

Dark Ethnography?

Encountering *the Uncomfortable Other* in Ethnographic Research

11 – 12 July 2019

International Workshop at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany

Organizers: Lene Faust (Bern) and Simone Pfeifer (Mainz)
Contact: lene.faust@anthro.unibe.ch; pfeifer@uni-mainz.de

FOREWORD

The workshop “Dark Ethnography” brings together researchers from anthropology and related disciplines working in the fields of neo fascism and militant Islamism, two somehow extreme sides of a political and societal spectrum. The three thematic sections focus on methodological and theoretical implications and challenges of working ethnographically with people that are categorized for example as ‘criminals’, ‘perpetrators’, ‘militant extremists’ or ‘terrorists’. Thereby the workshop expands on Sherry Ortner’s notion of “dark anthropology” and relates to a trend in anthropology to pay attention to “people we don’t (necessarily) like” (Sindre Bangstad).

Please register for participation as places are limited. To register, email Simone Pfeifer (pfeifer@uni-mainz.de). The keynote is open to the public.

The convener Lene Faust is member of the IRC Religious Conflicts and Coping Strategies at the Institute of Social Anthropology of the University of Bern. The convener Simone Pfeifer is member of the BMBF funded research project “Jihadism on the Internet: Images and Videos, their Appropriation, and Dissemination” at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.

We thank the BMBF, the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the “Gutenberg Workshops” and the DFG for their generous funding. Poster design by Ulf Neumann.

PUBLIC KEYNOTE:

Under a different name: Secrecy, Complicity, Ethnography
by Nitzan Shoshan (Mexico City)

Thursday, July 11, 7 pm, HS 15 (Hörsaal, forum 7)

Drawing on his research under a false identity, in this talk Nitzan Shoshan reconsiders the ethical imperative of absolute transparency and full disclosure in the transactions of anthropologists with their interlocutors in the field. Motivated by recent political developments in numerous world regions—including Europe—anthropology has recently shown a growing interest in research agendas that appear to entail the systematic violation of some of its most cherished ethical paradigms. Shoshan reflects on the significance of these disciplinary shifts by examining his evolving relationships with his interlocutors, particularly the social workers who consented to grant him access to their young right-wing extremist “clients” on the condition that he takes up an alias. Working under a different name brings into focus the intensive metapragmatic labor in which anthropologists engage as they position themselves in their respective fields, a dimension of our labor that too often remains unexplored. How do we draw our interlocutors into webs of secrecy and complicity as we withhold and obfuscate information in our transactions with them? How do we recruit them to collaborate with our dissimulations, and how, in turn, do they call upon us to reciprocate by upholding theirs? How do such complicities get mobilized interactionally and become discursively framed? Recognizing the importance of secrecy and complicity in fieldwork situations invites us to think, too, about the limits of transparency and honesty in ethnographic work more generally.

Workshop Timetable

Thursday, July 11th:

13:30 – 14:00 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION** (Lene Faust and Simone Pfeifer)

14:00 – 15:30 **PANEL 1: MORAL AND EMOTIONAL DILEMMAS**

Moderation: Lene Faust

Jens Adam (Berlin): **Situating Dark Ethnography: Violence, Neoliberalism and Alternative Futures in the European Anthropologies**

Martijn de Koning (Amsterdam): **Ethnography of IS and Al Qaeda Supporters in the Netherlands - Reflections on Ethical, Legal and Emotional Questions**

Simone Pfeifer (Mainz) and Larissa-Diana Fuhrmann (Mainz): **Research Ethics in Militant Contexts: Challenges in Digital Ethnography**

15:30 - 16:00 *Coffee Break*

16:00 - 17:30 **PANEL 2: CROSSING BORDERS IN FIELDWORK**

Moderation: Larissa-Diana Fuhrmann

Ajmal Hussain (Manchester): **On the Politics and Pitfalls of Researching Radicalisation**

Alice Blum (Giessen): **“Not Everything Was Bad throughout my Research” – Normative Expectations and Personal Uncertainties During Ethnographic Studies Regarding Right Wing Extremism**

Ana Ivasiuc (Marburg): **Game of Selves: ‘Uncomfortable Others’ and the Anthropologist’s Selves**

17:30 – 19:00 *Break with snack*

19:00 – 20:00 **PUBLIC KEYNOTE**: Room: HS 15 (Hörsaal), forum 7

Moderation: Christoph Günther (Mainz)

Nitzan Shoshan (Mexico City): **Under a Different Name: Secrecy, Complicity, Ethnography**

20:00 Reception with dinner in room: R 00-618 (kleiner Übungsraum), Forum 6

Friday, July 12th:

9:30 – 10:45 PANEL 3:
REFLEXIVITY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING ABOUT CONTESTED FIELDS 1
Moderation: Lene Faust

Anne Dippel, Valeska Bopp-Filimonov, Oliver Wurzbacher (Jena): **Where Dracula Turns into a Light Fairytale. On Pride and Prejudice in Contemporary Transylvania, Banat and Bukovina**

Marion Näser-Lather (Marburg): **'Dangerous' Fields – Challenges, Implications and Investigability**

10:45 – 11:15 *Coffee Break*

11:15 – 12:30 PANEL 3:
REFLEXIVITY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING ABOUT CONTESTED FIELDS 2
Moderation: Simone Pfeifer

Erol Saglam (Stockholm): **When Nationalism Meets Conspiracies: Insights from an Ethnographic Study on Violent Far-Right Communities in Contemporary Turkey**

Salman Hussain (Massachusetts, Amherst): **Ethnographic Entanglements: The Politics of Truth, Memory, and Emotion Among the Families and Claimants of the 'Missing Persons' in the 'War on Terror' in Pakistan**

12:30 – 13:00 **CLOSING SESSION WITH PANEL DISCUSSION:**

**Where to go from here?
Directions and Consequences for the Discourse about Ethics and Self-Reflexion in Social Anthropology**

Moderation & Discussion: Mario Krämer (Siegen)

Lunch