

SESSION: Loving the Other: "Radical Connectivity" in Ethnographic Fieldwork

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Ethnographic fieldwork could be defined as "a movement of de-contextualization and re-contextualization, which is both physical and intellectual" (Pina Cabral 2013). Ethnographers need to be re-socialized in the long term, which is usually accompanied by the emergence of empathy, or even sympathy, between the ethnographer and the people she studies. Sometimes, positive relations and physical closeness lead to actual love, in its romantic and even sexual sense, between the ethnographic Self and one (or more) of its Others. Other times, closeness can lead to rejection, extreme antipathy and even conflict.

This panel will address "ethnographic love", either understood as sympathy or as actual romantic affect (and their negative reverses), as crucial aspects of the way in which we conduct fieldwork. The main goal will be that of disclosing the intimate or "radical" connections that fieldworkers need to build and negotiate with their subjects of study, thus reflecting on the impact this has both on our methodologies and later theoretical analyses. The panel is open to contributions that address sympathy and/or (dis)love in fieldwork practice reflexively and analytically. This should be applicable to students who are experiencing such kind of "positional" challenges in ongoing field research as well as to more advanced scholars who are able to put these determining aspects of the ethnographic socialization in perspective.

Ethnography through rose- coloured glasses: 'radically' rethinking research norms, formats and practices with sympathy and love

Varga, Hannah (MCTS, TU München, München, GER)

In the last years, the norms of what counts as ethnographic research have been questioned (Sánchez Criado & Estalella 2018) and its methods experimentalized (Murphy & Marcus 2013), in order to reformulate ethnographic practice (Faubion & Marcus 2009) and to challenge the positions of fieldworkers in research. Thereby, some anthropologists are expressing feelings, like anxiousness to address the friction between what could be seen as ideal setting for ethnography and the real interactions with the 'others' in the field site (Marrero- Guillamón 2018).

So, what about feelings? Does sympathy or even love transfigure our view as fieldworkers and therefore, should be ignored? Or, could a look through such rose- coloured glasses offer a possibility to 'radically' engage with ethnographic practices, instead?

Based on my ongoing PhD fieldwork with a group of architects associated with the University of Alicante in Spain, I would like to explore what kind of effects sympathy could produce in ethnographic research. And, how this might open possibilities to discuss norms, formats and practices which are assembled under the umbrella term 'ethnography'.

Particularly, I would like to reflect on two different effects that sympathy has caused in my ongoing research activities: 1) Sympathy as challenge for distance, and 2) Sympathy as part of establishing collaborative actions with the 'others'.

Notes towards a critical reflection of love in queer ethnography: Class, affects and the insider's positionality

Yu, Ting-Fai (International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden University, Leiden)

Anchored in my ethnographic field research on the intersection of sexuality, class and critical methodologies in Asian studies, this paper considers love as a useful perspective for understanding social inequalities in queer lives as well as highlights its analytic relevance to the fields of queer anthropology and insider ethnography. Based on my ethnographic study of the influences of class on the subjective production of working- and middle-class Chinese gay men in Hong Kong, the findings suggest that love was among the most prominent proxy of class difference that informed my informants' perceptions of being classed queer subjects. While my middle-class informants had tended to center same-sex love and romance as their core identities, my working-class informants had actively rejected the homonormative ideal of queer intimacies and instead favoured friendships with other gay men as the major mode of queer identification. Seeing reflexivity as an important methodological orientation in queer studies (Adams and Jones, 2011; Dahl, 2010); by discussing my informants' perceptions of me as a Hong Kong gay man and the ways they challenged my understanding of love and other forms of intimacy, this paper demonstrates how a critical reflection of the researcher's insider status and positionality can not only effectively reveal the operation of class in queer lives but also productively engage with the affective dimensions of field research.

The makings of an ethnographer: Guilt and desire for the gaze of 'the other'

Rautio, Suvi (University of Helsinki, Helsinki)

To understand the interpretations of being that humans apply in the world, ethnography becomes an intimate study of encounters "with people", and not, as Ingold (2008) highlights, "a study of people" (82). In disentangling these intimacies, the anthropologist is as much of an instrument in the field as her interlocutors are. Placing myself and my thirteen months of research in an ethnic minority village in Southwest China as the focal point of my paper, I piece together the fragments and misguided dialogues that formed my encounters and the intimate, romantic relationships that eventually overtook my own experiences of being in the field. As an anthropologist and thus instrument in the field, the paper explores the positional challenges I faced for the 'ethnographic love' I felt. The paper unpacks these challenges through the cultural and epistemological logic that I applied to classify my role as a failed ethnographer, and how I was taught to reframe this failure into something gained by being corrected of the moral judgments I carried with me from my past that pervaded my experience of fieldwork.

Reference:

Ingold, Tim. 2008. "Anthropology is not ethnography." *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 154: 69–92.

Failing to Create Intimate Connections in the Field

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