



## SESSION ABSTRACT

### Studying who study the 'other': Ethnographic gaze & Ethnography from the margins

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**Abstract:** The panel draws on the moment of disruption within traditional Anthropology brought out through the works of ethnographers from the marginalised and vulnerable groups. These shifts have contributed towards a (re)thinking and (re)-imagining of ethnographic paradigm, methods and ethics. This coupled with a change in both profiles of Anthropologists—black, Asian, women, etc— and the “fields” of study. We are interested in what ethnography from the margin does to the discipline and the ways it disrupts dominant modes of knowledge production.

What happens when those traditionally the “subject” of ethnographic inquiry study the other? The panel seeks to critically engage with the question of ‘habitus’ of the ethnographers. By reversing the ethnographic gaze, the panel seeks to bring to fore conversations, reflections and engagement around questions of structures (location of the ethnographer across caste-class-race-region-religion-language-gender), politics (the everyday navigation of field) and representational (the knowledge that is produced through this process).

Further the panel comes at a time when world over there has been a backlash from the right, and far rights groups against radical queer, gender, ethnic studies scholarship and heightened surveillance of researchers from marginalised communities.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

**Tuesday, September 27, 2022 | Slot 5 | Room 2**

*Deborah Wockelmann: The epistemological dilemma of knowledge production in African Studies*

*Kristof Nagy: Writing Ethnography from the Belly of the Beast(s)*

*Akhil Kang: Studying Upper castes and re-defining Anthropology of South Asia*

## SESSION PAPERS

### **The epistemological dilemma of knowledge production in African Studies.**

*Deborah Wockelmann*

There is an epistemological dilemma in the production of knowledge about Africa. Despite many discourses in the 21st century on the pathways towards decolonization of African studies and the Global South as a whole, we can still see how colonial legacies continue to exist in research, teaching and multiple other manifestations of knowledge.

How is it that despite various interventions and contributions in favor of decolonized scholarship and epistemological freedom by great scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), Hountondji (1990), Oyewumi (1997), Zeleza (2006), Chakrabarty (2007), Bhabra (2007), Chilisa (2012), Tlostanova & Mignolo (2012), Comaroff (2012), Mbembe (2015), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), sustainable change is still so difficult?

I argue that the theory and practice of African studies are subject to fundamental epistemological conflicts, including different economies and cultures of knowledge production (Zeleza 2006) and the rigid conceptions of Western scholarly tradition about what counts as knowledge in the first place, and which is considered relevant. By drawing from my own experiences as a German scholar in African Studies, I want to illustrate challenges of ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork in research practice and discuss possible ways to deal with them.

### **Writing Ethnography from the Belly of the Beast(s)**

*Kristóf Nagy*

What is the dominant, and what is the dominated? How can an anthropologist navigate among highly politicized institutions without being allied with them? This paper aims to answer the question and complicate these seemingly self-evident categories by analyzing the positionality of my PhD ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out at the Hungarian Academy of Art, the cultural flagship institution of the authoritarian Orbán-regime of Hungary. In this project, I attempted to tackle the heart of the ideological state-apparatus to go beyond the anthropological research on street-level state bureaucracies (Fassin 2015). But to complicate this setting, I was not doing it from a quasi-neutral position but from the Central European University (CEU) that was just expelled from Hungary by the Orbán-regime.

The overidentification with CEU followed me through the entire fieldwork that I

carried out as an intern at the Academy. Suspicion, fear of being kicked off, joking relationships, such as the "hello Soros-agent" greeting, and questions about how CEU allowed me to work at a regime-aligned institution became parts of my daily routine. At the same time, I won't argue that I was inquiring about a dominant institution from a dominated position since CEU, founded by the Hungarian-born capitalist George Soros, is part of the global liberal order.

This paper re-examines my ethnographic positionality and asks how the navigation between the two dominant institutions shaped my anti-systemic habitus. I will critically reflect on my sympathy towards right-wing cultural producers' vernacular and distorted anticapitalism. This paper aims to find an ethnographic way to maneuver and go beyond the clashes of liberal and right-wing forms of domination without making an unintended alliance with any of them. I will show that it is not enough to analyze the material constraints of the researcher but also their historically internalized and habitualized forms.

### **Studying Upper castes and re-defining Anthropology of South Asia**

*Akhil Kang*

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