

“ENCOUNTERS ACROSS DIFFERENCE: ANTHROPOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS” WORKSHOP PROGRAM

*December 2nd, 2019
ISA, Hollandstrasse 11-13, 1020 Vienna, Austria*

This workshop explores theoretical and methodological nuances in framing complex social situations, where multiple social actors engaging with different traditions of knowledge interact with each other. Our main goal is to gain insight on these nuances to further develop a theoretical-methodological approach to the study of the interactions between different traditions of knowledge through the various ways in which subjects and objects locate, mobilize and evoke difference through worldviews, conceptions, affects, moods, dispositions, according to context. Our emphasis is on how knowledge embedded in multiple intertwined global connections and socio-historical and political contexts affect each other and the subjects involved, or on what we call “encounters”.

Encounters are directly significant to us in the recent context of the arrival of large numbers of forced migrants in Europe, most of them from the Middle East. The summer of 2015, also known as the “Summer of Migration”, is when this encounter intensified and became a point of inflection, or a critical event in Veena Das’ terms (1996), putting the asymmetries between different traditions of knowledge in evidence, resignifying them to account for what was deemed a crisis. Social actors evoked this encounter differently, sympathetically or unsympathetically, making this vernacular strongly polysemic. Yet, despite the specificity of this particular situation, we understand encounter(s) to be potentially much broader as an anthropological perspective.

Among anthropologists, the term encounters seem to thrive the most not in book or article headings, but in conference titles. General conferences in anthropology aim to attract the largest number possible of scholars, working in a myriad of different, relatively unrelated, fields. Thus, conference titles need to be all-encompassing to account for the most potential participants. Especially since after 2013, the term encounter spiked in the titles of conferences such as the AAA,

EASA, and the IUAES. However, taking for granted the idea of encounter as being “between people who start from sharply contrasting assumptions” (Keane 2007: 9) but not developing it any further has been all too common in the anthropological literature. Even some of the most preeminent usages of the term have appeared without a thorough or overt definition, as it is the case of usages by Talal Asad, Peter van der Veer, Webb Keane, Chris Hann, and Anna Tsing.

Asad (1990) mobilizes the term encounter between the “West” and its others (being it colonial or pre-pre-colonial) exclusively in terms of confrontational power relations. Since the early 1970’s, anthropologists such as him framed the interaction between colonial powers and the colonized as encounters. In addition, the “anthropological encounter” has been used for decades as another label to the ethnographic method of participative observation, and consequently to the relationship between the anthropologist and its object of study. Both usages have persisted, often surreptitiously and without further reflection, in the contemporary anthropological theoretical repertoire and lexicon. van der Veer (2009; 2001; 1994) also mobilized the term to account for “the colonial encounter” and “the ways in which indigenous discursive traditions are transformed through their encounter with colonizing discourses from the West (2001: 134). Yet, his ideas of “close encounter” and “fields of historical interaction and encounter” (2001: 8) suggest more overtly that “encounter” is not necessarily political face-off, but experienced as “culture” or “knowledge”. Keane (2009; 2007) uses the term to frame “the especially sharp contrasts found in the “mission encounter” between Dutch Calvinists and ancestral ritualists on the Indonesian island of Sumba. He develops such contrasts especially through concepts such as “semiotic ideology”, “language objectification”, “reflexivity”, and other concepts presented in light of his ethnographic work that only come into being through the relationship between the social actors involved and the knowledge forms produced by “the colonial encounter and postcolonial awake” (2007: 9), or “the encounter between two semiotic ideologies” (2007: 28).

Departing from a different perspective, Chris Hann (2014; 2012) develops his usage through salvaging a “plural concept of civilization” as first employed by Marcel Mauss, Alfred Kroeber, Robert Redfield and others. Here, civilization is different from culture only in terms of scale, and social groups like peasant communities were “part societies” that had to be analyzed in “dynamic interaction” with the larger tradition to which they belong (2012: 115). Ultimately, Hann seeks to

readdress the abandoned comparative analysis at a “meso-level” in anthropology “to show how micro investigations making use of ethnographic methods can be reconciled with the analysis of inter- and intra-civilizational dynamics” (2012: 114) - whether or not one makes use of the term civilization. Somewhat between Hann and the others, Anna Tsing (2005) uses the term encounter alongside “friction” and “fragments”. She is mostly interested in the flow of global connections and its relationship to context. Encounters here are the arena where the universal and the contextual meet, where the “engagement across difference” is produced through contingency” (2005: 3), or “zones of awkward engagement, where words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak” (2005: XI). Such encounters produce “global connections” that in turn “give grip to universal aspirations” (2005: 2). Friction, in turn, is transient, and arises out of these “encounters and interactions” (2005: IX). It “inflects motion”, which in turn is not reducible to the “self-actualization” of global forces with “universalist aspirations” “without restraint” (2005: 4-5); it defines “movement”, “cultural form” and “agency” (2005: 6). Thus, global connections are “made, and muddled, in friction” and created by “fragments of varied schemes and travels and encounters” (2005: 272).

A worthy final mention is Philip Fountain, who overtly defines the term as “not simply the unfurling of predetermined scripts, but rather dynamic spaces of negotiation” (2016: 163); spaces that he understands as “negotiated, contested, and constructed during the encounter itself” (2016:164). Like Fountain, many other authors also add new potential meanings to the idea of encounter in the anthropological lexicon. These usages may have their limitations but they all have their value. All in all, the term encounter seems to already have quite some value as anthropological currency, and even the more elusive usages seem to point out to important common denominators, which we propose should be the principle for a broad anthropological category with comparative width and heuristic power. Our main effort has been thus to disentangle possible meanings currently attached to the term in the anthropological repertoire to propose our working definition.

Most importantly to us, however, encounter serves as framework to understand and portray the asymmetric embeddedness of ideas, representations, values, dispositions and affects across different social groups to discuss how worldviews and social practices are shaped, and to assess how encounters have affected the social actors involved. In addition, we understand that the concept of

encounter(s) is but one way of framing and tackling theoretic-methodological phenomena as the meeting between different traditions of knowledge and consequently relationships between global forces and context, dynamics between orthodoxies and heterodoxies, and subtleties between happenstances and cultural and/or power structures.

This workshop aims to discuss alternative concepts to encounter(s) drawn from the anthropological lexicon and repertoire in order to: a) further develop encounter(s) as an anthropological category and/or perspective; b) become aware of the latter term's limitations and of other theoretical-methodological possibilities; and c) pollinize multiple potential perspectives through particularly developed discussions in others.

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PARTICIPANTS

Marzia Balzani is Research Professor of Anthropology at New York University Abu Dhabi. Her fieldwork has been conducted in India with Hindu Rajputs and more recently with Ahmadi Muslims of Pakistani heritage in the UK. Her research interests and publications encompass political ritual, gender and religious persecution, asylum and refugee studies and transnational and diasporic faith groups with reference to Hindu and Muslim South Asia. Her current fieldwork centres on heritage and identity in Tuscany, Italy. Her forthcoming books are *Ahmadiyya Islam and the Muslim Diaspora: Living in the End of Days* and *Connections: Introducing socio-cultural anthropology for the twenty-first century* (co-authored with Niko Besnier).

Sabine Bauer-Amin is a social anthropologist and researcher at ISA, as well as member of ROR-n. Previously, she has worked on the Middle East with a special focus on youth and issues of belonging and differentiation in Lebanon and Egypt. Her current research focus is on the situation of Middle Easterners mainly from Syria, Iraq and Egypt in Austria and beyond. Her interests are political and social dynamics, refugee studies and coping practices with uncertainty. Among her latest publication is *Volunteering among Refugees in Vienna and Bavaria as an Ethnographic Encounter*, in *Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia*.

Ayse Caglar is a Professor at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vienna University and a Permanent Fellow at IWM. She received her PhD at McGill University, Department of Anthropology and Habilitation in Sociology and Social Anthropology at Free University, Berlin. Before joining the University of Vienna she was a professor at and the chair of the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University, Budapest and she was a Minerva Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Goettingen. She was the co-editor of the journal *Sociologus*, the Associate Editor of *Global Networks: a Journal of Transnational Affairs* and is a member of the Editorial Board of the *American Ethnologist*, *Focaal*, *Anthropological Theory*, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, *International Journal of Political Sociology*.

Andreas Dafinger is Associate Professor at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest. He has a Masters (sociology and anthropology) and a Ph.D. (anthropology) from the J.W. Goethe University, Frankfurt, and a Habilitation in anthropology from the University of Leipzig. He has specialized in the fields of development studies, spatial anthropology, economic anthropology, methodology, ethnicity and ethnic conflict, and West African area studies. Among other works, he authored *The Economics of Ethnic Conflict: The Case of Burkina Faso*, Boydell & Brewer (2013).

Sarah Green is the leader of the Crosslocations project, a professor of social and cultural anthropology at the University of Helsinki, President of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), President of the AAA's Society for the Anthropology of Europe, and former editor of *Social Anthropology*. She is specialized in the anthropology of place, space, location and borders, and most particularly Greece, the Balkan and Mediterranean regions in recent years, though she has also carried out extensive fieldwork in the UK, both in London (on

radical and revolutionary feminist separatism) and Manchester (on the introduction of digital technologies to the city). Her publications include *Urban Amazons* (Palgrave-Macmillan 1997) and *Notes from the Balkans* (Princeton UP 2005), which won the Douglass Prize for Best Europeanist Ethnography in 2006; she has also co-written an experimental photographic book with Lena Malm, *Borderwork: a visual journey through periphery frontier regions* (2013); and has contributed a wide range of articles and book chapters.

Barbara Götsch is ISA's Deputy Director. She is a researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Her research interest is centred on socialities. After her PhD research (2016, University of Vienna), which focused on social cognition in a work context in urban Morocco, she turned to imaginings of the future in urban centres in Southeast Asia. Her publications include 'Imaginations of the future city in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Vienna: pathways to recognition, competitiveness and conviviality', forthcoming in *Archiv Orientalni* in 2020, and 'Reflections on a collective brain at work: one week in the working life of an NGO team in urban Morocco' in Ingold, Tim & Gisli Palsson. Eds. 2013. *Bio-social becomings: Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 123-144.

Monika Halkort is Assistant Professor of digital media and social communication at the Lebanese American University. For the year 2019-2020 she has been appointed as post-doctoral fellow at the Orient Institute Beirut. Her research centers on the intersectional dynamics of digital materiality, racialization and enclosure in contemporary data regimes. Her most recent work examines how technical infrastructures mediate conflicting horizons of death in the Mediterranean to conjure up new zones of 'non-being' (Fanon) and digital coloniality. The main geographic focus of my work is the Arab world. Her latest publication is *Decolonizing Data Relations: On the Moral Economy of Data Sharing in Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Canadian Journal of Communication, [S.I.], v. 44(3) 2019).

Stephan Kloos is the Director of ISA. He is a medical anthropologist (PhD 2010 UC Berkeley & San Francisco) who, for over 15 years, has conducted original research on the development and socio-cultural, political, and economic role of Tibetan medicine (Sowa Rigpa) in Asia. His latest publications include *Humanitarianism from Below: Sowa Rigpa, the Traditional Pharmaceutical Industry, and Global Health* (Medical Anthropology 39(3) 2019) and *The Pharmaceutical Assemblage: Rethinking Sowa Rigpa and the Herbal Pharmaceutical Industry in Asia* (Current Anthropology 58(6) 2017).

Fazil Moradi holds a PhD in social and cultural anthropology from the University of Halle-Wittenberg and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, where he is a lecturer. He is a fellow of the transnational *Research Network, Law, Organization, Science and Technology* (LOST), and *Sci-Tech Asia*, University of Hong Kong. Dr. Moradi starts his fellowship at Johannesburg Institute of Advanced Study, University of Johannesburg in South Africa in 2020. His latest publications are: "Tele-evidence: On the Translatability of Modernity's Violence," *Critical Studies* 4 (2019): 5-23 (with Richard Rottenburg);

“Un Translatable Death, Evidentiary Bodies: *After - Auschwitz and Murambi - in Translation*,” *Critical Studies* 4 (2019): 137-156; and "Health Perspectives among Halabja's Civilian Survivors of Sulfur Mustard Exposure with Respiratory Symptoms—A Qualitative Study," *PLOS ONE* (2019): 1-16 (with Faraidoun Moradi, Mia Söderberg, et al).

Marek Pawlak is a social anthropologist and Assistant Professor at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Jagiellonian University in Cracow. As a researcher, he also closely collaborates with Centre for Migration Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and Jagiellonian Centre for Migration Studies. In his research, he focuses on crises, migration, futures and emotions. In recent years, he has been conducting an ethnographic fieldwork on migration, affects and temporalities of crisis in Iceland and social class, gender identities and the notion of care in the Polish community in Norway. He has published a book *Zawstydzona tożsamość. Emocje, ideologie i władza w życiu polskich migrantów w Norwegii* [Embarrassing Identity. Emotions, Ideologies and Power among Polish Migrants in Norway] (Jagiellonian University Press, 2018).

Noura Salah Aldeen completed her B.A in Economics, and M.A in gender and development studies (Thesis: Gender and Migration: Beit Hanina as a case study) from Birzeit University, Palestine. She is currently a doctoral candidate in social and cultural anthropology at the University of Vienna, and is conducting her ethnographic field research among the black community in the old city of Jerusalem.

Leonardo Schiocchet has a PhD in anthropology (Boston University, 2011). He is a researcher at the Austrian Academy of Sciences Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA), P.I. of the FWF-funded project *Austro-Arab Encounters* (2018-2022) and editor of ROR-n's blog. Since 2006, his work has focused on the Anthropology of the Middle East, with particular attention to processes of social belonging and subjecthood among Arab refugees in the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe. Within this focus, his work has covered themes such as dynamics of suspicion and trust, ritualization, home-making processes, and others. In 2018, he edited the special issue “Anthropologists and Refugees between the Middle East and Europe” in *The Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia*, 4(2).

Maria Six-Hohenbalken is Deputy Director of the Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, and lecturer at the Department for Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna. Her fields of interest are political violence, migration, refuge, memory studies, transnationalism and diaspora studies and historical anthropology. She co-edited *Memory and Genocide. On What Remains and the Possibility of Representation* together with Fazil Moradi and Ralph Buchenhorst (2017). Her latest publication is *May I be a sacrifice for my grandchildren, Transgenerational Transmission and Women's Narratives of the Yezidi ferman*, *Dialectical Anthropology* 2018.

Martin Slama is a researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences (ISA) and a lecturer at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology (IKSA) at the

University of Vienna. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Indonesia (Java, Bali, Sulawesi, the Moluccas, West Papua) and his main research topics include the Hadhrami diaspora, Islam in Indonesia, and the uses of social media and mobile communication technologies in Southeast Asian contexts. Recent publications: *Online Publics in Muslim Southeast Asia: In Between Religious Politics and Popular Pious Practices* (co-authored with Bart Barendregt), *Asiascape: Digital Asia* (2018); *A subtle economy of time: social media and the transformation of Indonesia's Islamic preacher economy*, *Economic Anthropology* (2017).

TIMETABLE

December 2nd

Morning

9:00am – 9:15am > *Welcome Remarks*

Stephan Kloos (ISA Director)

Sabine Bauer-Amin

Leonardo Schiocchet

9:15 – 10:00 > *Introduction*

Chair: Martin Slama

Leonardo Schiocchet – *Encounter as Anthropological Perspective*

Sabine Bauer-Amin – *Shifting Notions of Difference: Arab-speaking Christians & Egyptians of different Generations in Vienna*

10:00 – 11:30 - *Panel 1* > *Discussant - Sarah Green*

Chair: Maria Six-Hohenbalken

Martin Slama

Stephan Kloos

Andreas Dafinger

11:30 – 13:00 - **Lunch Break (catering)**

Afternoon

13:00 – 15:00 - *Panel 2* > *Discussant - Andreas Dafinger*

Chair: Noura Salah Aldeen

Maria Six-Hohenbalken

Marek Pawlak

Barbara Götsch

Monika Halkort

15:00 – 15:15 **Coffee Break**

15:15 – 16:45 - Panel 3 > Discussant - Ayse Caglar

Chair: Roger Casas

Noura Salah Aldeen

Fazil Moradi

Marzia Balzani

16:45 – 17:00 Coffee Break

17:00 – 17:45 – Wrap-up Session

Chair: Sabine Bauer-Amin

Sideswipe: 1. Caglar; 2. Dafinger; 3. Green (7min each)

Transversal Discussion

17:45 – 18:00 - Closing Remarks (thank you note; publication plans; logistics)

Leonardo Schiocchet

Sabine Bauer-Amin

19:00 – Workshop Dinner

December 3rd

9:00 - Welcome Remarks by the Director

9:10-11:10 - Keynote Session

Chair: Leonardo Schiocchet

Keynote 1. Sarah Green (University of Helsinki): Recycling identity politics in an age of populism and austerity: on the Crosslocations of Brexit, the personal and the political

There is something strangely familiar about the arguments and moral tone of many political debates at the moment in London, whether they come from the right, left or trans-intersection-woke sides of the debate. Almost forty years ago in London, during the era of Thatcher and the restructuring of the welfare state, what was called ‘identity politics’ by some and ‘political correctness’ by others, was raging amongst radical and alternative political groups who were fighting on behalf of a variety of causes in the city, particularly issues of gender, sexuality, race, and class. By the mid-1980s, the debates had become toxic, as people weaponised their political positions and used them to attack each other, usually in highly emotionally and morally charged ways, even as they were being equally harshly attacked by the conservative media for being the ‘loony left’ or ‘political correctness gone crazy’. It was exhausting, and people regularly spoke of their burnout as a reason to retreat from their activism.

Now zoom forward to the contemporary period in the midst of the era of austerity politics, anti-migration, Brexit and populism on the one hand, and a refashioned alternative moral and political scene centred around gender, sexuality, class, race and climate on the other: the personalised, and politically and morally forceful, tone of the debates seem highly familiar, even if the world is now a different place. The familiarity circulates around the basic principles of identity politics and the powerful emotional charge that is attached to the different political positions taken. Yet then, as now, these politics co-exist with different approaches, ones that are instead based on fighting for legal rights, rather than moral identities. This paper explores what form of not-quite-repetition of identity politics the current political climate constitutes.

Keynote 2. Andreas Dalfinger (CEU): The CEU and the Threat against Academic Freedom

Just under three years ago, the CEU was –almost overnight and unforeseen by most– confronted with a situation hitherto unimaginable and certainly unprecedented in the short history of the EU: It was faced with the threat to cease its operation as a private and US accredited university in Hungary, unless it met a series of conditions, which turned out to be tailored exclusively to the CEU and which in fact were impossible to meet. The CEU had always constituted a body strongly

subscribed to liberal and anti-nationalist values, and the move by the –self declared aliberal and nationalist- government was unequivocally perceived as a politically motivated move to silence a source of critical engagement. The Hungarian government’s decision led to an immediate – and equally unprecedented – surge of global academic –and public- solidarity, with international politics moving in pace. As we all know, this still had not been enough; by 2020, CEU will have moved its operations to Vienna. I will look at the ensuing political and academic debate and its common denominator: “academic freedom”, which was largely understood as “freedom from political interference” - but also the difficult task to frame the event in more specific terms: freedom of academic governance. By looking at the frictions the political rupture caused –or revealed- within the academic community, I propose there were casualties by the roadside, that have not been counted yet.