kept like an anthropological field diary and therefore could have the character of a collage and need not but may not only contain texts, but also other media such as pictures, videos, screenshots, drawings, forms etc.

The diaries were supposed to give room for ambivalences, paradoxes, uncertainties, confusion, messiness. We suggested to focus on everyday life, i.e. on ordinary affects (Kathleen Stewart) under extra-ordinary circumstances. As a medical anthropological journal, we were mainly interested in medical aspects of this crisis and their social embeddedness. What ideas about the cause and effect of the Coronavirus are circulating? How do differing groups and environments assess the risk? Are there any worries associated with the pandemic, and if so, which ones? What is the mood of the diary writers and your environment? What are current ideas about how to counter the virus? What types of prevention in the form of behaviour or drugs are recommended, and what are they? Which therapeutic measures are recommended and which are taken? In other words: what are theories of healing on a daily basis? But the diaries should not only focus on expectations and ideas, but also on practical everyday affairs, i.e. hygiene practices, greeting behavior, change of routines, etc.

As medical anthropologists, we were and are of course also intrigued by how the public health and (bio)security measures taken in individual countries, regions and homes affect not only everyday life, but also the possibilities of social, political and collective action more generally. Which novel forms of solidarity have emerged in

various contexts and environments? Which political actions are rendered impossible? Are forms of civil disobedience to security and confinement measures emerging and for which reasons? What are the economic impact of the biosecurity measures, not only on national economies, but also on household and grassroots economies. On which evidence or data or lack thereof are public health measures taken in "your" countries or regions?

And of course, we were interested in the sinister side of events, because they may erupt any day or week in the course of events: rumors, scapegoats, the uncanny side of contagion in blaming and shaming. Diary writers were asked to also write down those things, even if they were feeling an embarrassment for themselves or their community. For example, already early on Chinese people were suspected of spreading the virus, and we didn't expect this to be the end of such false claims. Of course, the idea was not to spread any of these rumors, but to consider them in the protocols, if they occur (at all).
Regarding the media we said that it is not necessary to save all the media coverage. It was rather a matter of paying attention to reports participants encounter, which were pointed out to them and were considered meaningful at the time.
Documentation of the source – for example a URL and the date of access – was not expected to be encyclopedic or striving for completion in any sense, but aimed at documenting personal experiences and observations.

It is primarily a matter of collecting ethnographic material. Some of the authors asked if they can write in their mother tongue because of the intimacy of a diary. This was of course fine and we encouraged this intimacy of expression, but for a publication a translation was necessary, since we decided to publish texts both in English and German.

"Follow the crisis" was the mode we proposed. After all, we are all participants in a historical process that challenges our understanding of participant observation. The idea of the Curare Corona Diaries Project was to write a diary in the strict sense of

the term, and to record what happens in individual understandings of the crisis as it develops on a local (and global) basis. This is about ethnographers and anthropologists and some others documenting the „ongoing accomplishment“ of the crisis or rather crises. Our understanding is, that a blog, or a daily published diary entry, is NOT a diary, because that would mean writing for the public and with and against and within the public, but that a diary (in the strict sense) or a fieldwork diary is an irreplacable genre of experience, observation and reflexion, that we should cherish in its own right, and that we want to give a chance. Apart from this assumption, there were no limits and no rules as to what participants may write.

Before the diaries were published all authors had the opportunity to look back on their diaries and decide what to do with their texts. We proposed the following options: to publish the diaries completely or in extracts, in their own name or anonymously; or to contribute the diaries for subsequent analysis by the Curare Corona editorial team only. Authors were asked to describe themselves and their situation at the time they started the diary. Each author was and is responsible for making all data in their texts anonymous in such a way that all described actors are sufficiently protected or have given their permission. We also refrained from professional language editing, since we wanted to keep the diaries in this original format, that reflects the nature of individual diaries.

Publishing personal diaries, sharing and exposing some of our most private thoughts, feelings, through not yet developed and unfinished arguments, hunches, fears, etc., does also involve some form of bravery. As editorial team, we are very grateful to all participants for their bravery and openness. We thus accepted all diaries for publication, without exception or intervention. This also implies that the responsibility for the texts and used sources rests with the authors.

We would like to thank all authors once again for their participation in this project!

Selected diaries will soon be published in Special Issues of Curare in a focused and

expanded form.

We are also grateful to Daria Ledergerber and Leonie Schäfer for their precious editorial assistance and to Peter Gillessen, Florian Lueke, and Annette Steffny for their technical support and careful work on the website.

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