

Preface

The summer of 2023 will mark Helene Basu's final teaching term at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, where she has been Professor of Social Anthropology since 2006. In that time, she has guided ranks of aspiring anthropologists out of the classroom and into the field, inspiring them at every turn with an insatiable inquisitiveness. As a gesture of gratitude, we, a group of her former and current students, present her with this volume of essays. Like the cultural practices Basu spent much of her academic career carefully observing and analysing, the process of assembling this volume has been marked by constant transformation, its various texts proceeding through several liminal stages before reaching its present form. We are very grateful to the authors, for their patience and for their contributions, without which this volume would not have been possible.

Basu's academic and research interests have seen her contribute towards a diverse range of anthropological fields, such as practices of kinship, ritual, health, media, religion and politics. Her theoretical frameworks and analyses often seek to transcend established dichotomies (e.g., categories of the "modern" and the "traditional"), while her methodological approach engages relationships, ideas and practices at the transnational level and through their symbolic configurations across space and time. Throughout her work, she has given particular attention to the role of practices and values as well as the intricacies of power and the embodied nature of culture. Her interests exceed regional and thematic confines, revealing a scholarly mind whose scope and vision is grounded in anthropological practice and methodological musings. In the course of her career, she has established and maintained great rapport with distinguished scholars as well as her colleagues, students and research partners, some of whom have become life-long companions.

Ever since Basu took up her professorship at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Münster, Germany, she has directed her students' attention to the notion of "practice". More than a conceptual lens providing analysts with theoretical insights into the nature of embodiment, agency and/or actor-networks, "practice", for Basu, is primarily an invitation to attend to what people actually *do*, before investigating what their practices *mean* or how they are socio-culturally structured. Guided and motivated by these insights, her students have been encouraged to more richly explore experiences, performances,

negotiations, and transformations of practices. What is more, the practice theory elaborated by Basu turned students' attention to their own practices as researchers, lecturers and contesters of knowledge in a self-reflective way that questions their entanglements with the "field". As a result, Basu's students learned to not only describe practices as socio-culturally given but to develop a sensibility towards the transformative potentials of practices.

Among our generation of anthropologists – the last with a Magister Artium degree in the pre-Bologna period – fieldwork practices as much as post-fieldwork analyses of "data" (what Basu preferred to call "fieldwork material") was rarely discussed in the seminar room. After all, fieldwork itself was hardly part of the curriculum. Following the required coursework on the operationalization of research questions, a student's future – in terms of research – was open and fieldwork remained as uncharted and as mythical as the work up of empirical material and the ultimate write up phase. Apparently, success or failure in the field was left up to genius, chance or tenacity and the "lonely hero syndrome characteristic of the classic open-ended fieldwork" (Bundgaard & Rubow 2014: 38) was still widespread. The reflection and demystification of the fieldwork process had yet to take roots in the everyday practices of teaching.

In September 2008, a group of four MA students (Pablo Holwitt, Annika Strauss, Nadezhda Stoyanova, Agnieszka Anczykowska) and a PhD candidate (Julia Koch) set out to Bombay/Mumbai in India. The preparations for the trip entailed intensive Hindi courses with Basant Srivastav and topical seminars with Basu herself. Mumbai's Tata Institute of Social Sciences, with whom Basu had been collaborating, became something like a base camp in the megacity. The group would occasionally take a break from the field to share and process experiences.

Some of her students would accompany Basu for brief stints in the field: these experiences served as "educational shocks", preparing the students for their own fieldwork. Koch, for example, was taken to a Sidi village adjacent to the shrine of Bava Gor. To this day, she still recalls the physical manifestations of her excitement as she stood at the saint's grave squeezed in a crowd in the sweltering heat. As the rhythm of the drums sped up, people fell into a state of trance and then began to speak in tongues. Observing Sidi children moving rather undisturbed through the unfolding scene around her, Koch was confronted by her own outsidership as well as the apparent normality of the situation for the local participants.

In December 2012, Mrinal Pande accompanied Basu to the shrine of Mira Datar before proceeding to the site of her own doctoral fieldwork in Mahuva, Gujarat. When she now recalls her emotional experiences, she recognizes that the timing and intensity of the stimuli in the field of Mira Datar presented a sense of dissonance and altered perception of the lifeworlds she was routinised into. Basu addressed Pande's reactions with the intellectual vigour that empirical work demands: the "resistance, internalization and confirmation" were all consequences of participatory research. Emboldened from anxiety to acceptance, the whole gamut of evoked emotions and experiences were set down and reported, later to be reflected on: a process that in turn would also be systematically documented.

When Basu facilitated an "Ethnopschoanalytic Deutungswerkstatt" (see Nadig et al. 2009) and invited Maya Nadig to a collaborative Workshop in order to share stories "off the record", she succeeded in opening up a reflexive space full of new possibilities for students and young scholars. In so doing, Basu not only introduced new perspectives into the classroom, but she also acknowledged the corporeality of fieldwork, with its transformative emotional and intellectual experiences. Helmar Kurz and Annika Strauss, who participated in the workshop as students, adopted the reflexive approach and applied it in the field and later in the classroom when they themselves started to teach (Strauss 2015, 2017; Kurz 2019, 2022).

Basu illustrated that interdisciplinary collaboration as well as the inclusion of practitioners in research and tutorial settings can be a fruitful, albeit at times communication- and energy-intensive endeavor. Her students grew accustomed to the stream of invited psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, lawyers and filmmakers, who gave lectures or workshops in the department. Often, Basu would play the part of the hostess and open her home in Gremmendorf to the visiting speakers. During the summer term, students and colleagues were invited to parties in her garden. With the arrival of the winter term and the cold, classroom discussions continued in front of her fireplace while sipping on a glass or two of wine. Uncountable anecdotes from fieldwork and conferences were shared in these informal settings. In fact, it has been whispered in the corridors of the department that this or that student, inspired by these scholarly but never impersonal discussions, was able to overcome their writer's block.

Basu's anthropological inquiries range across the fields of religion, politics, mental health, emotion, migration and have resulted in many fruitful collaborations such as a six-volume encyclopedia on Hinduism, award-winning ethnographic films, multiple highly-regarded books and articles. As a principal investigator of the project "Madness and Mental Health in India: Patients between sacred/healing places and psychiatry" – part of an interdisciplinary and nationally-funded "Clusters of Excellence" research effort entitled "Religion and Politics in Pre-Modern and Modern Cultures", Basu addressed religious pluralism, mental health and migration in India (Koch 2016, Basu 2017, Pande 2017, Pande 2020). In addition to cooperating with Göttingen's Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, she also led the collaborative research project "Contemporary Indian Cultures and Economies - Interdisciplinary Discourses in Cooperation" with Mumbai's Tata Institute of Social Sciences (A New Passage to India, DAAD exchange program). Most recently, Basu participated in the project "Cultures of Decision-Making" organized by the Collaborative Research Center (SFB) 1150. Within the scope of this interdisciplinary research project, she focused on mediality and cultural narratives of marriage in India as decision-making situations, examining both lived practice as well as mass media representations (Basu 2019, Basu & Pande 2021). Basu's films are communicative and self-referential, going beyond descriptions of the outcome of conducted research. They are a practice of research in themselves. Basu institutionalized her envisaged approach in the master's program Visual Anthropology, Media and Documentary Practices at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (Basu 2009b, 2012, 2018, Basu et al. 2018).

We are grateful to Helene Basu for her tireless mentorship and the intellectual "journeys and dwellings" she guided us through. We would not be what we are today without the learning experiences she facilitated in the classroom and accompanied before, during and after our respective fieldworks. Thank you.

Julia Koch
Helmar Kurz
Mrinal Pande
Annika Strauss

Prologue

Filming Culture in the Digital Age. Helene Basu's Film "Drugs and Prayers" on Ritual Healing and Psychiatry in North India

Frank Heidemann

In the early 1990s, Helene and I had our offices next to each other at the Institute of Ethnology at the Free University of Berlin. The institute had state-of-the-art visual equipment, including a separate room in the basement for VHS video technology. Films were screened with a 16-mm projector in the classrooms and videos were watched on TV screens. We carried the overhead transparencies, the slides and the folder with our notes under one arm and the slide projector under the other from our offices on the first floor down to the seminar room in the basement. I still remember the almost daily excitement when the slide projector went missing. Just before class, we would enter the secretary's office where the projector was kept on a shelf - at least in theory. When the shelf was empty, the hunt for the urgently needed device began. Our colleague in the front office would leave her burning cigarette in the ashtray on the desk, grab her large bunch of keys, walk down the corridor, open the offices and, after a quick glance, hurry to the next door. She would almost always manage to remember the last person who had used it, but sometimes it took a while to find what was in those days an indispensable piece of equipment.

Today, most students know slide projectors from old family photos or films from the past. Tube TVs, overhead projectors, large rolled-up maps and VHS cassettes have also had their day. Libraries have DVD collections, but they are hardly used because the latest computers no longer have a built-in optical drive. Technology has changed dramatically. Mobile phones are used to watch videos (at least on trains and planes) and, no less importantly, can produce images and videos of amazingly high quality. Small and technically advanced video cameras are available in universities or are owned privately. It is therefore not surprising that ethnologists working in the field store their own audiovisual material on their computers. For me, photography nowadays feels fundamentally different than it did in the 1980s, when we had to wait for long periods (even up

to a year during fieldwork) before the 35 mm negative film rolls from our still cameras and 16 mm film rolls could finally be sent to be developed. With the elimination of the time gap that separates shooting and viewing, a kind of suspense inherent in analogue photography has also disappeared. In the field of audio-visual documentation and communication, time and space have contracted. Sound-images are stored in micro-chips and lead an unbound social life.

Despite new audiovisual technologies and the ubiquity of digital images in research, teaching, publications, presentations and exhibitions, anthropology remains to this day what Margaret Mead critically labeled "A Discipline of Words" (1980: 3). In the recent decades, we can observe an increasing recognition of visual anthropology at major anthropological conferences as well as in the film review sections of some of the leading journals. But it still holds true what David MacDougall wrote a quarter of a century ago: Anthropology "has no lack of interest in the visual; its problem has always been what to do with it." (1997: 276). Images are part of our academic discourse, but not read with the same commitment and accuracy as texts. In electronically stored ethnographic field materials, visual data takes on considerable significance and contributes implicitly to the generation of ideas and theories. Ethnographic films are produced by numerous doctoral and post-doctoral fellows. The selection committees of ethnographic film festivals are confronted with an ever-growing number of submissions and the juries lack the same thing as the filmmakers: enough time to complete the task responsibly. In my student days, the rule of thumb for the editing process was an entire day's work for one minute of finished film. At the time, however, there were two or three minutes of source material for every minute of finished film. Today, the ratio is often 1:50 or even more, and you should accordingly plan more time for the editing process.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Helene made video recordings in Gujarat, which she used as visual field notes for teaching and public lectures. She realized the enormous value of her recordings and took the matter seriously. In Berlin, she met Angelika Schlöndorf, who was working on editing analogue films. They started working with the moving images and edited the first short clips. Andreas Samland with his background in digital editing joined them. Helene was fascinated by the impact of the short videos and decided to continue exploring ethnographic film-making. In 2007, she began her collaboration with Philipp Offermann as cameraman. In 2008 they filmed for two weeks at a Sufi shrine in Gujarat, famous for healing possession illnesses and madness induced

by spirits. At this shrine, a collaborative mental health project aiming at bringing together psychiatric and ritual healing practices had recently started (Basu 2014).

“Drugs and Prayers: Indian Psychiatry in the Realm of Saints” is the title of Helene’s first film (camera: Basu and Offermann; editing: Schlöndorf, Samland, and Basu; 55 minutes, 2009). It opens with a short text introducing the context: “In Gujarat, psychiatrists and social workers have initiated a new program for community care at a religious healing site...”. The work of the NGO and the content of the film is about “davā”, psychiatric care, and “duā”, prayers or rituals. The first scenes offer an anarchic order of movements, voices and sounds – a multi-sensory firework. Then, for almost nine minutes the camera turns to a conversation between a psychiatrist, a young woman suffering from possession and her brother-in-law, who looks after her. The dialogues are translated into English and are easy to read in the subtitles. She says: “Taking medicine is good, but the saints also help.” The psychiatrist asks, what helps more, and she answers: “Prayers! Drugs help, prayers help, too.” And later, her brother-in-law: “If medicine is needed it will help. If praying is needed it will help.” The film follows Dr. Ajay Chauhan, the superintendent of Medical Hospital Ahmadabad and initiator of the Davā & Duā Program, to his office, where he speaks with Sayad Chotu Miyan, the guardian of the Sayyid Ali Mira Data shrine. Both agree: “Acting wildly, beating, abusing, suicide attempts, incessant talking” ... such a person “needs medicine, needs sleep, food and energy.”

A few minutes later, the audience can listen to Sayed Vajid Ali, the chairman of the Mira Datar Dargah Trust. He explains his clients’ problems. Ghosts and evil spirits attack them. They are objects of black magic. Priests, however, can offer help. “Those who are possessed by evil spirits go into their trances. It goes on for hours, days or months. Those who are possessed are different from the mentally ill,” Ali argues. Later, a ride on a motorcycle, with filmmaker visible in the rear-view mirror, takes us to the shrine of Rasti Ma, the birth mother of the Sufi saint. A young Hindu woman explains how the evil spirit sits in her body, how Rasti Ma attacks the spirit and is going to heal her. She is an object of black magic. The medical expert offers a different interpretation: “She suffers from somatization and depression.” A graphic example of multiple ontologies is presented at the end of the film. Patients are bathing in a pool of muddy water. A large board announces “that this gutter is dangerous to health as it is filled with dirty water.” A group of people take full-body baths, and rest with the mud on

their skin in the sun. However, in an ironic twist, the viewers, learn that patients were advised to take a bath: “Impure spirits are punished in the dirty water”.

Before *Drugs and Prayers* was selected for the RAI International Film Festival in London in 2011, Stephan Eisenhofer and I had a long discussion about the film. We did not hesitate to screen it at the Munich Ethnographic Film Festival in 2010, because the film documents long-term ethnographic fieldwork with a clear focus on an anthropological sub-discipline, medical anthropology, and is a wonderful introduction to an ethnographic site and its everyday interactions. The viewer does not feel like an outsider, observing events at a distance, but as a visitor on-site, present at the temple, the shrines, the psychiatric outpatient clinics. At first, the scenes of possession appear as unusual or even extremely strange actions, but after listening to the protagonists for a longer period of time, the actions of possession lose their exotic quality. The possessed/patients sit and talk, describe their suffering and explain how it all came about. Hidden ontologies emerge on the horizon of the spoken words. The psychiatrists ask the right questions and leave room for open dialogue. They appear as sympathetic as the patients. The filmmaker establishes an equidistance between *davā* and *duā*. Two incompatible views of one and the same phenomenon coexist: not in separate worlds, but in the same frame captured by the camera. One of the film's great achievements is to show what appears to be contradictory and yet what is coexisting peacefully.

Drugs and Prayers is the anthropologist's representation of the devotees' and psychiatrists' voices. Often, a narration of a narration suffers from an enormous loss of quality through its reduction to the written form. The film, however, saves the mimic expression, the social and physical proximity of the speakers and listeners, and introduces the location at the same time, the impressive soundscape and the colorful background of the shrine. After decades, it will be interesting to see how the devotees were dressed and to hear how a Bengali person spoke Hindi. Helene's and Offermann's camerawork is not an intervention or provocation but the work of a modest observer. This consistent understated style creates a humble poetic of cultural plurality. Pluralism is not an argument, but a visible form of interaction.

The documentary is the work of an experienced anthropologist, and not of trained filmmaker. Her film is not informed by a theory of narration, an idea of a hero, an anti-hero, transformation of individual characters etc. I consider her film to be unorthodox insofar as it neither follows conventional scripts or story lines

nor overemphasizes film effects. It is the work of an anthropologist, who writes and films. The film seems descriptive, but this is not the case. A number of crucial themes in the anthropological debate on illness, on medical pluralism and mixed religious practices (Hindu/Muslim) that converge in healing are taken up, often implicitly. The art of this kind of film-making is: if you know the theory, you can find it in the film - if you don't know the theory, you can see it as a thick description. What is more, I could not detect any artificial light in the film; the microphone appeared on the screen in a few scenes; and the sound was only slightly (or not at all) enhanced in post-production. Technically, it is a minimalist film, in many respects unfiltered and always honest. The film has reached a different audience than Basu's anthropological readership. It was shown in educational institutions and discussed by psychologists and psychotherapists. Moreover, the film is a prime example of documenting cultural plurality in a distant place. The idea of a monolithic cultural other cannot be sustained after watching this documentary.

Another aspect that impressed Eisenhofer and me was the dialogue between the two sides in the aforementioned nine-minute scene of Drugs and Prayers. It was not instigated for the camera, it just happened. Obviously, the location of the take was also interesting for bystanders: young people positioned themselves in the background of the scene. They too are actors, who inscribe themselves in the film with poses and facial expressions. These bystanders are not just onlookers but co-producers of an atmosphere that fills the space. The eye of the camera is impartial and all-encompassing. The architecturally and ritually designed environment in addition to the ambient soundscape produced by those present contribute to the totality that allows the viewer to read the film. The balance between all possible points of view reaches far beyond the duality of *daṅ* and *duā* and encompasses the surrounding mood, which actors experienced at the moment of being filmed. The question of eye level is thus far more than a calculated balance between ritualist and psychiatrists but rather a fundamental stance of doing fieldwork. A plurality of meanings and values emerges onto the screen. When Helene confines herself to her fieldwork and does not dominate the room with her explicit questions, when she is there just as a seriously interested and patient listener, then the magic of digital technology emerges as a quiescent and unexcited participation. With digital photography and light-weight video cameras a new quality has emerged.

Christopher Pinney has shown in an essay with the programmatic title "The parallel histories of anthropology and photography" (1992) that in the nineteenth century the spirit of positivism and the search for objective visual processes emerged simultaneously. Without intending to suggest a causal connection here, however, I would like to mention that the history of anthropology in the twentieth century, with its search first for functions, then for structures, processes and finally for multi-sensory dimensions of cultural expression was also accompanied by a technological process that produced multimodal forms of representation beyond "writing culture". The hardware of photography and videography, which became handheld and easy to operate, supports a sensory ethnology that documents more than the ethnographer captures analytically. The small cameras record beyond the intention of the filmmakers. They have the potential of a dense description beyond textual representations. The combination of moving pictures and recorded sound can capture much of the space that words might otherwise obscure.

In the past decade, Helene has released three more films (see filmography). In these years, audiovisual distribution technology has offered even more possibilities in the field of documentation and distribution. Films can be stored on platforms and repositories and streamed independent of time and space. Power Point presentations are enriched by video clips as excerpts from a growing corpus of films. Photos and soundtracks lend themselves to impressive slide shows in classrooms and exhibitions. Images are not just good to look at, they are good to be discussed. More importantly, anthropological sub-disciplines that focus on sensory perception are turning to multimodal approaches. In an age of more-than-human approaches, our "discipline of words" (Mead 1980) is changing to a more-than-textual anthropology. Helene's profound films are an important contribution to this unstoppable process and unquestionably an integral part of her groundbreaking research.

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Filmography

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Ute Luig studied German Literature, Geography and Social Anthropology in Cologne, Freiburg and Kampala. After her doctorate on migrant workers in Kampala (1972) she became assistant professor at the Universities of Heidelberg and Mainz where she habilitated about the precolonial history of the Baule in Ivory Coast. She joined the Free University in Berlin as Full Professor from 1990 to 2010. Her main interests are gender studies, political anthropology, colonialism as well as spirit possession. She did long-term fieldwork in Uganda, Ivory Coast, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and after her retirement in Cambodia.

Angelika Malinar studied Indology and Philosophy at the University of Tuebingen where she gained her PhD. She held positions at the University of Tuebingen, Free University Berlin, and University of London (SOAS). Since 2009 she is Professor of Indology at the University of Zurich. Key areas of her research are epic and puranic literature, the interplay between literary forms and intellectual discourse in classical and modern Indian literature and philosophy, and the formation and institutionalization of Hindu religious traditions in the past and present. Her numerous publications include *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, *Time in India: Concepts and Practices* (editor), and the multi-volume *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (co-editor).

Jos Platenkamp studied social anthropology at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, and at the École des Hautes Études, Paris. He obtained his PhD in Leiden in 1988 with a dissertation on the socio-cosmological and ritual system of Tobelo society in Indonesia. He taught social anthropology and Indonesian Studies in Leiden from 1986 to 1993 when he was appointed professor at Münster University, Germany. There he taught social anthropology and Southeast Asian, religious and ritual studies until his retirement in 2017. He conducted fieldwork in Northeast Scotland (1976), the North Moluccas (1979, 1980, 1982),

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