

Workshop:**Dark Ethnography?****Encountering 'the Uncomfortable Other' in Anthropological Research**

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Organizers:

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Outline:

The workshop "Dark Ethnography" aims to bring together anthropologists from different fields focusing on methodological and theoretical implications and challenges of working ethnographically with people that are categorized for example as 'criminals', 'perpetrators', 'militant extremists' or 'terrorists' and that anthropologists "don't necessarily like" (Bangstad 2017).

Sherry Ortner introduced the term "dark anthropology" for an "anthropology that emphasizes the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them." (Ortner 2016, 49). Ortner relates "dark anthropology" mainly to neoliberalism as a structural force that affects people's everyday lives and experiences and sees it as an opposition to "the anthropology of the good". Ortner's intervention theorizes changes in the political economy on a global scale and concludes with a turn to the anthropology of resistance and social movements. In our workshop we expand on Ortner's notion of "dark anthropology" and ask what a "dark ethnography" could look like and what happens if we engage with people that anthropologists usually oppose. Dealing with moral and ethical issues in anthropology has concerned representatives of the discipline time and again, culminating in the demand for a moral anthropology (Fassin 2008).

Along with recent developments like the Brexit vote, the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States and the accompanying rise of populism, the far right and neo fascist movements in Europe and the United States, there has been a rising interest within anthropology to ethnographically focus on these phenomena. A comparable tendency equally pertains to anthropological work that ethnographically relates to sympathizers and supporters of militant Islamist movements. A political development that is closely entangled with the 'war on terror' and islamophobia.

The two somehow extreme sides of a political and societal spectrum – neo fascism and militant Islamism – do have more in common as might be obvious at first sight. First of all, these positions relate to a trend in anthropology to pay attention to "people we don't (necessarily) like" (Bangstad 2017). These people cannot easily be portrayed by anthropologists as "the suffering subjects" that are "living in pain, in poverty, or under conditions of violence or oppression" (Robbins 2013, 448) because at the same time they

might be deeply involved in the exertion of violence and oppression, many contemporary anthropologists advocate against. Therefore, the relationships of anthropologists and the people they work with become ethically and morally highly charged and are part of complex relationships within a politically contested field.

Secondly, the positionality of the researcher in this highly contested environment becomes even more relevant. It is not only especially difficult to enter these ethnographic fields where building trust highly depends on the protection of the interlocutors' privacy and security (Hemmingsen 2011; de Koning, Bartels, und Koning 2014) but also the processes of inclusion and exclusion are highly politicized and contested in public debates (de Koning, Bartels, Koning 2014, 2011).

Thirdly, reflexivity in ethnographic writing is highly connected to emotional dimensions of the researcher's experience in the field and can be influenced by moral and ethical tensions. Devereux underlined the importance of taking into consideration fears and irritations of the researcher as main starting point in the process of data analysis (Devereux 1967). Especially for anthropologists who work in highly contested fields, self-positioning as anthropologist, questions of possible "contamination" due to closeness to the field and ways of ethnographic writing can lead to great challenges (Shoshan 2015).

We invite papers that deal with (but are not limited to) the following questions:

- How can one access politically contested, militant or dangerous fields? What are the consequences of working in such a field relating to the researchers but also the interlocutors' security?
- How can researchers reflexively position themselves during fieldwork and the process of ethnographic writing?
- How do we deal with writing about our interlocutors as complex personalities - not reducing them to specific or single valuation categories?
- What are specific ethical and moral challenges, for example also when anthropologist become involved in political and legal processes?
- Whose morals? Who is allowed to self-define and who decides what or who is good, bad, or dark?

We invite junior and senior anthropologists and researchers from related disciplines working ethnographically in the field of "dark ethnography" to join our workshop.

Please send a title and paper abstract of no more than 300 words, and a short bio (150 words) to lene.faust@anthro.unibe.ch and pfeifer@uni-mainz.de.

The deadline for abstracts is 15th of October 2018. Accepted abstracts will be notified by 15th of November 2018. We intend to publish the contributions of the workshop and are reaching out to possible publishers at the moment.

References

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