

Czech Association for Social Anthropology  
is pleased to invite you to

**216<sup>th</sup> GELLNER SEMINAR**

Thursday 20 March 2025 at 5:30 p.m.  
Conference room at Lusatian Seminary  
U Lužického semináře 90/13, Prague 1

# Eben Kirksey, Ph.D.

Professor of Anthropology, University of Oxford



## Big Sugar Made Big COVID: How Metabolic Rifts Made Us Vulnerable to a Virus

Rifts in ecological processes are increasing the rate of viral transmission from bats to other species. Agricultural enterprises are denuding forested landscapes worldwide, presenting new challenges for insect eating bats as they seek food at night. Intense stress from multiple sources is disrupting the delicately balanced metabolism and immune system of bats. Sick bats are literally falling from the sky and shedding viruses. Enfeebled and flapping around on the ground, bats are becoming easy prey for cats and other predators. Drawing on extended ethnographic field research in Southeast Asia using multispecies methods this talk will engage with a number of questions: Where are coronaviruses actively circulating among people and animals? Is the focus on Wuhan as the epicenter of 2020 pandemic fundamentally misplaced? Did metabolic problems generated by sugar facilitate the emergence of COVID-19?

Eben is a cultural anthropologist who is perhaps best known for his work in multispecies ethnography—a field that situates contemporary scholarship on animals, microbes, plants, and fungi within deeply rooted traditions of environmental anthropology, continental philosophy, and the sociology of science. Questions related to science and social justice animate his most recent book, *The Mutant Project* (2020), which offers an insiders account of the laboratory in China that created the world's first children whose genes were edited with CRISPR-Cas9. Eben was a British Marshall Scholar at the University of Oxford, before he went on to earn his PhD at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He has taught at some of the most selective and innovative higher education institutions like Princeton University and Deep Springs College. He helped found one of the world's first Environmental Humanities programs at UNSW Sydney in Australia.



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