



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Decolonising and sharing ethnographic materials

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Abstract: The demands on research and research data are becoming ever greater, not least due to the ongoing digitisation of all aspects of academic practice. In social and cultural anthropology, a discipline generating its data in dialogue and collaboration with research participants, developments connected to notions such as open data, research data management and scientific accountability come with specific challenges, many of them to do with research ethics and the sensitive character of most kinds of ethnographic data. In short, producing, handling and using ethnographic materials entails specific forms of responsibility and raise questions that significantly overlap with those raised in current debates on decolonial science and knowledge production and the digitisation of academia, including the FAIR and CARE data principles.

By using the term ethnographic materials rather than data, we wish to suggest that such questions are best considered not only with regard to the production of research data in the narrow sense that has been dominating much of the research data management discourse of recent years. Instead, we propose to discuss research data in its widest sense together with other forms of dealing with items and objects deemed to carry ethnographic knowledge, such as collections, archives and libraries, as well as all forms of “publicly” sharing ethnographic knowledge in the digital sphere beyond academia. In this workshop we welcome contributions in English or German dealing with these and similar practices in relation to the challenges of ethical knowledge production and the decolonisation of ethnographic perspectives.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Thursday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 1 | Room 5

Franziska Weinert: Decolonial Approaches for Archiving Ethnographic Materials in the Context of the Ethnographisches Datenarchiv (EDA)

Matthias Ziegner: Small collection, large issues: Reflections on decolonization efforts in ethnographic collection management

Emily Bischof, Johanna Braendle: Decolonize the Library

Thursday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 2 | Room 5

Moritz Strickert/Julia Zenker: Decolonising in practice: On catalogues, vocabularies and collaboration

Johana Wyss, Franz Graf: Borderlands of Memory: Data Management in a Transnational Research Context – Memory and Populism from Below (MEMPOP)

SESSION PAPERS

Decolonial Approaches for Archiving Ethnographic Materials in the Context of the Ethnographisches Datenarchiv (EDA)

Franziska Weinert

Calls for Open Science and the sharing of research data have become increasingly prominent in academia. In response, many researchers in the field of social sciences have voiced their concerns about sharing their research data. The nature of qualitative and ethnographic research is permeated with social relationships between researchers and research subjects which leads to sensitive research data. The discourse of sharing ethnographic data therefore needs to be examined through a decolonial lens. Furthermore, to ensure the ethical handling of sensitive ethnographic and qualitative data, CARE and FAIR principles can assist to create the possibility to share information responsibly.

In dealing with ethnographic data, one is faced with ethical challenges due to its sensitivity. When archiving ethnographic data, the central challenge is the tension between creating dense information while keeping the responsibility to protect research subjects in the archive. In this workshop, we will take a close look at these questions in the context of the Ethnographisches Datenarchiv (EDA). EDA offers support in handling ethnographic data, including research data management, digitalization, and the long-term archiving of ethnographic and qualitative data. The main task of EDA is the digitalization of data and archiving as well as providing access to this data on the platform Phaidra. Finally, these challenges will be illustrated in the workshop through examples and case studies of EDA and the ethnographic collection of the Institut für Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie (IKSA). Here, the focus will be on the approaches that EDA employs to ensure a conscious handling of ethnographic material through efforts to strive for data sovereignty, data access, and decolonial methodologies.

Small collection, large issues: Reflections on decolonization efforts in ethnographic collection management

Matthias Ziegner

In the last three decades, justified criticism has been levied against institutions which hold ethnographic collections. While this discourse largely focuses on museums and their unique role in conceptualizing and presenting ethnographic material, smaller collections, such as the Ethnographic Collection at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ESKSA) face similar challenges in engaging in decolonizing approaches.

Since the re-opening of the Ethnographic Collection in 2017 new approaches in dealing with the colonial past of the collection and the departments history have been used to establish the groundwork for decolonization efforts. These approaches include cooperation in working groups and networks such as the Netzwerk Koloniale Kontexte, the implementation of guidelines regarding the handling of sensitive data and objects as well as provenance research on selected objects. Furthermore, we work in close connection with the Ethnographic Data Archive (EDA) in digitalization and long-term archiving of ethnographic material. Ultimately these actions should lead to collaboration between the Ethnographic Collection and communities of origin.

However, there are numerous obstacles to be faced in trying to bridge the gap between theory and practice, especially as a small collection with limited resources. This workshop aims to discuss the possibilities and challenges faced in decolonization efforts of the Social- and Cultural Anthropology Departments Ethnographic Collection, trying to implement FAIR and CARE principles and dealing with ethnographic material at large.

Decolonize the Library

Emily Bischof

While the library of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna only dates back about 100 years, its collection of historical books is much older. Due to the subject's origins in colonialism, the works produced during this period are characterized by colonial ideas and practices, as well as racist and other discriminatory language and content. The library distances itself from said content and, therefore, carefully selects new purchases. However, the old collection still remains. Today, these books serve as witnesses of their time and require a critical examination. Hence, the internal working group AG "Koloniale Kontexte – Decolonize the Library", established in 2021, of the Vienna University Library is currently developing several strategies and initiatives to deal with this colonial collection in a transparent way. One of these initiatives is the "Content Notice" project, which aims to give library users the opportunity to actively draw attention to racist, discriminatory and colonial content in library books. The "Content Notice" initiative was developed by the university course "Library and Information Studies" in cooperation with the Social and Cultural Anthropology Library and the African and Middle Eastern Studies Library. In addition, a racism awareness location was established in the library in collaboration with the "Working group against intersectional discrimination and racism" of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology. Furthermore, the working group organized the decolonial and antidiscriminatory reading "Reading against Silenc-ing", with the theme of oppression and academia, which was hosted by the Social and Culture Anthropology Library. The new location was introduced during this event. The aforementioned initiatives, as well as further projects and future prospects will be the focus of our contribution.

Decolonising in practice: On catalogues, vocabularies and collaboration

Moritz Strickert, Julia Zenker

Our talk will focus on the handling of collections, in particular the processes surrounding the digitisation and cataloguing of materials from colonial contexts. This involves not only

objects, but also writings on the subject, museum finding aids, correspondence, historical sources from the colonial era and research on the subject. Key questions which arise here are: How can data from colonial contexts be brought together, presented, processed, visualised and used in a meaningful way? In addition to the importance of transparency and access, co-operation with the communities of interest plays a decisive role, which must be further strengthened in the future.

Digitisation is a central driving force for dealing with the topic. Online catalogues and exhibitions form an interface between knowledge collections in European institutions on the one hand and the global public on the other. While this makes collections more accessible worldwide, this process is also accompanied by specific challenges due to a larger circle of users.

The questions that arise here are: Who decides what can be shown and how? Which labels are used? What language? Which region of origin is correct? Which standardised terms for forms of acquisition (exchange, gift, purchase, robbery) are appropriate? And who decides on all this?

A further thematic field is the problem of terminology and classifications, which is becoming increasingly important in the context of growing discourses on decolonisation and restitution when working on online catalogues and databases. They create transparency, enable participation and form the basis for the negotiations of communities of interest on forms of representation or restitution of certain objects. They are therefore no longer merely a working tool, but an important component of decolonial practice. The search for suitable, representative, common and/or standardised concepts and systems of order poses a particular challenge.

Borderlands of Memory: Data Management in a Transnational Research Context – Memory and Populism from Below (MEMPOP)

Johana Wyss, Franz Graf

In our contribution, we aim to raise questions regarding the archiving and sharing of ethnographic materials collected within an EU-funded anthropological research project. Five researchers investigate the interplay between memory and populism through an ethnographic comparison of five borderland regions in Central and Eastern Europe: Bukovina, Burgenland, Galicia, Istria, and Silesia. These regions have frequently changed their borders, national affiliations, demographics, official historical narratives, and loyalties. Given today's multiple crises and the so-called "illiberal turn," we cannot be certain how these borders will look in the next or subsequent generations, underscoring the necessity for competent and careful preservation and even potential reuse of materials.

The relational character and context sensitivity of ethnographic research present serious challenges. A one-time "informed consent" is not sufficient; the consent of research subjects must be continuously negotiated and agreed upon throughout the research relationship – it is based on trust and mutual respect. How can this consent be granted for potential long-term archiving? How do we protect or "do no harm" to those with whom we work, respecting their rights, interests, and sensitivities, while being unable to foresee which future threats (or misuses) might arise? Can research subjects be involved in the management and selection for long-term archiving and accessibility in a way that persists

even after the conclusion of the research? If we acknowledge that we preserve not only for academia but also for the communities with whom we work, we might need solutions that enable collaboration beyond the duration of the research.