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Resonance across the researcher/research participant divide: Rethinking Ethnographic Methodology in a Global Pandemic

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Abstract

This article explores the methodological implications of conducting ethnography under shared conditions of uncertainty and constraint, using a collective online ethnographic study of family life in Denmark during the Covid pandemic as its focal point. By rethinking anthropology's classic imperative of "being there," we examine how digital methods and shared existential circumstances between researchers and participants offer opportunities to develop innovative forms of relationality and engagement. Drawing on Hartmut Rosa's concepts of resonance and world appropriation, we propose a methodological approach centering on "being with" as an alternative to physical presence, emphasizing the affective, reflexive, and emergent qualities of research practice. We situate these reflections within broader discussions on the socio-historical context of knowledge production and the transformative potential of collective, relational methodologies. In doing so, we contribute to critical debates on ethnographic practice, highlighting how moments of rupture can challenge established epistemologies and inspire inventive modes of inquiry.

Keywords: Collective Ethnography, Digital Methods, COVID-19, Resonance, Being There

Introduction

On a Wednesday morning in April 2020, a Zoom interview takes place between an ethnographic researcher, Ida Wentzel Winther, and a research participant, 50-year-old Susanne, who lives with her husband in a small town west of Copenhagen. The interview centers on experiences of everyday family life during the Covid-19 pandemic, which at the time has recently entailed a national lockdown of Danish society along with most of the world. Susanne is one of about 50 people, primarily women with Danish, white, middle-class background, who have agreed by email to be interviewed online, either alone or together with their family members. Although few people have died in Denmark due to Covid-19 at this point, reports of high death rates in China, Italy and other countries have been broadcasted, and both the immediate and late complications of the virus are still unknown. A majority of Denmark's workplaces and public institutions (besides healthcare) have shut down and redirected their activities to be conducted from home, including schooling and childcare, leaving parents of younger children tied between work and family obligations. Below, researcher Ida articulates her personal impression of this first encounter with Susanne:

> *Susanne appears on my screen. Her face is very close. She tells me about her everyday life in the past four-five weeks of lockdown. Susanne lives with her husband while their adult son lives in an institution for people with mental illnesses. Normally they visit the son often, and he often comes home to them. Susanne is very connected to him. Early in the interview, Susanne suddenly starts crying. Her face and tears are half a meter away, but I cannot be there to offer her a Kleenex or a gentle clap on the shoulder. She keeps talking and crying. I ask if we should take a break. She dismisses me and goes on. She cries heavily throughout our encounter. It seems as if this doesn't bother her. It bothers me. Mostly because she seems SO close and yet so far away. But also because her crying evokes feelings of sadness and longing in me: My two oldest children have left home, and like Susanne misses her son, I miss seeing and hugging them during this strange pandemic. From a distance, Susanne and I get entangled, connecting with each other's emotions and life situations. But eventually, I have to end the interview. Flash!…. Susanne is gone. From intense conversation and despair to an empty screen (April 2020).*

In this article, we reflect upon the relationship implied between us researchers, our research participants and the strange world around us in a two-year collective online-ethnographic study of lockdown family life in Denmark during Covid-19 (March 2020-March 2022). Drawing on both our personal experiences and research observations, we explore how the pandemic and successive lockdown periods placed us and our research participants existentially very closely together, as the entire world and basic preconditions for human contact and everyday routines suddenly changed around us. Linking these observations to discussions on anthropological epistemology during Covid-19 (Howlett, 2022; Wynn & Trnka, 2022), we argue that pandemic ethnography like ours entailed new meanings of 'being there' in the life worlds of research participants: We were unable to pay physical visits to the homes of the participating families, but we had relatively easy

access to their digitally reproduced voices, torsos and attention through Zoom meetings, during which we – like them – were stuck with each our own spouses and school-going children in the very 'everyday lockdown family life' we were studying. Rather than 'being there' in the traditional sense of the anonymous anthropologist who travels physical distances – mostly alone – to the domains of the people and practices under study, we experienced this particular project as 'being with' our informants, resonating deeply with each other's emotional turmoil and practical challenges. This experience was also enhanced by the fact that we as researchers, on top of the pandemic, all shared significant life circumstances with the large majority of our informants, including being middle-class mothers and ethnic majority members of Danish society with children living at home, without the immediate prospect of losing our jobs, health or homes. Inspired by the writings of sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2019), we argue that these experiences of *resonance* between researchers and research participants were enhanced by our shared life-in-emergency situation, and that this may also regard ethnographic research pertaining to other critical collective experiences, including the ecological and political global crises marking our time.

The writing of this article was driven by a general sense among the five of us of having gained new and valuable research experience. We all identify as ethnographic researchers, but we come from different disciplines (anthropology, linguistics, psychology, ethnology, and cultural sociology) and had not previously collaborated to the same extent as we did in this project. Our reflections can be linked to the notion of *transmethodology* (Special Issue of this journal 2021-22) in the sense that we pay attention to how the pandemic as an urgent and comprehensive societal crisis – a moment of rupture – pushed us to (re)consider the less visible, intangible and precarious processes of our collective research endeavor and to develop new ways of working that transgressed the research formats we were used to individually, both in relation to each other and to the research participants (cf. Khawaja & Kousholt, 2021). These new research experiences regarded both our methods and communication formats (mainly online), the questions we found compelling to ask, and the social relationships and ethnographic insights we developed along the way. Although we physically never left our respective homes and families while conducting interviews and collecting ethnographic material, we felt a vibrant connection and sense of congeniality emerge very quickly between us and them – as well as within our research group – spurred by the drastic change of life and societal circumstances we all underwent alongside each other as the pandemic unfolded outside our windows, on our media screens, and in our personal lives. This experience of synchronicity and congeniality was especially strong in the initial weeks of the first lockdown in March-April 2020, when everyone and everything were in a state of emergency and nobody could grasp the extent of the pandemic, e.g., in terms of infection risks, mortality rates, and vaccine development. But during the two successive Danish lockdowns in winter 2020/21 and 2021/2022, we observed a similar congeniality with each other and our research participants whom we reinterviewed, this time sharing not only the concurrent pandemic life circumstances with each other, but also those of the past 6-18 months of confinement and uncertainty.

In an attempt to understand the shared states of being in and relating to the world in this shared destiny – what we in Danish call 'skæbnefællesskab' – we draw attention to Hartmut Rosa's concepts of *resonance* and *world appropriation* and his proposed sociology of our *relationship to the world* (Rosa, 2019), with which he explores new

potentials – and pitfalls – for human connection in modern societies. As illustrated in researcher Ida's initial encounter with Susanne, our ethnographic material is characterized by intense, sometimes conflicting emotions of fear, sadness, frustration, hopelessness, insecurity, excitement, and joy, along with deep existential issues and reflections like reconsidering one's priorities in life and at work or worrying about the future. Drawing on Rosa's resonance theory, we discuss the methodological implications of the intensified emotions and existential uncertainty expressed and shared across the researcher-research participant divide during an all-encompassing crisis, the proportions and long-term consequences of which none of us understood.

A world-relationship of resonance

In his book *Resonance: A Sociology of our Relationship to the World* (2019), sociologist Hartmut Rosa sets out to re-enchant the world by elucidating the inherent potential for what he denotes as resonance between humans and the world around us. The term resonance originates from physics and refers to two systems oscillating, with one side responding to the other in each their own 'voice'. An acoustic space emerges: Something rings and something else vibrates along in unison, like two metronomes running, not as an echo but in parallel. Initially, the metronomes swing with each their frequency; when brought together, they start swinging wildly and chaotically, but then slowly adapt and eventually harmonize their movements in a joint rhythm. Resonance "is always a dynamic event, the expression of a vibrant responsive relationship that can be seen perhaps most splendidly when a person's eyes light up" (Rosa, 2019, p. 196). It "contains within itself a transformative element that exceeds our capacity for autonomy. It sets in only when we encounter something that has something to say to us" (ibid., p. 455).

According to Rosa, there is a universal human need for such a response-relation or resonance with the world, but the conditions and sensibilities shaping its appearance are particular and historically tied. In philosopher Martin Heidegger's words, we are always already thrown into the world at a certain time and place in history (Heidegger, 1927), a point which Rosa extends by describing how our bodily relation to the world – what he denotes world appropriation or Weltanverwandlung – may seem further challenged and alienated in today's highly accelerated society dominated by media. According to Rosa, however, such a relation or appropriation is possible even today via moments of resonance, which he defines as the "flaring up of hope for world appropriation and response in a difficult world" (Rosa, 2019, p. 321). He perceives human beings as "creatures capable of resonance" (Rosa, 2019, p. 36) who possess an inherent openness, wanting to be affected and answered to by the world.

Rosa describes a mutually resonant world-relationship in which we not only let ourselves be touched by the world but also seek to touch and thus 'reach the world' through an emotive response, connecting emotions, rationality, and bodily sensations. Resonance is thus a mode of relating (Relazionsmodus) (Rosa 2019, p. 196) which can only arise in accommodating resonance spaces (ibid, p. 166). Rosa's ambition is for humans in modern society to develop our own voice so that we can encounter and enter into dialogue with other entities rather than being either alienated or merge into a unit.

As we perceived it, this world-relationship was thoroughly tested during Covid-19 when the pandemic put a stick in the wheels of modern accelerated society (Rosa, 2015).

Everything was quiet, streets were deserted, and nobody could meet, travel, go to work or school. We were all thrown into a new reality and had to find other ways of relating to each other and the world. The pandemic in that way spurred reflections on how we as "creatures capable of resonance" (Rosa 2019, p. 36) experienced and dealt with both less social and physical contact and more online presence in a context of societal crisis. Rosa's theory of resonance offers a means of understanding the unfamiliar experiences brought by the pandemic and how we all sought to appropriate and relate to this new world. Below, we introduce the project and the Danish Covid-19 context in which it played out.

The project: Pandemic family life in Denmark

Covid-19 first hit Denmark in February and March 2020, prompting politicians to shut down the country and send home most workers. On a global scale, death tolls were rising rapidly, and the scale of the virus' late complications still unknown. National healthcare systems were under immense pressure, and politicians had to make rapid decisions on public curfews and vaccine distribution. In Denmark, authorities urged citizens to show each other so-called *samfundssind* – or 'community spirit', a morally induced display of solidarity, care and respect – by keeping social distance, staying at home, getting vaccinated, homeschooling children, and sticking to 'social bubbles' of maximum ten people (Clemensen et al, 2021). For us as family researchers this situation raised questions like: How did people manage these new conditions? How did parents work from home while simultaneously caring for their children? What was it like to be confined to one's home 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without physical contact with anyone other than one's immediate family? How to maintain social distance from a child living in an institution? How to solve the dilemma of children maintaining contact with both parents in case of separated households (e.g., due to a divorce)?

Our project was launched the day after prime minister Mette Frederiksen announced the lockdown of Danish society on March 11th, 2020. Unlike other qualitative researchers who have described their experiences with hasty readjustment of their research from physical to online 'home-bound research' in the early stages of Covid-19 (Podjed, 2021; Howlett, 2022; Davis & Obertino-Norwood, 2024), this project was both thematically and methodologically anchored in the Covid-19 pandemic from the very start. Knowing each other well beforehand as colleagues and fellow researchers, we all felt an instinctive attraction to participate in this study when Ida Wentzel Winther, who initiated and led the project, reached out to the rest of us. The project offered us a welcome sense of 'escape' from the confinement of our homes and families, along with a chance to reflect both with each other and our research participants about this strange and frightening emergency situation happening around us. As it unfolded, the project and its pandemic circumstances ended up taking our research practices in directions none of us had been before.

Empirically, the project drew on online ethnography among 50+ families conducted between April 2020 and February 2022. Participants were recruited via social media and a project website with attached forms of consent. Once assigned, we contacted participants for zoom interviews and further encouraged them to submit photos, videos and diary entries to us, self-documenting their everyday lives throughout Denmark's first lockdown period in spring 2020 (see also Clemensen et al, 2021; Dannesboe et al, 2023; Winther et al, 2023; Jørgensen et al, 2024; Kousholt et al, in prep). Participants lived different lives across Denmark, some in small city apartments, others in suburban houses and yet others

on countryside farms, and the families differed both in sizes, ages, and social constellations, with the consistent feature being the presence of at least one parent of minimum one child.

Across these differences, all the participating families could be seen as possessing a relatively large pandemic privilege (Horton, 2021), in the sense that they all had fast internet access, could work and homeschool children in their own homes, and were not immediately hit financially or on their personal health and thus had excess resources to participate in a qualitative research project. In our material from the first Danish lockdown in spring 2020, which included the national closing of schools and most workplaces for five weeks, we observed how many participants made meticulous weekly schedules for their children's school and leisure activities, baked pastries together, and extended their frequency of family walks and hikes in nature (Clemensen et al, 2021). At the same time, the extent of people's workloads varied drastically in our material, with some – including ourselves and maybe two thirds of our research participants – facing an increasing workload, including the preparation and processing of online meetings and lectures, while others experienced a near-halt in their professional chores. On a more personal level, some participants had the privilege of owning a car and perhaps a cabin in nature, allowing them to escape their home confinement for some time. While we were all relatively privileged from a global perspective, we thus experienced the pandemic life circumstances and existential uncertainty from different vantage points.

Many participants talked openly about their concerns and dilemmas during lockdown, like balancing work, childcare and homeschooling, sustaining the mental health and well-being of teenage children, handling their own fears and concerns about getting ill, and taking care of elderly parents, all the while respecting social distance guidelines. In previous articles, we have described how the pandemic brought attention to the interplay between societal histories, family morals and everyday family practices in the Danish welfare state (Dannesboe et al, 2023), how many of the participating families found themselves reconsidering basic conditions in their lives, especially in terms of 'family time' and children's access to nature (Jørgensen et al, 2024), and how some parents began seeing their own 'crisis management' and adaptability at home not only as an intermediate burden but also as a potential resource for themselves and others in the ongoing global crises affecting families in different ways (Kousholt et al, in prep). We also talked to young people throughout the three lockdown periods in Denmark, recording how their lives were put 'on hold' while the pandemic kept them away from school and meeting up with their friends. Drawing on these conversations, we have described the emergence of new vulnerabilities and strengths brought by the pandemic, marking a generation of 'lockdown youths' in distinct ways (Winther et al, 2023).

At our initial research meetings on Zoom in spring 2020, we composed a joint interview guide to make sure we all got around the same aspects of everyday organization in the families we talked to, that is, structures, agreements and challenges spurred by the lockdown. The guide included worries about the virus and practical concerns, pandemic family talk, everyday annoyances, arrangements of school and work from home, contact with family, friends, institutions, neighbors, plus exercise and other bodily practices. This design aimed at foregrounding participants' perspectives on the pandemic and their personal experiences during lockdown.

Apart from the listed topics, the families framed most of the interviews' content, with typical interviews lasting 1-2 hours and taking form and direction in accordance with the individual interviewee(s). Many people took evident pride in contributing to something epochal and exciting never recorded before and seemingly also had the time and need to ventilate their experiences with others than their immediate family members. Participants generally welcomed our invitation to share their pandemic experiences, some asking us enthusiastically if we would like to meet up [on Zoom] again the following day. Interviews were recorded via Zoom and uploaded to a GDPR-compliant platform to which all five of us had access. We maintained contact with many participants throughout the Danish Covid-19 period from 2020-2022 and reinterviewed members of ten different families during the second lockdown in winter 2020/21 and again during the 'semi-lockdown' in winter 2022. These reinterviews allowed us to follow people's practical, mental and emotional responses to Covid-19 over its two-year extent and to mirror and contextualize these responses with both our own and more broadly mediated interpretations of the pandemic's significance.

Doing online ethnography from home

As ethnographers interested in micro-level everyday practices among children and parents, we have generally preferred to join our research participants in their physical environments and generate ethnographic material through observations, informal talk and participation in practical activities alongside them. Spending time with people in their familiar surroundings helps the ethnographer observe how people move through the world, share knowledge and reproduce and challenge cultural norms, generating insight that online ethnography or clinical experiments never can. It may also help with detecting differences between what people claim they do (for example during interviews) and what they actually do in everyday life.

Such onsite observations, focusing on action and the physical environment, were now rendered impossible by the pandemic and prompted us to connect with our research participants through the means available to both them and us: digital, online devices like computers and smartphones. Online ethnography is by no means a new phenomenon (see Hine, 2000; Pink et al, 2015), and implications like the relation and distance between researcher and participant, and knowledge about the complex digital entanglements within the embedded, embodied, everyday life, have been described in numerous publications (e.g. Beneito-Montagut et al, 2017; Clerke & Nopwood, 2014; Hine, 2017). In the wake of Covid-19, several researchers have discussed their experiments with online ethnography during pandemic lockdown (Brinkworth et al, 2020; Davies and Obertino-Norwood, 2024; Horton, 2021; Howlett, 2021; Podjed, 2021; Watson and Lupton, 2022; Wynn & Trnka, 2022), in some cases underlining the unexpected increase of intimacy emerging between them and their informants in digitalized encounters. Political scientist Marnie Howlett thus describes how – to her surprise – turning her onsite research on the shaping of national identities in Ukraine to Zoom ethnography, conducted from her home in London, induced "noticeably longer" conversations and "enabled a more symmetrical relationship with my informants" (Howlett, 2021, p. 8) – which she ascribes to the fact that the participants now had more control of her (the researcher's) access to their lives and were able to observe her personal life in a different way than before (Howlett, 2021). Similarly, sociologists Ash Watson and Deborah Lupton observed how the rapid conversion from onsite to online ethnography of their research on people's use and feelings around home-based digital

devices in Australia (Watson & Lupton, 2022) entailed "a rich sense of rapport and mutual empathy in many of the [online] home visits as well as an informality that may not have been as well achieved during an in-personal home visit" (ibid., p.10), which they ascribe to the fact that participants could now 'look back' into the researcher's personal space via Zoom.

Like these researchers, we observed how the coincidental sharing of our private work stations during Zoom interviews, sometimes including our pets, bypassing children, or messy kitchen tables, mirrored the homes and lives of our research participants and had a relaxing impact on our encounters, and how the use of digital devices like phones and computers seemed to bring us closer to people's embedded, embodied everyday life rather than further away from it, which we further elaborate on in the sections below. Collaborating as five researchers on this project, we also experienced how the use of a shared online platform became a great advantage in collective processes of data analysis and writing (cf. Beneito-Montagut et al, 2017), providing easy access to each other's Zoom interviews and the many photos, videos and diaries shared with us by research participants. Furthermore, working online gave us a larger geographic flexibility than we might otherwise have had, allowing us to reach and interview families all across Denmark, and moreover probably attracted some people who might otherwise have declined to participate in a traditional field study that would require allowing a stranger into their home. Drawing on Hartmut Rosa's sociology of world-relations and resonance, we now discuss the epistemological consequences of these online encounters and exchanges between us and our research participants during Covid-19 in Denmark.

Reconfiguring authority and collective research

As mentioned earlier, our roles as experienced ethnographic researchers were challenged by the onset of the pandemic and this research project, both towards our research participants and each other. Since we also had to work and join conversations from the confinement of our messy homes and family lives, the invitation to enter the 'suppressed facts' of strangers (Goffmann, 1956) was if not mutual, then more equivocal than we had experienced in earlier research projects. Some of us thus had to do interviews from our bedrooms to find solace from our children's noise or prying faces, or from our messy kitchen tables in clear sight. Sometimes one of our children would appear in the middle of an interview, complaining about a sibling or asking for help, transforming us from researcher to 'mom', 'citizen' or 'fellow confined' in an instant. Sometimes our wi-fi connection would fail or a screen would freeze, forcing us to restart the interview. As researchers, we normally have influence on the format and extent of the field visit on behalf of participants, but now our Zoom visits were shaped by the technology at hand. Like in the following situation where researcher Karen Ida Dannesboe was placed on a table after having talked to a family of four living in Northern Jutland:

> *It is a strange and yet perfectly meaningful sensation to be stationary, while the family members all move around. In this interview, I am placed on the table while the parents Maria and Karsten initially sit in front of the screen. We talk, and then the children are brought over to come and talk to me while the parents leave the conversation. As I finish talking with the children, I remain online. We are supposedly done now, but I wonder if the parents will come back and say goodbye? My body is locked to the screen and the camera,*

> *to a state of waiting and only perceiving what I can see from the angle in which they have placed their computer. I observe Maria and one of the girls walk by at the rear end of the house. Time passes. Finally, Maria and Karsten both return. We talk briefly, then say goodbye and I press the 'leave meeting' button (May 2020).*

From the family's computer camera, Karen Ida can look into the house from a certain angle, but she cannot move around freely. The family members, on the other hand, come and go, forget about her and later return. She is locked and depends on their rhythm. Of course, she could have logged off and finished the interview, but since she has initiated their conversation and asked for their time and participation, she considers it kind to wait. The researcher is deprived of some of her usual means of assertion, but neither Karen Ida nor Maria and Karsten and their daughters seem bothered by this change of roles. Instead, the meeting allows for a less defined encounter between them to occur in which the ethnographer is existentially and digitally with the family, sharing new pandemic world experiences, feelings and concerns, while at the same time being physically apart. In Rosa's terminology, Karen Ida and the interviewed parents develop an immediate resonant relationship, responding to each other's oscillatory impulses (Rosa, 2019, p. 165-166) as a response to the shared world crisis.

The pandemic also sustained a resonant space and connection among us five researchers, enhanced by the fact that we were all women, academic staff with the possibility of working from home and had children or youngsters living at home and going to school. In retrospect, this close community both challenged and strengthened the project. We were 'natives' in the pandemic field. Like our research participants, we were strained by 'homeworking', homeschooling and confinement with our loved ones 24 hours a day, thus being emotionally invested in the issues and questions we were examining during interviews. We found ourselves placed in a professional research project while losing our orientation as participants in the same epochal crisis as our research participants. We had no idea where or when it would end or how dangerous it was. To our research participants, we were both 'alien' and 'co-conspirator', simultaneously detached and very close by. These shared research conditions allowed an extra online 'social bubble' to emerge within our team, giving us a space to reflect upon our own experiences.

Doing online ethnography was unfamiliar to most of us. The experience of professional unfamiliarity was enhanced by our decision to record all our interviews via the Zoom program (with the consent of our research participants) to allow for subsequent comparison and association during analysis. Knowing that our four colleagues would have access to see and hear our often faltering or clumsy attempts to build rapport and approach the people suddenly appearing on our screens – usually people whom we had never communicated with ourselves before and whose life situations, family and living conditions we only know little about – added an extra dimension of vulnerability to the entire enterprise. Below, researcher Nana Clemensen describes such an experience in the fall of 2020 during Denmark's second lockdown:

> *As arranged with Tobias' mother the previous day, I log onto Zoom and observe Tobias sitting on a bed in what appears to be a teenage room. He seems uneasy in the situation and gives brief answers to my questions about how he feels and spends his time during lockdown. After a few minutes, the*

> *conversation comes to a halt. Normally, during physical fieldwork, I would respond to such a halt by asking Tobias to show me his room or tell me about some of his things. I could suggest we go in the living room or walk outside. But now we are tied to the screen, and the distance feels palpable between us. I start feeling increasingly uncomfortable keeping both Tobias and myself in this awkward situation. After a few minutes, I say 'Thank you' and we both log off Zoom, and I upload the recording to our shared platform. I email my project colleagues, telling them about the aborted interview and my feelings of panic and professional failure.*

While little congeniality seemed to appear between researcher Nana and Tobias in the encounter above, Nana described how her fellow researchers emerged as compassionate witnesses to the methodological barriers she had experienced in this unfamiliar online encounter – what Rosa has described as "a harbour of resonance in a stormy sea" (Rosa 2019, p. 202). Even though we were long-time acquaintances and colleagues before entering this project, it was new to most of us to share such intimate and challenging research situations with each other. Like in the Zoom encounters with most of our research participants, however, we experienced how the 'messy' and unfamiliar conditions of lockdown shared between us became a source of increased confidence and resonance between us, allowing our collegial relationship to grow stronger.

Sharing the mess during lockdown

All five of us had previously conducted fieldwork in what we and research participants had perceived as informal arenas – typically in people's homes where we had encountered lots of clutter, unmade beds, close conversations, and intense emotions (e.g., Kousholt, 2005; Winther, 2005; 2009; 2015). Still, we were overwhelmed by the degree of confidence and trust emerging almost instantly between us and our research participants in this project in the first weeks of Covid-19 lockdown. During interviews, many participants would sit comfortably in a bed or couch, eating and having tea or coffee or brushing their teeth on camera, some wearing pajamas and unruly hair and perhaps with a pet or a young child climbing back and forth across the screen. Some families would start bickering openly or leave the interviewer 'hanging' on the kitchen counter while everyone walked out to do other chores. One participant placed her phone with the camera on in her baby's pram while walking around Copenhagen, while another conducted her interview from a small garden shed to get some 'alone time' away from her husband and children.

A similar confidence and eagerness to share impressions of 'lockdown life' was visible in the many photos people sent us, documenting messy floors, unmade beds and dirty dishes, along with home baked pastry, exercise routines, homemade timetables and family outings to parks and sites of nature. The families who sent us photos all gave us permission to share them publicly:

[picture 1-3]

[PHOTO TEXT:] These images, submitted to us by research participants in spring 2020, display the many functions served by the home during lockdown: working, eating, sleeping, working out, studying etc. Numerous photos showed messy floors, beds and kitchen tables, along with family members entangled in each other's lockdown life.

Both in Denmark and in other parts of the world, social confinement and the continued contact to schools and workplaces via online cameras allowed some of the messy and intimate parts of everyday life, which we usually hide from everyone but our closest peers and kin, to seep into more formalized arenas. This observation was not only made within our study, but also for instance among schoolteachers who were suddenly pulled into their students' homes and bedrooms through online teaching. During our own live-streamed university lectures, we experienced students lying under the covers, just as we were introduced more closely to our colleagues' homes, children, pets and messy living rooms during online meetings.

Social scientists have written about the home as a culture behind closed doors (Miller, 2001; Winther, 2005; 2009). So much of the life we care about plays out at home, a place that remains notoriously difficult for ethnographic researchers to infiltrate and often requires months of trust building. With the pandemic's onset, we were suddenly granted access to the homes and private lives of people who had never met us before and hardly knew our names. Rather than unfamiliar researchers, we had the experience of being perceived by our research participants as fellow companions in this strange and frightening situation. In Rosa's terminology, a space of resonance emerged between us in which everything could easily be shared and understood without having to translate, conceal or negotiate each other's existences or points of view. Below, researcher Ida describes her initial online encounter with mother Josephine, father Peter, and their teenage son Mikkel in June 2020:

> *The family is seated by a table, and I see three torsos before me on the screen. They describe their living situation and how each of them manages to find a place of quiet with good wi-fi connection to get through tasks of work and school. The father, Peter, is a bit busy, since he has a row of professional*

> *Zoom meetings that same day. He stands up and walks behind the two others. At the back of my screen, I thus see a 40-year-old man wearing tie, jacket and underpants. He is obviously dressed up for the work meetings on 'torso level' but at the same time he is at home wearing comfortable boxers which no one can see at the meetings. I, the ethnographic researcher and interviewer, apparently hold a different position than his colleagues at the meeting. I am invited into the family's private sphere, although they have never met me before and I am just a flat figure on a screen, asking them questions and recording our conversation.*

To some participants, our interviews offered not only a temporary distraction from the stuffy commotion of lockdown family life, but a more urgent chance of emotional support and relief. Some suffered deep existential problems associated with the pandemic at the time we reached out to them, like physical or mental illness, unemployment, loneliness or worry about a suffering elder or child – and chose to invite us in. Consequently, some conversations involved intense emotional displays of sadness, fear and frustration, along with the sharing of personal concerns like health problems, marital issues, and the well-being of family members. One person spent an entire interview venting agitatedly about 'the system', while others began half-jokingly referring to our interviews as 'therapy,' allowing them to release some of the amassed worry and stress in the preceding weeks and months of confinement. Conversations thus often grew long and intense, drawing on other socio-affective resources than some of us had experienced in previous studies. Social distance guidelines deprived us of the more or less intuitive ethnographic means we might otherwise have used to empathize and gain our research participants' trust: a cup of coffee, a glass of water, a hand on a shoulder, a tissue, a curiously inquiring walk around the room or house, a stretch of legs, a suggested change of scenery. Like it did to our research participants, the pandemic shook us in our familiar roles both at work and at home, peeling off some layers of reservation and bringing us closer together as mothers, partners, home schoolers, 'remote workers', citizens and human beings.

Inspired by Rosa, we perceive such encounters as moments of resonance, enhanced by the shared experience and appropriation of a radically altered and unpredictable world. Although the pandemic prevented us from joining our research participants' life worlds with our bodies and senses, we were mentally and emotionally right there with them, experiencing the same existential uncertainty in real time along with the tangible challenges of balancing work, family and our own mental health. Rather than being there and studying people's every life in traditional anthropological sense (Frykman & Gilje, 2003), our epistemological foundation thus became one of 'being with' our research participants, sharing world experiences and resonating with each other in a vast, closely familiar yet uncanny pandemic field.

The ideal of 'being there' with research participants has remained a foundation for ethnographic fieldwork, including digital and online ethnography, multi-sited fieldwork etc. As a research field, anthropology derives much of its methodological and scientific legitimacy through the often close relationships induced by the researcher by following others 'in their shoes' and encountering them where they spend their days and lives (Hastrup, 2003). Today, however, much of our social lives is played out in virtual communities and technologies, both professionally and privately. While the pandemic and national lockdowns for many people entailed a hitherto unknown degree of physical

isolation and reliance on digital technologies, it also highlighted some more permanent life circumstances in today's world, like the intensification of global crises in terms of climate, war, migration, mental health etc., alongside the sociocultural influence of social media.

Similar reflections have been made by other ethnographers doing fieldwork during Covid-19. Based on their personal and professional pandemic experiences in Australia, anthropologists L. L. Wynn and Susanna Trnka have proposed *a phenomenology of lockdown*, allowing researchers to explore people's post-pandemic images of the future, their experiences of the pandemic as 'a rupture with the past' and how people's responses to the pandemic "meld media coverage, government messaging and personal experiences" (Wynn & Trnka, 2022, p. 188-89). Challenging anthropology's notion of physical co-presence as the ideal means to fully grasp people's life experiences and recalling the phenomenological claim that 'we are all limited by our own horizons of perception', they encourage us to use our lockdown experiences to find new 'vantage points' towards anthropology and ethnography in a changeable, digitalized world:

"[E]xperiences of simultaneous isolation and connectedness during the pandemic take to an extreme what anthropologists have been observing for years about how our worlds are changing and its implications for ethnographic research methods" (Wynn & Trnka, 2022, p. 191).

With our extensive 'lockdown ethnography' fresh in mind, we adopt a similar approach to the knowledge and experiences shaped by the spread of Covid-19. None of us were likely to have embarked on a 2-year long online fieldwork had it not been for the pandemic, and yet the five of us now perceive it as a transformative experience that has left important and useful marks on us as researchers. It has allowed us to rethink our roles and potentials as ethnographers in a world marked by multiple global crises and levels of uncertainty, and reminded us of the profoundly human conditions we share with our research participants, even when our lives and circumstances may appear far apart.

Sharing pandemic feelings

As illustrated in researcher Ida Wentzel Winther's first encounter with 50-year-old Susanne in the beginning, many of our lockdown interviews were marked by research participants' description or direct display of emotional turmoil, especially from the first weeks of lockdown in spring 2020. Emotional displays can be a vital aspect of ethnographic research but are seldom straightforward. Anthropologist Francine Lorimer reflects on her fieldwork among psychiatric patients in a hospital ward in 2004-05, suggesting that "emotional responses during fieldwork can often indicate our own frustrations as we struggle to be empowered in an unfamiliar setting" (Lorimer, 2010, p. 100). In 'Emotions in the field', anthropologist James Davies discusses how "certain emotions evoked during fieldwork can be used to inform how we understand the situations, people, communities, and interactions comprising the life worlds we enter" (ibid., p. 1). The reflexive turn of 1980s and 90s' anthropology catalyzed important discussions regarding the relationship between the ethnographer's position in the field and the material produced there, including the ways in which our ascribed gender, ethnicity, and personal history affect how we understand, interact with, and write about our field sites. According to Davies, however, these discussions "left comparatively under-investigated the researcher's states of being during fieldwork and how these states may

either enable or inhibit the understanding that fieldwork aims to generate" (ibid., p. 1). Inspired by Lorimer and Davies, we are struck by the prevalence of emotional and existential issues in our ethnographic material. This was apparent in an interview with 38-year-old Elisabeth and her five-year old daughter Molly from outer Copenhagen in April 2020, described by researcher Dorte Kousholt below:

> *Elisabeth and Molly sit together by the dinner table while Molly is drawing. Elisabeth shares how they don't have much living space. I can see that the living room and kitchen are one joint room, with many things placed closely around them. I can almost feel the small room through the screen. From my own lockdown life, I recognize the feeling of being more people confined in a limited space serving several functions, with clutter and the remains of different activities lying around. Elisabeth is visibly affected by the lockdown situation, by the strained relationship with Molly's father (whom she is no longer together with) and by worries about Molly. But we can only discuss these things superficially, with Molly sitting right there. I sense how Elisabeth is watching out for Molly but also longs to talk. We carefully move through the interview together, like two shaken pendula trying to find a familiar frequency together.*

This situation is saturated with emotions, and while she has never met Elisabeth before and only knows few things about her, Dorte experiences an immediate sense of congeniality emerge between herself and Elisabeth, tied to their shared life circumstances of being confined with their loved ones as mothers, citizens and provisional remote workers in a small space during an unpredictable world crisis. It is as if a nerve or thread of resonance appears between them. Such sharing of personal hardships with strangers evokes questions about privacy and formality practiced in different cultural settings. Much anthropology seeks to either 'familiarise the unknown' or 'defamiliarise the known', both with the aim of challenging cultural stereotypes and bringing new perspectives on the world as we know it (Hastrup, 1992). As ethnographers, we often get close to the people we study and live or work with, and it can be challenging not to 'go native' and either 'disappear' into a given group of people or choose an already familiar field close to one's own life. Since anthropology's representation crisis in the 1980s, such concerns have assumed a more ambiguous character: On one hand, warnings have been issued against 'home blindness' and loss of professional distance, and on the other, the potential gains of knowing research participants' life circumstances, codes and beliefs 'from the inside' have been raised (Hastrup, 1995). Rather than positioning ourselves at either end of this spectrum, we aim to transgress this dichotomy between closeness and distance. We approach the social and emotional confidence emerging between us and our research participants during an urgent global crisis through Rosa's concept of resonance, understanding this relationship as a fundamentally human response to the world during uncertain and unsettling events. We thus perceive interactions like the one between Dorte and Elisabeth above or between Ida and Susanne described earlier as spaces of resonance, with two human beings connecting to each other in the context of the pandemic, with one part hurting or crying and the other part responding or resonating. Ida and Dorte could not place a hand of the shoulder of their respective research participants, and yet they both – like the rest of us during most of our interviews in this project – experienced an intense vibration or connection emerge between themselves and the other. They did not know each other's 'relationship to the world' (Rosa, 2019), but at that moment they shared

world experiences and 'appropriated the world' in new ways by being caught in the pandemic indefinitely and finding themselves isolated and segregated from important others.

Final thoughts

This research project has evoked fundamental questions about researcher roles, presence and positionality, recalling previous discussions of methodology and epistemology: From 'armchair anthropology' to onsite participation and again to connecting digitally through cameras and screens and files in a global crisis. We and our research participants found ourselves caught in a collective state of emergency. Our conversations – both with informants and among each other in the research group – became a space to share and resonate with each other's intimate issues and heart-felt concerns, or what Rosa calls 'harbours of resonance in a stormy sea' (Rosa, 2019, p. 202). Being physically apart and yet experiencing unfamiliar terrain closely together, we were in many ways remotely embedded. This combination of being both remote and present, embedded and a torso on a screen, available in a split second across the country and disconnected at the touch of a button, provided a different kind of presence from what anthropologists commonly refer to as 'being there' – a presence we best describe as 'being *with'*.

Our study exemplifies a transmethodological approach (Khawaja & Kousholt, 2021) that emphasizes responsiveness to the constraints and possibilities of conducting research in times of uncertainty. It reveals how global crises can reshape ethnographic practices, pushing the boundaries of how we engage with research participants and make sense of the world. One might find this kind of contemplative position or approach too passive in a world burning in front of our eyes. Rosa does not associate his theory of our world relationship with political action, but he helps us understand human longing and connection, not as merging in unity but as 'encountering another as an Other' in spaces of resonance and adaptive transformation (Rosa 2019, p. 447).

The project and our online approach further allowed us to get to know many people and record their experiences of an ongoing global crisis in real time. It provided us with a body of material that spanned two years and involved many extensive conversations with individual families. The procedure was relatively easy and cost-efficient. We were not 'there' in our familiar way of doing ethnographic research. Nevertheless, 'being with' each other and our research participants under conditions of uncertainty and constraint, and developing new ways of collaborating as a research group, prompted transgressive methodological and analytical insights across our different disciplines and ways of working. The resonance across the researcher/research participant-divide provided us with close insights on the personal, unremarked aspects of everyday life during a global crisis. We think this experience can be used in the context of other global crises, including the multiple political and ecological crises marking our time.

Collaborating in a safe professional 'haven' during a difficult time gave us a glimpse of how we might create caring and committed research collectives in future projects. Having experienced 'spaces of resonance and adaptive transformation' emerge between the five of us and our research participants during the pandemic raises the question: How do we avoid backsliding? How do we allow new ways of connecting and understanding to emerge among us? These questions regard all researchers and other actors concerned with

building hope and community in today's turbulent world. We may not create immediate structural changes, but it is urgent that we continue to experiment and share across familiar divides.

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