

**Materialities in practice (MA/PhD course), Medical Anthropology and Sociology Winter School,
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Report by Lise Bjerke (Institute of Health and Society, UiO), Inga Haaland (Institute of Health and Society, UiO) and Kaja Berg Hjukse (Department of Social Anthropology, UiO)



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*Kaja Berg Hjukse, Annemarie Mol, Inga Haaland and Lise Bjerke
(from left to right).*

The course “Materialities in Practice” was held by Annemarie Mol, Professor of Anthropology of the Body at the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Materialities, we learned, are everywhere, also in the field of health care and medicine. How to analyse them? How to account for them in anthropological studies; in sociological analyses? How to not take what natural and medical sciences have to say about materialities for granted, but situate them in their socially embedded knowledge practices? These are some of the questions the course addressed.

The course encouraged us to explore the various ways in which social/material and culture/nature divisions tend to be made in academia and not take the results of (biomedical) research for granted, but instead investigate the contexts from which it emerges. We also explored how to differentiate between the effectiveness and the effects of technologies, and discussed the pros and cons of the methods of holism (adding aspects of reality together) and contrasting (situating, specifying and differentiating between versions of reality). The course built on Annemarie Mol’s research groups’ previous and current work, providing an insight into Mol’s extensive and renowned theoretical work.

The course was organized in a seminar style, with a high level of student participation. It was based on a selection of obligatory literature as well as in-class lectures by Professor Annemarie Mol and other lectures from University of Amsterdam. The course also included small fieldwork exercises that were reported back on in class.

In addition to the knowledge and skills gained from the course as described above, the grant from the NRSRGH provided us the opportunity to get to know each other as fellow PhD students, both academically and socially. Spending two weeks together in Amsterdam allowed us to discuss and reflect on the course also after class, and elaborate further on how the insights from the course could be integrated into our own PhD projects. Based on our experiences in Amsterdam, we will continue to discuss and meet in Oslo throughout the course of our PhDs.

We would recommend this course to PhD students seeking insight into materialities and practices, as well as topics related to science and technology studies within a health context. The course was both

useful to those of us who are in the pre-fieldwork phase (Lise and Inga) and post-fieldwork phase (Kaja). For instance, the course provided knowledge on how to approach materialities during fieldwork by focusing on practices. This was particularly relevant for Lise, who is about to conduct fieldwork in India related to antibiotic production and distribution. Inga is working on HIV prevention and Pre-exposure prophylaxis in Tanzania with same-sex attracted men. The course provided literature and fruitful discussions on both materiality and Actor Network Theory, which are two theories she plans to use in her analysis. Inga also got the opportunity to meet scholars' at UvA with extensive research experience on HIV in Tanzania. For Kaja, who is in writing phase of her PhD project on mental health and marriage practices in Myanmar, the course helped her to see new analytical potential in her empirical material and was inspirational for the writing process ahead.

The student cohort participating in this course came from different disciplinary backgrounds, such as global health, science and technology studies, medical anthropology and medicine. This facilitated interesting but also challenging discussions and group work, in which our perceptions and perspectives were challenged. We gained experience in how to discuss and navigate within a multidisciplinary student/research group – an important skill in our respective PhD projects.

The obligatory readings and texts discussed in class were mainly from the Dutch context. Since all our studies are in a non-European context (India, Tanzania and Myanmar), we would have enjoyed if there were more texts from other regions in the obligatory course curriculum. That said, the course did offer some recommended readings from non-European contexts. The majority of the participants were MA students, and in some cases we think that the discussions might have been more productive and focused on individual projects if it would have been a PhD students only course.



NRSGH provided funds for travelling by train to Amsterdam, although it was more expensive than flight tickets. We would encourage fellow students attending the Winter School in Amsterdam (and other places within train-able reach) to travel by train. This will help compensate a little bit for our large carbon footprint fieldwork ;)