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Mapping out an anthropology of defrauding and faking

In the aftermath of the global economic crisis and the rise of post-truth in media and politics, trust and authenticity appear as fleeting qualities, having been replaced by suspicions of fraud and fakery. By looking at defrauding and faking as practices and questioning public discourses about them, laden with normative evaluations, as they are, this special issue ethnographically explores everyday interactions and imaginaries, to learn about the underlying political, economic and moral changes. Studying defrauding and faking opens a unique window to various key issues: the emergence (and crisis) of routines and technologies for establishing trustworthiness and genuineness, fraudsters' knowledge production and problematic research ethics. We feel that anthropologists need to challenge themselves with topics that afford no sure footing, in moral or political terms, to produce new irritants, questions and insights.

Key words fraud, fake, trust, authenticity, ethics

Introduction

At the end of 2016, news media circulated the story of a fake US embassy in Accra, Ghana, proudly flying the Star-Spangled Banner while selling forged visas to hopeful Ghanaian migrants. What could better fit perceptions of West Africa as a space of conmen and insolent officialdom? A few days later, however, a newspaper claimed that neither local law enforcement nor people living nearby had ever heard of this fake embassy or this particular visa scam, and that no American flag was to be seen in front of the address mentioned (Die Tageszeitung 2016). The story itself seemed to be fake, perhaps fabricated by US government agencies or international media. When one of us (Jan Beek) spoke to police in Accra, they did not know about this specific case yet gave credence to the story, as it also aligned with their view of their country. The multi-layeredness of this story exemplifies the loss of authenticity of – and the deterioration of trust in – institutions and symbols that once seemed reliable. In the aftermath of the global economic crisis and the rise of post-truth in media and politics, this loss is no longer symbolically contained in the Global South. Trustworthiness and genuineness appear fleeting, while suspicions of fraud and fakery burgeon. Notably, although these latter terms allege criminal deception, they rarely lead to court procedures. Instead, calling something 'fraud' or 'fake' has become a shortcut for rendering it scandalous. The terms serve as powerful metaphors for the social flaws and insecurities of a changing political, legal and moral landscape.

Practices of defrauding and faking have always hovered on the margins of anthropological enquiry, perhaps because the discipline focuses on practices that foster social cohesion (see Mühlfried 2018: 9). Anthropologists have rarely studied frauds and fakes

in detail, preferring objects of enquiry that allow a clearer moral and political positioning. In this special section, we are interested not so much in contributing to public discourses about fakes and frauds that are loaded with normative evaluations but rather in mapping out *practices* of defrauding and faking, exploring ethnographically the everyday interactions and imaginaries that shape political, legal and moral landscapes – and in doing so inquiring into those radical changes that the perceived rise of a new fraudulence suggests. Beyond that, we need to consider practices of establishing trustworthiness and genuineness to understand the processes that form – or fail to form – the inherent distinctions on which these landscapes are based. Anthropologists must challenge themselves with topics that provide no sure moral or political footing, so as to produce new irritants, questions and insights.

What insights can the study of fraudulent practices offer anthropology? Why should we be interested in the creative tactics of conmen, the spread of pyramid schemes or the persuasiveness of fake stories? What moral and ethical challenges accompany such inquiry? While a systematic discussion of the topic is rare, three approaches can be identified that speak to these questions. The political economy approach by the Comaroffs' (2000) and others highlights the functionality of fraud within capitalist societies. Goffman (1959, 1974) looks at the everyday interactions, providing useful concepts for understanding the intricate connections between 'strips of activity' (1974: 10) which – depending on the social situation – may be labelled either genuine or fraudulent. Lastly, Benjamin (1955 [2003]: 12) argues that technological change, more specifically reproducibility, has fundamentally undermined notions of authenticity, leading to a world of copies without originals. This paper approaches the aforementioned questions by first attempting to demarcate the topic, to sketch the history of research into defrauding and faking and to discuss its relationship with trust and technologies of authenticity. We then reflect on fraudsters as a source of knowledge production, both in academia and beyond, and as a challenge for research ethics. Interwoven with our argument are summaries of contributions in this special section, which have encouraged us to develop these ideas.

What constitutes defrauding and faking?

In online communication, news stories or the tax planning of transnational companies, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the fraudulent and the trustworthy, between fake and genuine. Outlining a sociology of financial fraud, Harrington remarks on the ever hazier line between the legal and illegal, remarking that 'for fraud to occur, it must be difficult to recognise as such' (2012: 394). When looking at everyday interactions, drawing the lines becomes even more difficult. In studying everyday practices of self-presentation, Goffman (1959) repeatedly discusses imposters and conmen: figures whose performances are similar to those of the rest of us, except in that they may be 'discredited' afterwards (1959: 44, see also 42, 144). Krige (2012: 69–70) questions the distinction even more profoundly, by describing Ponzi schemes not as fraudulent but as part of larger processes of financial risk-taking.

Still, there have been many attempts to demarcate the topic. Legally, fraud is understood as a deliberate deception to secure unfair or unlawful gain – a definition some scholars adopt (see Harrington 2012: 395; Whyte and Wiegratz 2016). Ottermann (2000: 24) defines fraud by looking at the victim, contrasting fraud, in which the mark

is not aware that he is being deceived, with the theatre, in which the audience seeks out make-believe. On the basis of 'the moral attitude of the citizenry to these undertakings', Goffman differentiates between 'benign' and 'exploitive fabrications' (1974: 103). The former may serve a higher goal, if only to entertain; the latter is inimical to the 'private interests' of those who are contained. Ogino (2007: 21; 25) understands interactions between conman and deceived as lacking any sociality ('zero-degree-sociality'), as devoid of any social rules.

However, the contributions in this issue thwart these definitions. Michael Bürge's paper on money doubling in Makeni, Sierra Leone brings this out most starkly. Money doubling allows the young men he observed to partake in the city's growing economy. In these interactions, the client and ethnographer alike are taken in. However – perhaps most surprisingly – the perpetrator himself seems to be taken in by narratives about European and Chinese ships copying money off the coast of West Africa. All parties perceive money doubling as fundamentally indistinct from other economic practices, as consistent with their imaginaries of wealth creation and distribution in Sierra Leone. To confront the aforementioned scholarly definitions with this ethnographic material is to destabilise these concepts, beginning with the implied division of perpetrators from victims. The perpetrators do not engage in a purely deliberate deception but believe their own narratives – to an extent. Indeed, as Lewis and Saarni (1993: 9) show, lying involves degrees of awareness, and always requires some form of self-deception. Nor are the deceived completely unaware that these practices may be fraudulent and unsustainable.

The impossibility of reliably discerning defrauding and faking tells us something fundamental about them: practices are not fraudulent *per se*, nor are objects *essentially* fake; even Ponzi schemes could be understood – and are sometimes genuinely perceived by their perpetrators – as failed economic enterprises. According to Benjamin (1955 [2003]: 16; 24), works of art once only became genuine by being embedded in traditions and rituals, but now – in the age of mechanical reproduction – mainly emerge out of a process of constantly 'testing' them. Practices become fraudulent and objects fake by actors producing them as such – by raising suspicions, by actors accusing others and sometimes in the rare final step of seeking a judicial ruling.

Therefore, the object of our research does rely on emic perspectives. In other words, we are interested in practices, persons, organisations and objects when the people involved raise questions about their trustworthiness and genuineness. Thus, studying defrauding and faking is necessarily also a study about authenticating, about practices that produce the very underlying distinctions of the genuine and the fraudulent.

A conceptual history and geography of frauds and fakes

While much has been written on particular historic frauds and fakes, systematic writing on their history is sparse. When authors do so, they often ask when frauds and fakes came into the world, implying an imagined time before. For Horkheimer and Adorno, defrauding and faking begin with the domination of nature; fascinated by the figure of cunning Odysseus and his lie about being called 'nobody', they argue that defrauding is an inherent part of the dialectic of enlightenment, allowing for the transcendence

of tautological speech but destabilising identity (1988 [1948]: 64–7). Since Odysseus, defrauding has been a key theme in literature, allowing for the exploration of the relation between narration and reality. Other authors point to the 1800s popularisation of the commodity economy as inspiring the onset of widespread fraud (Ogino 2007: 7). This resonates with literature; in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* or Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man*, a new figure appears in the expanding urban spaces of the late 1800s: the fraudster. For this figure, fraud is not a single act but imbues the whole character. In this strand of literature, narrating fraudulent schemes allows the ruptures of societal and technological change to be explored.

Instead of seeking a beginning, most authors point to the present, claiming a profound change regarding defrauding and faking – as we did in the introduction. The Comaroffs' concept of 'occult economies' (2000: 315) as a response to crisis of wealth production of capitalism provides a vocabulary that, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, has become nearly mainstream. More recently, Whyte and Wiegratz (2016: 1–4) state that fraud and corruption have become normalised in the global economy, underpinned by an all-pervasive 'moral culture' in contemporary capitalist societies. Monaghan and O'Flynn (2013) assume a 'Madoffization' of contemporary societies.

However, the assumption that frauds and fakes have skyrocketed in the last decade becomes tenuous in a historical perspective.[1] Minsky (1992: 9), an economist who rose to prominence after the 2008 financial crisis, sees Ponzi schemes not as an aberration but as a routine phase in the business cycles of capitalist economies. The perception that fraud has become all-pervasive could itself be understood as a cyclical phenomenon in capitalist societies. Yet, even when such assumptions tell us little about the increase of fraud, they are meaningful regarding changes in the underlying distinctions. They show an increase in doubt concerning certain beliefs, from the fairness of capitalism to the trustworthiness of news.

Besides placing fraud at certain times, scholars also situate frauds and fakes in certain spaces or cultures. In her edited volume on fraud, Harrington differentiates Western cultures, which see deception as morally ambivalent, and non-Western cultures, which 'treat deception in an explicitly positive light' (2009: 16). Although there are certainly distinct histories of producing fraud in the world, such a generalisation is problematic. Odysseus is only the first of many trickster figures in the Global North, and people in the Global South certainly do not applaud corruption and fraud.

In anthropology, defrauding and faking has been studied at the frontiers of capitalist expansion. Hibou argues that an 'economy of dirty tricks' (1999: 110) in Africa had emerged as a result of the economic downturn since the 1980s. Working on Nigeria, both Smith (2007) and Apter (2005: 254) write about a culture of corruption, though they note ambivalences and transnational interrelations. In studying Eastern Europe, Verdery (1995: 643, 662) shows how the pyramid schemes of the 1990s introduced new understandings of money and provided wealth to an emerging elite. Studying similar schemes later, Musaraj understands them as part of a translation from socialist forms of wealth production to an 'entrepreneurial culture' (2011: 88).

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[1] There exists no comprehensive research on the history or politics of frauds and fakes in the respective disciplines, even though these practices had serious impacts on everyday life and macro-politics alike. For instance, faking official documents was a widespread practice in the medieval period. In the late 20th century, the collapse of several pyramid schemes even sparked a civil war in Albania.

The Comaroffs (2009: 12) describe an industry committed to faking in the Global South versus an industry of 'authentication' in the Global North. In a more general sense, however, they also suggest that this depiction of Africa, and the Global South as a whole, is enmeshed with old and new regional stereotypes: 'postcolonies are quite literally associated with a counterfeit modernity, a modernity of counterfeit' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 13, 6; see also Burrell 2012). Whyte and Wiegratz (2016: 4) explicitly criticise the depicted dichotomy of a corrupt Global South versus an ethical Global North, instead pointing out the fraudulence of neoliberal interventions.

In this special section, Zhipeng Gao and Katherine Bischoping offer a fascinating contribution to these questions by comparing perceptions of Lei Feng, a Chinese hero lionised by Chairman Mao, in China and the USA. To audiences in the USA, Lei Feng is a hilariously obvious fake, invented to propagandise an unquestioning population. Chinese actors have a very different understanding; they refrain from questioning the genuineness of pictures of Lei Feng because of the pedagogical and societal good that his stories bring. Instead of referring to culture, the authors argue that different politics of authentication lead to diverging framings of Lei Feng in China and elsewhere. The contribution also shows that the perception of fakeness is interwoven with past and present transnational power relations, a reflection that is often missing when discussing similar topics in Africa or Eastern Europe.

Indeed, we argue that considerable research on fakes and frauds not only describes but also partakes in the making of fraud by not scrutinising its underlying politics. Such research has reproduced regional stereotypes, locating deviant practices in the Global South. This special section could likewise be criticised because most of its contributions describe defrauding in Africa or by African actors. This is a result of the anthropologists' regional expertise in this special section and of the power of actors in the Global North, for instance, corporate tax lawyers, to deny researchers access to practices that may be identified as fraudulent. Gao and Bischoping's contribution, in contrast, makes it clear that distinct historical paths have created diverging political and moral practices of authentication, leading to diverging perceptions of what constitutes frauds and fakes in different parts of the world.

Authentication practices and the re-emergence of relational morals

Preoccupation with defrauding and faking is not new. Rather, there is a new anxiety about the increasing difficulty of identifying trustworthy, genuine interactions, whether it comes to reading digital news, assessing new political movements, taking blood tests or buying German diesel cars. Reeves (2013: 515, 517) has found that Russian officials sometimes accept fake registration documents more readily than authentic ones, because the former can be produced to be more believable. Frauds and fakes are not self-evident, but result from work, and arising out of legal, political or moral attribution. To understand them, we need to examine the practices of establishing, maintaining or testing trustworthiness and genuineness, because these determine something as fraudulent or fake. Our increasing difficulties point to the current fragility of such authentication practices, due to pluralisation of political authority,

cross-fertilisation, transnational mobility, changing legal and moral regimes and the introduction of technologies of authentication.

In his paper on undocumented migrants in France, Stefan Le Courant shows the complex and extensive identification technologies with which they are confronted. Migrants may react by forging several – similarly complex – identity documents and paper trails, even embodying these new identities. Their life becomes a perpetual struggle with tests of their documents. In Le Courant's account, the technological means of authentication not only largely fail to establish these documents as fake, but also fail at fixing identities; the migrants who forged these documents suffer from the multi-layeredness of their new names.

This introduction of technological means aligns with current Euro-American organisational theory, which portrays trust as emerging out of transparent procedures (Corsín 2011: 182). Denying the relational and political dimensions of trust – and in turn of defrauding and faking – such technologies and organisational structures are designed to create systems that are imminently trustworthy. The popular preoccupation with fraud happens against the backdrop of using this term less and less in administrative or legal settings. The 2008 financial crisis, the document leaks and most of the mentioned scandals did not lead to criminal cases of fraud but to civil ones. As civil cases, they were not about the reconstitution of a moral order that had been violated by the perpetrator but about damages, suggesting an unfair economic exchange. In the digital sphere, there are attempts to abolish defrauding and faking altogether, for instance by using machine learning algorithms to filter out 'fake news'. A huge anti-fraud sector has been established that is not concerned with fighting fraud in the conventional sense so much as developing new algorithms and surveillance possibilities that automatically prohibit fraudulent interactions. These attempts represent utopian visions of 'designing crime out', of creating digital spaces that prohibit engaging in defrauding or faking in the first place (Wall 2007: 188).

Such attempts to forestall the possibility of defrauding and faking by reshaping social systems jars against the current revival of fraud suspicion in popular discourse. The public outcries about prominent fraud cases are attempts to reconstitute fraud and fake as concepts that allow practices to be discussed (albeit retrospectively) in legally and morally recognisable terms. In his paper on 'fake' Ghanaian pastors, Shipley sees 'fake at the symbolic centre of moral deliberation' (2009: 538).

This aspect of fraud and fakes can be seen most clearly in Jan Beek's contribution on multi-level marketing schemes, which move from Asian countries to Kenya. These schemes are travelling models, rapidly circulating certain capitalist rationalities and fantasies. Although these schemes find huge success, easily crossing borders and gaining millions of followers, actors perpetually raise allegations of fraud against the schemes and their managers. Framing multi-level marketing practices in the idiom of defrauding and faking allows actors to understand the workings of these schemes not as abstract systems but as relational – as fraudulent interactions between human beings. Fraud allegations thereby allow people to conceive of impersonal, abstract economic relations as trustworthy – or untrustworthy – relationships. Corsín (2011: 193) describes trust as a quality of relations, relations that also necessarily contain and revert to mistrust. Mühlfried likewise emphasises the relational aspect of trust, understanding trust and mistrust not as opposites but rather as mutually constitutive 'modes of relating to human beings and the world as a whole' (2018: 11).

By raising suspicion about fraud, actors bring to view complex societal entanglements as practices that they are engaged in; speaking of being defrauded by someone,

or someone faking, makes actors themselves visible. While responsibility is widely dissipated in a systemic view, the idiom of defrauding and faking opens up a clear way of attributing responsibility (see Corsín 2011: 180; also Gluckman 1972). Fraud allegations enable a perception of society as consisting of interpersonal relations, and bring to the fore normative dimensions of economic, political and other practices.

Overall, the current moment is characterised by two contradictory shifts pertaining to defrauding and faking. Confronted with the fragility of established authentication practices, ever-newer arrangements and technologies promise to move beyond issues of fraud, to rule out its possibility. Simultaneously, that the idiom of fraud is increasingly popular can be read as the (re-)emergence of distinct moral orders in the public sphere. Re-establishing defrauding and faking as meaningful categories provides actors with a heuristic for seeing economic connections as interpersonal relations imbued with normative expectations.

Fraudsters and knowledge production

Studying fraudsters also opens a window onto society at large. Ogino argues that fraudsters inhabit a special societal space because their interactions are not bound by conventional morality. Therefore, 'those who examine society (let us call these people sociologists) should view society in the same way as the conman' (Ogino 2007: 113). The fraudster's viewpoint enables new insights, because their success depends on staying one step ahead of potential victims in their knowledge of society and translocal phenomena. Successful fraudulent strategies presuppose knowledge of power and trust relations, of hierarchies and role models, which can only be acquired by closely analysing performances of those social phenomena. 'The presentation of self in everyday life' (Goffman 1959) matters for fraudsters, as they must study it to present a fake but trustworthy self that withstands scrutiny. By their success, fraudsters' practices prove that they have an immediate grasp of social perceptions, expectations and stereotypes. They tap into – and thereby give stark expression to – underlying anxieties and dreams.

At the same time, it is questionable whether their interactions are insightful because they are, as Ogino puts it, 'not bound by conventional morality' (2007: 113). Fraudsters depend on convincingly performing this 'conventional morality' and (partially) acting according to it. Their performance of 'conventional morality' merits closer investigation because it provides social scientists with a unique vantage point to learn about establishing and maintaining trust relations or performing roles. The recent work of John Cox (2018: 126) on a pyramid scheme in Papua New Guinea does exactly that, exploring how the scheme reproduced and amplified the participants' vision of their nation based on 'Christian citizenship' and egalitarian access to basic needs.

Studying fraudsters can also lend insight into other topics. Nigerian scammers draw scholarly attention because they so creatively invent strategies which bespeak a profound knowledge of stereotypical perception of Africans and Africa, held by non-Africans, reflecting the aforementioned transnational power relations (see Burrell 2012: 5). Looking beyond academia, fraudsters crop up in literature, theatre and film because they allow us to reflect on so many aspects of society. Molière's Tartuffe, Gogol's government inspector and Patricia-Highsmith's talented Mr Ripley point to the immorality of elites, false preachers, questionable laws, and the dysfunctionality of bureaucratic institutions.

Moreover, artists can use tactics that resemble those of fraudsters, though for different ends, intervening in real settings. Groups such as the Yes Men employ 'benign fabrications' (Goffman 1974: 87), not for monetary gain but to shed light on political and economic practices: in 2004, on the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, a seemingly genuine Dow Chemical spokesman appeared on BBC News, declaring that the multinational corporation would pay US$12 billion for the victims' medical care. The spokesman was actually Jacques Servin, a member of the Yes Men. As a result, 'in Frankfurt, Dow's share price fell 4.24 percent in 23 minutes, wiping $2 billion off its market value' (CNN 2004: np). After two hours of worldwide coverage, Dow Chemical issued a press release denying the 'spokesman's' declaration. The very name, the Yes Men, hints at a significant feature of the group's strategies for gaining access to the BBC, WTO or UN Climate Change Conference. Like conmen, these artists pay particular attention to implicit, uncodified standards and habitualised norms by which members of a society often unconsciously evaluate other members and their acts.

This again shows that fraudsters only partially break or transgress norms. Rather, frauds and fakes inspire confidence by confirming, even over-affirming, norms and imaginaries. Arns and Sasse (2006) examine such 'subversive affirmations' when analysing the resistance strategies of performance artists who intervene in the public sphere. The over-affirmation of a norm or imaginaries first reveals its affirmation. Having established confidence, the artists can uncover practices, casting doubt on their legality and morality. Implementing a successful artistic hoax – just like a confidence trick – necessitates discerning gaps in officialdom, social flaws, changes in the political, economic and moral landscape, and the diffuse anxieties and desires they engender as well as many other phenomena that usually bypass scholarly attention. Therefore, 'benign' and 'exploitative' fabrications alike allow insight into the socio-political and moral landscapes of the societies we study.

Research ethics

Lastly, this raises questions about the role of researchers within this landscape. Conventionally, anthropologists have studied people on the geographic, economic or political margins. More recently, many have also preferred to look at actors and practices that allow an unambiguous political and moral positioning. Although the fraudsters and forgers that we study in this special section fit into the first category, as perpetrator of crimes, wrongs or falsehoods, they do not fit into the second. Indeed, studying such practices creates new dilemmas with regards to positionality and research ethics, especially during participant observation. Cox, for instance, did not attend the pyramid scheme meetings that he studied and refused to interview its 'experienced swindlers' (2018: 12), because he feared that his presence as a white academic could have been used to validate the scheme. How far does 'participating' go? Are researchers to warn the fraudsters' victims? Or, when it comes to migration and forged papers, are we to help these actors keep their practices secret? In a way, the very use of such terms as 'fraud' and 'fake' is problematic; by considering only people who are widely regarded as defrauding or faking, we ignore powerful actor groups that have managed to label tax evasion, lobbying and other similar practices as legal and morally legitimate.[2]

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[2] Exceptions are Harrington's (2016) research into wealth management professionals and that of Mugler (2018) into global tax regimes.

Both the researcher's dilemma regarding his or her positionality and anthropology's inattention to more powerful actors' wrongdoings point to the history of the discipline. During anthropology's classical period, researchers endeavoured to counter Eurocentric thinking about the putative irrationality of colonised peoples through writing that strove to 'rehabilitate' the so-called savages (Rottenburg 2013). The ethos of rehabilitation was based on a notion of cultural relativism that required ethnographers to suspend moral judgement. Such professional neutrality served the discipline well as long as rehabilitation projects prevailed. Yet, as the artificial divide between 'us and them', observers and observed, is decreasingly tenable, neutrality has become thorny. In an increasingly entangled world, where discourses and images swiftly circulate and hitherto non-normative ways of being more readily spring up locally, what happens in Ghana may sway what happens in Britain, Germany, the USA or elsewhere – and visibly not just the other way around. According to Eriksen, however, 'many anthropologists are impeccable cultural relativists in their daily work, while they have definite, frequently dogmatic notions about right and wrong in their private lives' (2001: 13). To divide professional from private morality, as Eriksen suggests, may still facilitate access to the field, but can we afford to outright suspend moral judgement during fieldwork? It is easy to conceive of extreme scenarios such as overhearing the planning of a murder, in which researchers would have no choice but to act against research subjects' interests and report them to the authorities. However, morally ambivalent situations, such as encountering the feigning of identity documents, are both more prevalent and more perplexing to ethnographers. As Ferdinand et al. (2007) have shown, there can be no clear-cut answers to such ethical research dilemmas. They rather need to be seen 'as "situated dilemmas", mediated by the specific context in which they arise, that by their very nature are neither reducible nor amenable to universal codified rules' (2007: 335).

In her contribution on Ghanaian cyber tricksters, Ann Cassiman reflects on this quagmire and demonstrates how an ethnographer's temporary suspension of judgement can still be married to a moral inquiry, one that doesn't omit her from the picture. Her paper is thus less about exposing fraudulent practices than about the layered moral discussions such practices spark within the immediate social networks of their practitioners. In this sense, it can be considered an ethnographic contribution to a 'moral anthropology' (Fassin 2008). In terms of ethics, however, Cassiman sticks to the conventional anthropological objective of doing no harm to those she studies. Against this backdrop, she is considerably more apprehensive about revealing something that could harm her cyber trickster interlocutors than about the harm they cause their marks. This ties into a more general observation applicable to other authors writing on West African cyber-crime, whose writings barely conceal their fascination with the conmen (Beek 2016; Krings 2015; Smith D 2007; Smith A 2009). Why are we, as anthropologists, so fascinated by these people or perhaps even sympathetic to them? Why do we regard them differently from, say, right-wing extremists, whom we have less difficulty labelling as 'people we don't (necessarily) like' (Bangstad 2018)? Is it the fascination of the trickster, as Cassiman suggests, demonstrates that matters are less clear-cut on closer scrutiny? After all, a Ghanaian–US romance scam can still evolve into a social relation that fulfils distinct needs on both ends and that may continue even after it has been exposed as a scam (Beek 2018: 63). Perhaps, the West African scammer, like the post-revolutionary Russian impostor, also has the romantic appeal of a figure of resistance (Fitzpatrick 2005). The fascination would then turn out to be a distant echo of the rehabilitation project, re-emerging as sympathy for the marginalised who have found

a way to 'hit back' – akin to what Julius Lips (1937) suggested for artistic expressions mocking the coloniser, but this time with starker consequences. If the latter holds, then parts of this special section and similar research efforts not only speak about practices of defrauding and faking in the Global South, but also about a variety of the Lutheran 'Sündenstolz' that anthropologists from the Global North entertain, i.e. a kind of negative narcissism borne of the discipline's historical entanglements with colonialism and perhaps of a feeling of shame about the privilege of hailing from societies that, for the time being, have been on the winning side of capitalist expansion.

Conclusion

The current prominence of frauds and fakes is a symptom of neither their increase nor of moral decay. Rather, it marks the increasing difficulties in attributing trustworthiness and genuineness. This occurs against the backdrop of two opposing currents: attempts to make frauds and fakes disappear by employing technologies of authentication, and the rise of an idiom of frauds and fakes that emphasises relational moral expectations. Anthropologists facing these issues are confronted with new ethical dilemmas, a difficult positioning in the field and at the desk, and potential new insights into their role. As our contributions show, exploring defrauding and faking ethnographically allows radical shifts to be discerned that otherwise easily bypass scholarly attention: changing notions of friendship, reciprocity, business norms, transnational movements and readings of news media.

Neither these changes nor the practices that propel them lend themselves to normative perspectives. Ottermann (2000: 265) argues that successful frauds contain the potential for victims to recognise their faulty or incomplete view of the world – scams as a 'chance for societal enlightenment' (own translation). Cunning Odysseus restores his home after his travels, the trickster Ananse ultimately provides wisdom and the aforementioned novels often end with the definitive ruling of a judge. In our research, however, the changes brought about do not follow such grand narratives. Zainab, a Ghanaian scammer in Ann Cassiman's study, transforms society and relations in ways profoundly disruptive and disturbing. By defrauding and faking, she creates hybrid gender roles and reverses transnational money flows, yet also exploits genuine feelings of romantic love and undermines wealth distribution in her community in Accra. Such frauds change the political, legal and moral landscape as an earthquake does, while the fake fake-embassy in the same city hints at the illegibility and global entanglements of the landscape's new outline.

Acknowledgements

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Cartographie d'une anthropologie de l'escroquerie et du faux

Comme conséquence de la crise économique mondiale et de la montée en puissance de la post-vérité dans les médias et en politique, la confiance et l'authenticité semblent être des qualités

éphémères, remplacées en effet par des soupçons de fraude et de falsification. A travers l'analyse de pratiques d'escroquerie et de falsification et la remise en question des discours publics y afférant et leurs évaluations normatives, ce numéro spécial de *SA/AS* se penche sur les interactions et les imaginaires courants, pour mieux comprendre les changements politiques, économiques et moraux sous-jacents. L'étude de l'escroquerie et du faux ouvre des perspectives uniques sur diverses questions clés : l'émergence (et la crise) de procédures et de technologies permettant d'établir la fiabilité et l'authenticité, la production de connaissances de la part des escrocs et l'éthique problématique de la recherche. Les anthropologues devraient se donner comme défi d'aborder des sujets qui n'offrent aucune base stable, sur le plan moral ou politique, pour poser de nouvelles questions et produire de nouvelles sources de désaccord et de connaissances.

Mots-clés escroquerie, fraude, faux, confiance, authenticité, éthique