

Strategic Scientific Workshop funded by the Humboldt Centre, University of Bayreuth  
**Making (a) Difference: Intergenerational Conversations on Intimate  
Relations and Transformation**

26-28 October 2023, Bayreuth

*Making (a) Difference: Intergenerational Conversations on Intimate Relations and Transformation* brought together an international group of leading anthropologists, from a variety of career stages, to reflect on how intimate social relations are produced in, with and through differences, and how intimate relations produce social differentiation in turn. While the invitees share a common interest in the anthropological exploration of intimate relations – be it marriage, parenting, friendship, or research relationships – none of them had explicitly worked on questions of difference and differentiation before attending this workshop. The angle of difference presented a new and highly productive lens to re-examine their work – and the workshop sessions provided opportunities to experiment with different ways of reflecting on research, collaborating with colleagues across career stages, and grappling with emerging concerns in academic practice as well.

### **Workshop participants**

Twenty-eight leading scholars of kinship, care, and related themes in anthropology from around the world attended the event, including a balanced representation of early-, mid-, and late-career scholars:

- Erdmute Alber, University of Bayreuth (main applicant)
- Anna Madeleine Ayeh, University of Bayreuth
- Edwin Ameso, University of Leipzig
- Megha Amrith, University of Göttingen
- Erike Bähre, Leiden University
- Akua Britwum, Cape Coast University
- Cati Coe, Carleton University
- Serawit Debele, University of Bayreuth
- Yvan Droz, Vienna (co-applicant)
- Jeannett Edwards, University of Manchester
- Tabea Häberlein, University of Bayreuth
- Norah Kiereri, Aix-Marseille Université
- Lena Kroeker, University of Bayreuth
- Susan McKinnon, University of Virginia
- Jeannett Martin, University of Göttingen
- Ammara Maqsood, University College London
- Lotte Meinert, Aarhus University (co-applicant)
- Perveez Mody, University of Cambridge
- Victoria Muinde, University of Oslo

- Julia Pauli, University of Hamburg
- Koreen Reece, University of Bayreuth
- Judith Schachter, Carnegie Mellon University
- Hannah Schild, University of Bayreuth
- Ulrike Schultz, Adventist University Friedensau
- Rosalie Stolz, University of Heidelberg
- Magdalena Suerbaum, University of Bielefeld
- Sjaak van der Geest, University of Amsterdam
- Emilia Zabaliute, University of Durham

The workshop was furthermore supported by three student assistants and one research assistant from the University of Bayreuth:

- Emily Bauer, Social and Cultural Anthropology (BA), student assistant
- Sarah Hettler, Social and Cultural Anthropology (MA), student assistant
- Monty Schoeder, Social and Cultural Anthropology (MA), student assistant
- Mudassa Munir, Development Studies, research assistant



Workshop participants at the end of the two-day session

### Overview of sessions

After the opening session, in which Erdmute Alber introduced the thematic field and the envisaged cooperations, and Susanne Lopez welcomed the guests from the side of the Humboldt Center, the main event was organized in four parallel panels on the cross-cutting issues of power, temporalities, ethics and care – all contexts in which difference is negotiated and produced. Each session featured papers paired to speak to each other, by one early- or

mid-career scholar and one senior scholar, to create opportunities for intergenerational dialogue. The sessions were drawn together by experienced discussants, who offered new inspiration for contributors and drew out productive lines of thinking. Discussants also presented summary reflections in plenary discussions, which engaged all workshop participants with emerging themes and thinking and created space for critical contributions.

The workshop aimed to unsettle differences within academic practice across hierarchies of gender, generation and career stage as well, thereby inverting established practices around academic workshops and conferences. In one such session, participants were invited to identify issues of cross-cutting concern and post them, with each post forming the basis of an informal discussion table for those who were interested. In another, participants were guided through a session on body mapping as a mode of connecting with embodied ways of knowing and learning from research. In a third, participants were invited to envision possibilities, priorities and projects for a European network of anthropologists working on kinship.



Workshop participants reflect on the event

Joint dinners on the evenings of the workshop inspired lively discussion and new thinking on the workshop's themes and beyond. A Campus Tour and a session of *walking interviews* in Franconian Switzerland on the last day of the workshop provided insights in the location of the University of Bayreuth and the larger region of upper Franconia, but also rich opportunity for further reflection on the workshop themes and future collaborations.



Walking and talking in Franconian Switzerland



Workshop participants at Schloss Fantaisie

### **Making (a) Difference**

The academic contributions to the workshop countered a vernacular view of difference as a problem or challenge to be overcome with a productive understanding of difference that constitutes social relationships, thereby adding to the analytical distinction between difference, differentiation, and inequalities. However, the polysemic nature of the concepts of difference and intimacy prompted critical reflections on their productivity as analytical categories. The discussions underscored that the thematic complex of difference and similarity as a spectrum of human social interactions represents a perspective for closer examination of diverse constructions and changes in close relationships beyond simplistic binaries.

A follow-up workshop will be conducted in October 2024, focused on developing a publication from key contributions to the original workshop. Several participants at the original workshop also contributed to envisioning a European network for the anthropology of kinship, which is currently in development and will be proposed to the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA).