

MA Anthropology Newsletter



Student Project related to new 'Plants and People' Unit. Find out more on page 5.

Hi from the Editor and MA Director!

As the sun get warmer and new leaves and buds burst out from wintry twigs, this newsletter reports on the MA student activities this past winter. These activities have helped develop a foundation in anthropology, on the basis of which they now develop their research projects for the MA dissertation. You can find out about some of the chosen topics and see the breath of methods used, ranging from creative workshops to more traditional ethnographic methods on pages 4-5.

We also present some innovations to the programme, such as a new option unit called 'Plants and People', more information about the Wonderlab, and a new teaching collaboration with Bristol Medical School.

Two students then tell us how they applied anthropological thinking and methods to an organisation in Bristol as part of the optional 'Work Placement' unit.

Last but not least, congratulations to Lola Karpf for winning best dissertation prize in the 23/24 cohort – you can find out more about her research on the Alumni page.

We'd love to hear from any readers, alumni and colleagues, please keep in touch - our contact emails are below. We wish all students well with their upcoming MA research!

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Ongoing activities

BAARS - Bristol Anthropology and Archaeology Research Seminars

Every week during termtime we run the Bristol Anthropology and Archaeology Research Seminar (BAARS) Series at the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Bristol. BAARS take place Wednesdays from 13:00 – 14:30, in G.10 at 43, Woodland Road. For these occasions, we invite international and UK-based colleagues to present their latest research, followed by discussion and a social gathering. The BAARS presentation (image left) is part of Dr Amy Penfield's large research project, *Infracursions* – see more information on the last page of this Newsletter.



12 February 2025
Amy Penfield (University of Bristol) on 'Boom and bust subjectivities in informal gold mining economies'



2 April 2025
Gordon Omenya on 'Resilient Memories, Claim Making and Cultural Heritage Among the Migrant and Stateless Makonde Community in Kenya'



Welcome to the Wonderlab!

This semester we launched our Creative Anthropology space, where staff and students will be co-creating visual and multimedia outputs. The Wonderlab brings together anthropological theory with creative ethnographic practice, offering a space for student to engage with experimental forms of research and representation.

In March MA students used this space for our second Animation Workshop, this time with Ines Ruis Alvarado of the Universidad Científica del Sur. Alvarado is the film director of *Defenders of the Territory: Amazonian Women-Leaders and the Way to Gender Equality*, which was shown as part of one of the BAARS this term.

New Teaching Collaboration with Bristol Medical School

From 25/26 academic year onwards our students will be able to choose the option unit 'Introduction to Medical Anthropology and Global Health' run at the Medical School by Dr Christie Cabral and Prof Helen Lambert (Medical Anthropology) with teaching contributions from our department, such as by Dr Theresia Hofer (Social Anthropology). We look forward to bringing together medical and anthropology students and staff from across the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Law (FASSL) and the Bristol University Medical School and to developing further collaborations! Stay tuned.



Highlights of Current Academic Year 24/25



Field trip to Bath

To mark the end of the first term, MA students visited the Christmas market in Bath, and used this as an opportunity to have a first go at undertaking some basic fieldwork observations. We read Daniel Miller's work about Christmas in Trinidad to gain a sense of comparative context, and used the field trip as an opportunity to explore what an ethnographic investigation of the market might tell us about Christmas here in the UK. After we had explored the market in groups, we gathered in the wonderful Indian Temptation restaurant to discuss ideas, and to enjoy a vegetarian feast.

Work Placement Reports

Our MA students can choose an option unit called the 'Work Placement'. Charlotte and Ciara have chosen this option - here are their reports:

Charlotte Goodwin: For my work placement, I was a Policy and Research Intern at the International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI), at Anglia Ruskin University.

My placement was remote, and consisted of regular meetings to check up on my progress and my own independent work throughout the week. I completed more typical research tasks, such as working towards a literature review by creating an annotated bibliography, and was provided the freedom to develop my own research interests. This has accumulated into a 2,500 word article around extremist groups targeting and taking advantage of autistic individuals in online spaces.

By employing anthropological ideas, I have been able to consider notions around community and kinship that have helped inform my work. My placement has allowed me to develop essential skills that I hope to put to use with my dissertation and future research opportunities.

Ciara Kelly: For my Work Placement I have been volunteering with a local organisation that predominantly focuses on supporting vulnerable women.

Missing Link is the umbrella term for three sub-organisations: Missing Link, who support women with ill mental health and risk of homelessness, Next Link, who provide safe houses and support for those who are victims of domestic abuse, and Safe Link, who work with victims of sexual violence. A trinity of care put in place to deal with worst-case scenarios.

My role at Missing Link is simply 'Reception Volunteer.' On reception, I am the first point of contact for the organisation, so I am responsible for responding to inquiries from both professionals and clients. I am the first voice that they hear when they call that number, so there is a tremendous responsibility to be that voice of both empathy and professionalism in the chaos of the caller's situation. To soothe them into a sense of safety. This role has been a useful entry point into the domain of charitable support. As receptionist, I have interacted with almost every service and outreach programme offered by Missing Link, which has greatly informed my future career trajectory. I have continued volunteering since the completion of my work placement hours, and I am hoping to get work within this organisation once I graduate.

The implication of an anthropological approach has greatly informed my understanding of the third sector, and my role with Missing Link. Through key texts such as *'Give a Man a Fish'* (2015) by James Fergusson, I have developed an understanding of the duality between those providing the support and those receiving, and how the reciprocity of those receiving support is dependent on the methodology of the intervention implemented. Fergusson eloquently demonstrated this in his exploration of interventions in the Global South. Ferguson argues that in order to realistically support those in poverty, organisations should focus primarily on grants and cash transfers. This method of support can be usefully implemented into other interventional organisations, such as Missing Link, whose primary aim is to enable women to recover through their own agency and autonomy.



New Option Unit – Plants and People

Weaving with flax, foraging on Brandon Hill, and identifying barley seeds under the microscope – just some of the practical activities we do in “Plants & People”, a new unit this year. MA students joined 3rd years from across the Department in this truly four-field course, offered by Neil Carrier, Lucy Cramp and Fiona Jordan. We were hugely excited to run the course: in our research, we all study aspects of the relationship between people and plants (and fungi!).

We began with a chilly January scavenger hunt in Royal Fort Garden, designed to help students encounter and become aware of their own “plant blindness”. Themes of sociality, technologies and green spaces allowed us to discuss fungi, fibres, and forests; we roamed RFG in search of medicinal plants, visited Fenswood Farm and the Botanic Gardens, drew the tiny details of

food crops, interviewed the horticultural team who keep the campus blooming, potted up houseplants, and debated “green social prescribing”. P&P has been a terrific opportunity for research-oriented teaching, where we staff have learned from the interests, questions, and engagement of our excellent students.

by Fiona Jordan



Learning to identify and forage for plants on Brandon Hill



Come and see the *Plants & People* display in the Reception Room for more, including photos, weavings, and mystery fibres.

Selection of MA dissertation topics 24/25

Deconstructing Sociality and Class: Marginalisation and Expertise Explored through Autistic University Students from a Working-class Background

Charlotte Goodwin: I am exploring how working-class autistic students at the University of Bristol navigate and cope with social environments and barriers. I utilise the concept of disability expertise, which is the notion that disabled people acquire knowledge specific to their disability and context due to their lived experience, as developed by Cassandra Hartblay (2020). I am also employing a creative methodology, which will hopefully help to unearth new findings about the ways in which these students overcome challenges.

Degrees of Danger: The Everyday Embodiment of Female Students' Perceived Safety in Relation to the Urban Landscape in Bristol

Ciara Kelly: My dissertation investigates how perceptions of safety shape female students' relationships with and navigation of the urban landscape.

I will use ethnographic diary-keeping, photography, and mapping as methodologies to explore female students' everyday experiences of gendered spatiality from a nuanced and visual lens.

Displacement and Belonging: Identity Reconstruction Among the Three Gorges Migrants

Jiahui Li: My dissertation explores how the Three Gorges migrants make sense of home, identity, and community after being relocated to other parts of China. I'm particularly interested in how memories of place and past experiences shape their belonging in the new environment.

Gender Emancipation or Commercialised Empowerment? Women's Drinking and Spatial Choices in Female-Friendly Bars of Urban China

Lanming Zhao: My dissertation examines whether women's drinking practices in female-friendly bars in urban

China serve as resistance to gender inequality or reflect the neoliberal commodification of feminism. Drawing on theories of gender performativity, material culture, and commodified feminism, it explores how these spaces negotiate gendered power dynamics through alcohol choices, spatial design, and consumerist narratives.

Examining the Human Experience of Water Scarcity in Kakamega, Kenya

Raven McNeil: I am leaning Monday for a month in Kenya. I will be based in Kisumu in western Kenya by Lake Victoria from where I will be investigating the impacts of industrialisation, pollution and climate change on water security in the surrounding valleys. Where flower farming and hydropower damming have seen village streams dry up leading to longer fetching journeys and incidence of water being commodified. In this context my research asks, what is the human experience?

How does adventure tourism impact host destinations?

Rhys Davies: My dissertation will focus on the booming adventure tourism industry and how it impacts on host destinations by providing jobs, infrastructure, and resources to local communities. My aim of study is to determine how sustainable practices are implemented by travel providers to benefit host destinations. The main research question is how (through anthropological research) can adventure travel operators combine life affirming experiences for guests, while simultaneously enhance the productivity and future of the communities affected by hosting tourists?

University of Bristol AI Policy and Student AI Use

Gabriel Gatewood-Wolfe: How is AI policy in the university of Bristol being enacted by students? I plan to interview students about how they use AI in their studies as ways to examine AI policy from the bottom up.

Current Opportunities for MA Students

Call for Blog Posts - Bristol Anthropology and Archaeology Reflects!

This blog is a space for all members of the University of Bristol Anthropology and Archaeology community to reflect and create dialogue about our discipline, research, and fieldwork. Here you will learn about the various projects PhDs, master's students, and undergrads are working on, discussing, and applying. Posts are written primarily by students, with guest posts by staff, alumni, and members of the wider Bristol community: <https://antharchreflect.blogs.bristol.ac.uk>

If you are interested in writing a piece yourself, or would like to get in contact with a particular contributor, please get in touch via the [contact page on the Blog](#) or by reaching out to Rae Hackler, PhD student in Anthropology at: rae.hackler@bristol.ac.uk

Bristol Anthropology and Archaeology Reflects

The student research and critical engagement blog for the University of Bristol Department of Anthropology and Archaeology



APPLY NOW FOR THE GILLIAN PILLER TRAVEL BURSARY 2024-2025 FOR MA ANTHROPOLOGY STUDENTS! Deadline: Thursday 17th April 2025. Email the MA dissertation director: theresia.hofer@bristol.ac.uk

RAI FILM FESTIVAL 2025



RAI FILM FESTIVAL is looking for volunteers for the upcoming festival, taking place from 11 to 15 June 2025 at the Watershed and Arnolfini in Bristol.

The RAI FILM Festival is a biennial international event celebrating the best in documentary filmmaking from around the globe. Established in 1985 by the Royal Anthropological Institute, the RAI FILM Festival showcases new work from academic anthropologists and related disciplines from all levels of experience from students to professionals. It looks for fearless films that ask difficult questions, build bridges, seek redress and promote social justice and dialogue.

As a festival volunteer, you will gain hands-on experience in event coordination, guest liaison, technical support, and social media promotion. You will also have the chance to network with filmmakers and industry professionals while contributing to one of the world's leading anthropological film festivals. To apply, please email us to get the application form or check the website <https://raifilm.org.uk/>. Please send filled in application form and your CV via email to education@therai.org.uk.

Staff Projects and News



Amy Penfield and Team - The 'Infracursions' Project

Illegal incursions — specifically illegal land grabbing, logging, and mining—play a major role in the Amazon's destruction, fragmenting habitats and accelerating deforestation. Even though these activities take place on the small scale, they are interconnected across large geographic and social spaces, meaning their cumulative effects have devastating consequences.

Based on data from the Amazon rainforests of Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil *Infracursions* investigates these incursion economies that invade remote frontiers and result in environmental degradation. The project's scope is both broad and interdisciplinary, integrating anthropology, environmental science, and social policy to provide a holistic view of how these incursions thrive. By studying the social, legal, technical, and ecological aspects of these extractive activities, *Infracursions* will shed light on how informal networks, local expertise, and 'fluid infrastructures'—such as unofficial transport systems, resource smuggling, and improvised utilities—keep these economies running, even in remote and often hostile environments.

Importantly, *Infracursions* shifts the lens of the analysis to the perspectives and motivations of those involved in informal extractive economies, a view that is often overlooked in traditional studies on environmental degradation. Our team aims to reframe how we understand these illicit operations, shifting the narratives away from villains and destroyers to a focus on the hidden infrastructures that allow them to thrive beyond state oversight.

You can find out more about the project check: <https://infracursions.org>

Trauma-informed Anthropology - Special issue Vol. 13 No. 2 of *Teaching Anthropology Journal*, edited by Dr. William Tantam

This Special Issue seeks to open up anthropological conversations around trauma. It encourages open dialogue and sharing of practices and strategies within the discipline, but also outside of it. These are conversations anthropology needs to be having between students, colleagues, departments, and institutions. While many will be exploring and navigating these issues in siloes, we hope the Special Issue will offer a catalyst for more open dialogue — diminishing the shame of those who are struggling to work through trauma, and sharing tools to facilitate supportive and accessible academic practices. We have consistently explored related issues of accessible academic engagement and dissemination in our MA Research Methods unit, as well as in related conversations in different units on the MA program, and in discussions around BAARS presentations.

The articles in this special issue deal with a range of different forms of trauma, different sets of participants and audiences, and different foci. Some of the articles concentrate more specifically on research and the challenges of supporting those who have lived through trauma to engage with research. These articles also engage with understandings of secondary trauma and vicarious traumatisation: the impacts of working with trauma on the researcher themselves (Borghi; Procter, Spector and Freed; Kotsira). A second theme that emerges is teaching about trauma (Buck; Weston; Brown; Tantam). These contributions capture the reflections of those teaching about violence and challenging topics, and think through the techniques they deploy to support student learning and

access. A final theme concerns trauma, decolonization, and intergenerational trauma (Naidoo and Shaik; May and Santos). These articles offer a close consideration of the tensions between Western epidemiological paradigms of trauma and Western knowledge systems and different approaches to understanding pain, healing, and learning. Offering different lenses of African Indigenous Knowledge Practices and culture-based interpretations of trauma and response goes further to recognize and meet the needs of those the anthropologists are working with.

Poignantly, the submission from Saleh on 'Teaching with the window open' in Lebanon draws together these different discussions, as she reflects on how to support student learning while also in the midst of considerable cultural harm and distress. Unfortunately the timing of this issue could not be a clearer example of the need for these conversations if we are to take seriously as anthropologists our responsibility to engage with contemporary worlds. It can be difficult to reconcile the lived complexity of challenging experiences alongside providing a pedagogic and intellectual guide for our students. As Saleh writes in her article in the special issue,

"Does all this mean we should let anthropology burn [...]? If I have learnt anything from fires, it is that not everything gets burnt away. In the inevitable salvaging process that ensues, recuperation will always be a highly political act. What we try to keep alive is what we hope to bring to the future." (Saleh)

Open Access: https://www.teachinganthropology.org/ojs/index.php/teach_anth/issue/view/77

‘Ritual Therapy: The Diverse Experiences of Death Café Attendees in Bristol, London and Online’ – by Lola Karpf

In my MA dissertation I was trying to make sense of the motivations and experiences of people who go to Death Cafés – pop-up spaces where strangers come together to talk about death over food and drink. I wanted to explore how their attendance was shaped, if at all, by their bodies and emotions.

There has been some previous research on this topic, largely divided into studies conducted for therapeutic/clinical purposes, and studies to further anthropological and sociological knowledge about Death Cafés. Many of these studies suggest that people are mostly coming together in these spaces in search of connection. Although my research confirmed this, it also found certain ritualistic and bodily practices enacted by the Death Café facilitator and attendees to make sense of death. I used a combination of theories – embodiment and ‘the death system’ (Kastenbaum, 1970) – to help shed light on the lived experience of my participants, whilst also showing how their attitudes were shaped by broader cultural and social processes.

The research methods I carried out were participant observation, at an online Death Café and one in Bristol, and semi-structured interviews with twelve Death Café attendees, which took place online and around Bristol and London. As someone who’s been going to Death Cafés myself for many years, I also shared my own reflections throughout the study and considered my positionality.

I discovered that while Death Café experiences are indeed complex, people tend to seek out these spaces for both ritualistic and therapeutic purposes. On the one hand, people go to Death Cafés to ritualise and memorialise death and grief, and this is done in lots of different ways, like sharing food, drink and space with one another. On the other hand, individuals emphasised to me how Death Cafés benefited their mental health and acted as a support group. The role played by the facilitator and the ability to tell one’s story at a Death Café were also really important features. These experiences varied significantly when playing out online, as opposed to in-person.

My study aimed to bridge the gap between Death Cafés viewed exclusively in either therapeutic or anthropological terms. It tried to show, through my conception of ‘ritual therapy’, how rituals and therapy can intersect for attendees at Death Cafés. The research may also offer useful insights for clinical practice regarding palliative care and better communication around death and grief.

We are happy to announce the winner of the Best Dissertation prize 23/24: Lola Karpf for her dissertation on ‘Ritual Therapy: The Diverse Experiences of Death Café Attendees in Bristol, London and online’ - Congratulations Lola!

Previous Awardees of the Best MA Anthropology Dissertation Prize:

19/20

Alexander Kopsch

20/21

Sebastian Fagan

21/22

Kieran Curtis,
Madlen Williams

22/23

Alec Bird

23/24

Lola Karpf

