



Fwd: HealthXCross Newsletter 2024-02

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NEWS

We are almost halfway into the HealthXCross project! We have all been busy bringing our data back from our fieldworks and writing our first papers. The PI [Roberta Raffaetà](#) has been carrying out fieldwork in California and Hawaii. [Lucilla Barchetta](#) has carried on the process of writing. [Victor Secco](#) has recently completed his PhD with a thesis titled "Microbiology and rituals in the waters of the Ganges: The matter of life and death" at the University of Manchester, and is now carrying out a study in a European research institution focused on the microbiome. [Marta Scaglioni](#) has carried out field research in North Africa, inquiring how microbiome research is emerging thanks to European fundings. [Valentina Marcheselli](#) is ready to go back to her fieldwork in the United States, where she is looking at the study of metabolic processes as a window into the entanglement of microbes and environments across different scales and temporalities. [Valeria Burgio](#) is continuing her investigations on the forms of visualization of the microbiome and exploring art and design practices and museum discourses on the microbes. During the Summer, we also hosted our first trainee, Francesco Prospero, a Master student in Philosophy and History of Science and Technology at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Beyond helping us with communication management, he took part in our seminars and meetings; in particular, he gave a presentation on the relationships between ethnography and semiotic analysis.

Together with Valeria Burgio they explored the use of semiotic terms and methodology in Eduardo Kohn's "How Forests Think. Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human" (University of California Press, 2013). Francesco's final master thesis was titled: "Proposals towards an ecosophy of health". We spent the Autumn meeting in presence in Venice and attending seminars and conferences, while analysing our data. We are now back to online work, as we prepare to spread again across the globe to engage in a new round of fieldwork.

Pic: Francesco Prosperi's presentation on the relationships between ethnography and semiotic analysis.



WELCOMES & FAREWELLS

[MK](#), our new PostDoc, joined last August, and he is currently conducting fieldwork on the development of gut microbiome science in Hong Kong. His previous project concerns people's lives in Fukushima following the nuclear disaster. He is now researching something very different yet familiar, as both radiation and microbes are invisible and trigger human curiosity and imagination.

Lucilla, who joined the project from its very beginning, ended her collaboration in October 2023 after two years - as planned. We gained a lifelong very good colleague and friend. Lucilla's farewell: "As my farewell to the HXC project, I find myself reflecting on the transformative journey of the past two years. This experience has been both challenging and rewarding, shaping me into a scientist with enhanced analytical capacities and a stronger writing voice. Immersing myself in debates on the ontologies, politics, and governance of microbiome science, and delving into the realms of health, the technoscientific world, and the interdisciplinary knowledge infrastructures supporting them, has significantly broadened my intellectual horizons. Moving forward, I carry not only the knowledge gained but also a deep appreciation for the opportunities HXC has provided in enriching my future research paths: the exploration of interactions between health, air pollution, and the urban environment, guided by an in-depth environmental justice approach. I warmly thank Roberta Raffaetà and my team for their support and inspiration throughout this intellectual journey".

Pic: Snapshot from Lucilla's fieldwork with plant pathologists.

GUESTS

18-19.10.2023

[Ruth Müller](#) (TUM), [Luca Chiapperino](#) and [Cécile Fasel](#) (University of Lausanne)



Biosocial Interfaces

We had a rich discussion with Ruth Müller, Luca Chiapperino and Cécile Fasel about the intersections between postgenomics and microbiome, with a special focus on the ethnography of scientific practices and how they are reconfiguring health, expertise, and the politics of scientific research. The HXC team members discussed their case studies in light of this framework. The meeting was a preliminary phase for a special issue which is now in preparation.



24/10/2023

[Frédéric Keck](#) (EHESS)

How avian flu became endemic: History and anthropology of a global mobilization

Frédéric has analysed how avian influenza has been managed as a potentially pandemic disease since the emergence of the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus in China in 1997 and its spread in Europe and Africa in 2005. Anthropological lenses can shed light on how measures of biosecurity and techniques of preparedness have been applied to contain the viruses and how they have shifted when the avian influenza has been declared endemic. We had an internal meeting with him where we discussed his current and future research trajectories, together with the potential connections to the HXC research themes.



02/10/2023

[Tamara Ticktin](#) (Conservation biology and ethnoecology lab, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa) **Conservation biology and ethnoecology in Hawai'i**

Tamara Ticktin, professor of Botany at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa and one of the Directors of the Biocultural Initiative of the Pacific, gave a talk about her intense collaboration with Indigenous scientists and about the methods employed to deal with the island's ecological problems. For Indigenous Hawaiians, every ecosystem is biocultural and deeply entangled. Departing from this, she discussed how this experience modified her scientific approach and brought to reformulate conventional scientific methods and concepts such as that of 'ecosystemic service'.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Over the last year, [Marta Scaglioni](#) has analysed the intersection of microbiome research and race, unravelling how racism plays an important role in shaping microbial diversity. The microbiome, especially gut microbiome, is strongly influenced by host environments and in turn affects host metabolic, immune, and neuroendocrine functions. The host environment constitutes a bio-social concept and is often racially and socio-economically patterned: practices such as early life exposure (birth, breastfeeding, diet, smoking, alcohol and abuse, stress) and structural disparities (lack of access to green and blue spaces and of quality healthcare) vary along geographical, racial, and class lines. The impact of structural, cultural, and individual-level racism on the health of individuals is already well-established; however, there are few studies reticulating health conditions, resident microbes' diversity, and socio-economic and racial status.

Drawing on her fieldwork within a microbiome research group in North Africa, funded by the European Union, Marta has researched how the discipline has emerged in the context of the ideological and institutional history of the Western world, and how its movement to the Global South is the byproduct of specific infrastructures of knowledge and technologies. Thanks

to a long-standing ethnographic stay, she has unravelled how designing projects and sampling in the Global South entails a racialization process. The idea that Africa contains ancient, more diverse human microbes, and that the aim of microbiome science is to save them from disappearing, has a long tradition in microbiome sciences, and hides a superficial knowledge of the context of sampling.

“As a long-time connoisseur of North Africa, I was surprised to realise how many things I ignored: when studying science and scientists, a new image of the context appeared to me. For example, I was not prepared to encounter so many female scientists: the more I entered the research group activities, the more I was shocked to see how male scientists were rare. Women in science come from modernist, post-independence trajectories which were inspired by Western liberal human rights frameworks: and yet, they fall back into an old, patriarchal system where women are supposed to earn less and have more precarious careers. Anyway, talking about life, work and science with them gave me delightful moments of light-hearted fun and more thoughtful speculation”.

Pic: An old Tunisian medina in the South. Marta has carried out fieldwork in the southeastern part of the country, which is mostly rural.

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

Manara, S., Selma-Royo, M., Huang, K.H., Asnicar, F., Armanini, F., Blanco-Miguez, A., Cumbo, F., Golzato, D., Manghi, P., Pinto, F., Valles-Colomer, M., Amoroso, L., Corrias, M.V., Ponzoni, M., Raffaetà, R., Cabrera-Rubio, R., Olcina, M., Pasolli, E., Collado, M.C., Segata, N. 2023, “Maternal and Food Microbial Sources Shape the Infant Microbiome of a Rural Ethiopian Population.” *Current Biology*, April, S0960982223004591. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2023.04.011>.

Raffaetà, R., Santanera, G., Esposito, F. (eds.), 2023, Special Issue “Entangling Data while Entangling Disciplines: Discussing the Future of Anthropological Collaborations with Data Scientists.” *Anthropology in Action*, 30:3, pp. 1-8, ISSN 0967-201X (Print) ISSN 1752-2285 (Online), [doi:10.3167/aia.2023.300301](https://doi.org/10.3167/aia.2023.300301).

Amato, K., Raffaetà, R., 2023, “Afterword - Crafting data, crafting worlds across disciplines.” in the Special Issue “Entangling Data while Entangling Disciplines: Discussing the Future of Anthropological Collaborations with Data Scientists.” *Anthropology in Action*, 30:3, pp. 59-65, ISSN 0967-201X (Print) ISSN 1752-2285 (Online), [doi:10.3167/aia.2023.300307](https://doi.org/10.3167/aia.2023.300307).

Raffaetà, R., 2023, “Cognition and intelligence after the post-human turn: insights from the brain-gut axis.” in Batisti F. (ed.) Special Issue “De-humanizing cognition, intelligence, and agency. A critical assessment between philosophy, ethics, and science.” *JoLMA The Journal for the Philosophy of Language, Mind and the Arts*, 4:2, pp.1-20, e-ISSN 2723-9640, doi 10.30687/JoLma/2723-9640/2023/02/007.

Raffaetà, R. 2023, “What can microbes teach us about diplomacy – what it is and how to do it?” in Mali Weil (eds.) *The Mountain of Advanced Dreams*, Postmedia Books, Milan.

Barchetta, L., Raffaetà, R. “Data as environment, environment as data. One Health in collaborative data-intensive science.” *Big Data and Society*, (forthcoming in 2024).

Raffaetà, R., Benadusi, M. “Living and Researching from the Margin: Pandemic Times and the Reshaping of the

Anthropological Self.” in Hoffmann, S., Garcia Acosta, V.A., (eds.) *Inplacement: Global Outbreaks and the Anthropology of Isolation*, Berghan (forthcoming in 2024).

For the list of HealthXCross' publications see [here](#).



HXC INVITED

The team members of HealthXCross have been invited to present the project at various venues:

14/09/2023: V. Burgio, Visualizzare le relazioni tra i viventi ai tempi dei Big Data, [Big data and visual data between semiotics and sociology](#), University of Urbino.

06/10/2023: R. Raffaetà, Ripensare il clima dalle Hawaii: la scienza indigena e il cambiamento, Fondazione Prada, Everybody talks about the weather - Public Program.

13/10/2023: L. Barchetta and R. Raffaetà, One Health and digital data platforms, [Zoonoses. Multi-species transmission of pathogens and pandemic preparedness](#), University of Bergamo.

17/10/2023: HealthXCross team, presentation of research activities, [DSAAM \(Department of Asian and North African Studies\)](#), PhD Program.

18/10/2023: R. Raffaetà, Anthropology and research on the Microbiome: Addressing Future Health, [10th World Congress of the International Society of Microbiota in Venice](#).

11/11/2023: R. Raffaetà, Inquiring the microbiome as a scientific object across scales, [4S 2023 Honolulu, Society for Social Studies of Science, Honolulu, Hawai'i, US](#).

17/11/2023: R. Raffaetà, Have we ever been human? The social sciences after the Microbiome Revolution, [Meetings of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia](#).

13/12/2023: V. Burgio, Representing the Microbiome: Trees, Networks and Maps, [Visions of Microbial Health: a conversation between Biologists, Anthropologists and Artists](#), Singapore University of Technology and Design.

10/01/2024: R. Raffaetà, The Microbiome and its technology: an Ethnographic Exploration, [Wednesday Seminars at the University of Vienna](#).

26/01/2024: R. Raffaetà, What kind of object is the microbiome?, [Friday Seminars at LSE, London](#).

Pic: Roberta Raffaetà in the Meetings of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA, US, with [Victoria Orphan](#) (left), [Margaret McFall-Ngai](#), and [Dianne Newman](#).



ORGANIZED

Roberta, Lucilla, Marta, Valentina and Victor have organized and participated in the panel “Molecolarizzare la vita: il ritorno del sociale in biologia, medicina, chimica e tossicologia” at the Fourth National Conference of the [Italian Society for Cultural Anthropology, SIAC](#), in Rome, on September 22nd.

Roberta, Lucilla and Marta have organized the workshop “La scrittura etnografica. Esperienza e rappresentazione nella produzione di conoscenza interdisciplinare” at [the eleventh conference of the Italian Society of Applied Anthropology, SIAA](#), in

Perugia, on December 16th.

Pic: Keynote lecture by [Elizabeth Povinelli](#) (Columbia University) at SIAC (Italian Society for Cultural Anthropology).



UPCOMING EVENTS

Valentina and Victor are organizing a panel titled “[Making samples, doing science: transforming data and matter across landscapes and labs](#)” (panel n. 284), at EASST/4S in Amsterdam, July 2024; and the seminar “[Scienza, politica e società: l’approccio post-normale in teoria e nelle pratiche](#)” by Scienziati in Affanno is scheduled on February, 19th, at 11 o’clock at NICHE (Venice), come and join us!

Pic: The team of the panel “[Molecolarizzare la vita: il ritorno del sociale in biologia, medicina, chimica e tossicologia](#)” at SIAC (Italian Society for Cultural Anthropology).

HealthXCross asks: *how does health come to be reconfigured in a world entangled through microbial data?*

This project has received funding from the **European Research Council (ERC)** under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme ([GA n. 949742 HealthXCross](#)).

Principal Investigator: [Roberta Raffaetà](#)

[Project homepage](#)



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