EDITOR'S NOTES: TENSE INTERACTIONS IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

This thematic issue sheds light on navigations of otherness and relations of mistrust during times of uncertainty and insecurity. These often-tense interactions take many shapes and occur within, as well as across, boundaries set in terms of ethnicity, religion, kinship, gender, political ideology, citizenship status, health risk, and contagion. As the articles in this issue demonstrate, during such uncertain times, people search for ways to negotiate tensions surrounding the relationship between sameness and otherness (Bauman 2001). This involves navigating various challenges, especially when crossing borders or symbolic boundaries, while carefully following the processes involved in creating and maintaining them. Additionally, individuals may have to face inequalities, structural violence, xenophobia, and rising extremism. Furthermore, they may need to negotiate issues of mistrust and risk in contexts of contagion, illness, and (mis)information. And, sadly, many people are forced to navigate the effects of critical events (Das 1995) on their everyday life and social relationships in contexts of conflict and crisis.

In their edited volume *A World of Insecurity: Anthropological Perspectives on Human Security* (2010), Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Ellen Bal, and Oscar Salemink explore the concept of human security, highlighting, through rich ethnographic data, how people around the globe strive to navigate various experiences of insecurity – whether political, economic, environmental, existential, or physical – and to create or maintain a sense of safety, however fragile it may be. Reflecting on the recent socio-political developments and sense of risk, uncertainty, and mistrust that permeate everyday life, in light of the pandemic and of ongoing conflicts, we invited our authors to explore strategies that people employ to negotiate such tense and often risky interactions – whether momentary, everyday, or extraordinary – that cross the boundary between the public and the private, as well as the everyday realities of these adverse and uncertain times from a range of ethnographic urban contexts.

This thematic issue brings together six authors – respectively from the United States, France, Slovakia, Poland, India, and the United Kingdom – who examine various forms of such tense interactions and ways that people negotiate their sense of (in)security during times of heightened uncertainty. Susan Rasmussen invites us to explore attitudes and practices surrounding masking

(or not) in coping with the Covid-19 pandemic from the perspective of the Tuareg in Niger and Texans in the United States, while highlighting the politicization of face coverings and issues of danger, pollution, and contagion. Camilla Salvatore takes us on an investigation of how stereotypes concerning Bulgarian Roma were employed within the official discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic to legitimize antigypsyism, emphasizing their "otherness" and contributing to their further isolation – both physical and social. Viktória Kováčová examines alternative spirituality within a community in the High Tatras mountains of central Slovakia, and how its members negotiated issues of risk and contagion during the pandemic. Likewise exploring different types of uncertainties and insecurities, Marta Kluszczyńska's article describes the everyday lives of young Sahrawi migrants living in Spain and the choices and decisions they make to navigate the constant sense of uncertainty and temporariness, while trying to support their families. Sruti Manjula Devaprakash then takes us on a journey examining three texts written by authors who came to experience insecurity and othering for their writing about their respective communities, while bringing to light issues of caste, social inequalities, and politics of kinship.

Accompanying these articles is also a photographic essay by Tami Dončić which explores everyday negotiations of conflict and critical events, and their repercussions, among the young adults in Smederevo, Serbia, showing the effects of such negotiations on their lives and relationships in light of socio-political changes and their day-to-day realities. Lastly, there is a report from the workshop on studying religion in central-eastern Europe, funded by the Visegrad Fund, that took place at the Comenius University in Bratislava earlier this year, written by Viktória Kováčová.

As a guest editor of this thematic issue, I would like to thank everyone involved – the authors, reviewers, our language editor, members of the Editorial Board, and the journal's staff – who contributed in one way or another to this issue. My special thanks go to the executive editor, Dr. Oldřich Poděbradský, who embarked on the editing journey with me. I would like to also invite you, our dear readers, to explore the ethnographic material and ideas presented in this issue and ponder how these various uncertainties and insecurities permeate our everyday lives and affect how we think about the past, the present, and the possible future.

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