

Winter Semester 2021/2022

SDAC Guest Lecture Series

Machine Learning to Care: Encoding Mental Health Universalism in Bangalore

Claudia Lang
University of Leipzig
Medical/Psychological Anthropology

Wednesday
26.01.22
6-8pm c.t.



Claudia Lang, (Ph.D., PD, Social and Cultural Anthropology) holds a Heisenberg position at the University of Leipzig and is research associate at the Max-Planck-Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle. Earlier she was an ERC-funded postdoctoral fellow with GLOBHEALTH at the Cermes3 in Paris and held academic positions at the University of Munich, Münster and Leipzig. Her research focuses on health-related transformation processes and their impact on politics, ethics and care practices in globalizing societies. Her regional focus is South Asia. She is currently investigating the reconfiguration of mental health and care in the context of digitization. What new forms of care and human-technology relationships are emerging? Other areas of work include global health; the globalization, translation and experience of psychiatric categories; the reconfiguration of suffering; Ayurvedic psychiatry; community health care; and health and wellbeing in the context of planetary health. She is the author of *Depression in Kerala. Ayurveda and mental health care in the 21st century* (Routledge); and co-author of *Global health for all: Knowledge, Politics, and Practices* (Rutgers forthcoming); and co-author of "The Movement for Global Mental Health: Critical Views from South and Southeast Asia" (Amsterdam University Press).

Mental health and well-being have emerged as issues of concern and targets of intervention in global health. Simultaneously, the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated disruption of everyday life have not only exacerbated the global mental health crisis but also normalized digital mental health technologies. Digital mental health technologies respond to these crises and afford novel ways of knowing, caring for, and controlling individuals and populations. As extensions of psy regimes, they articulate new forms of human-technology relationships. Interventionists and entrepreneurs celebrate them as innovative technologies that bridge a presumed treatment gap, circumvent stigma, and intervene even in cases in which face-to-face interaction fails. Developers display an obvious techno-optimism in their aspirations to promote well-being by caring for users in a dawning digital future, while critics worry about surveillance, control, and technocratic governance. Using the case of an Indian produced mental health app, Claudia Lang discusses some of the multiple situated assumptions designers and programmers make about the contexts or the forms of life in which these 'band-aids' are put to use, as well as some of their actual sociotechnical practices. Claudia Lang also shows that these apps literally encode a situated mental health universalism within these technologies, thus rendering it portable. Digital mental health technologies, Lang argues, act as minimalist forms of care. They tell alternative, maybe smaller stories of thinking about and doing wellbeing in today's world of multiple crises.

This event will be held via zoom.
Please contact Prof. Dr. Dominik Müller to register
(dominik.m.mueller@fau.de).



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