



SESSION ABSTRACT

Engaging with "Homo Narrans": Storytelling and the Imagination in Ethnographic Research

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Human beings are storied animals. Whether it be recalling the past, imagining the future or inventing fictitious scenes, we tend to think in scenarios, thanks to our cognitive ability "to travel mentally in time and space and into the minds of others" (Corballis 2017:101). Narratives give meaning to events or situations. Telling stories is a way of seeding ideas, thoughts, and emotions in people's minds. We connect, create, and live through stories. Narratives are cognitive shortcuts, allowing us to digest complex information and relationships more easily. Narrative reworkings of reality enable people to symbolically alter subject-object relations (Jackson 2002). We (try to) control the interpretation of and thereby possess the past and the future through its narrativisation. Consider e.g., as suggested by David Mosse (2011: 155), the trick of "development" to arrange stories so that events appear to be the outcome of careful planning.

In this session we ask how stories connect people? What happens when stories cross the boundaries of their narrative communities? Why do some stories "work", and others not? How do the ones that do, "work"? In what ways do stories contribute to the affirmation of established norms? How do stories engage with breaches of expectations, norms or ethics? How do intended and unintended audiences deal with these breaches? How are the interpretations of stories negotiated in varying contexts?

This session starts out from a fascination with the universals of human sociality to ask about the specific contexts and particulars of narrative thought and storytelling around the world. We are looking for papers that engage with different story genres, be it stories of the self, humour, gossip, rumour, myths, legends, family histories; and the varying contexts of storytelling, such as in organisations, families, politics, policymaking, advertising or the digital world. We are especially interested in papers that discuss the creation of anthropological "tales of the field" and that problematise the role of ethnographers in co-creating stories in the field – for as anthropologists it is after all through stories that we become inextricably bound to the people we research.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Thursday, September 20, 2018 | Slot 1 | Room 5

Dyugu Dogru: *Poetics of a Squat: Migrant Historymaking and Local Governance Adversity in an Urban Renewal Neighborhood*

Aron Bakos: *Soldiers Tell Tales: Military Narratives in Multi-ethnic Context*

Noura Kamal: *Folk Art and Popular Narratives in Yemen: The Work and Writings of Abd Allah al-Barraduni*

Thursday, September 20, 2018 | Slot 2 | Room 5

Claudia Aufschnaiter: *"Fieldwork is Not What it Used to Be": Negotiating Narratives in Ethnographic Research*

Barbara Götsch: *Narratives in Organisations: The Social Life of Stories in Search of Meaning*

Michal Sedlacko: *Ministerial Advisory Centres in Slovak Republic: Accounts of Governing and the Boundary between Politics and Impartial Expertise*

Thursday, September 20, 2018 | Slot 3 | Room 5

Livia Wick: *Palestinian Oral History: From Refugees to Workers, from New Research Methods to Popular Narrative Genre*

Monika Kolodziej: *The Ways in Which a Story Can Substitute for a Direct Answer* Natalia Dusacova: *Telling Stories about Anthropologists: Views from the Field*

Natalia Dusacova: *Telling Stories about Anthropologists: Views from the Field*

SESSION PAPER

Poetics of a Squat: Migrant Historymaking and Local Governance Adversity in an Urban Renewal Neighborhood

Dogru, Duygu (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Genève, CHE)

My aim is to contribute to the conference by holding a presentation based on the findings of my Master's thesis that I have just finished writing. My thesis can roughly be situated between Anthropology and History and represents a rather experimental approach to their interdisciplinarity. While historical accounts tend to be overwhelmingly loaded with the noisemakers, this paper focuses on a place being haunted by history, where the inhabitants struggle to make their voice heard. The hills of peripheral Istanbul have born witness to industrialization, mass migration, land squatting and socialist anarchy. Today, the residents of those neighborhoods are confronted with the legacy of informal land rights and the destruction of their livelihoods. Therefore, the guiding question reads as follows: How does an encounter with the history of a site give insight into the population's identity in the context of wide-ranging spatial transformations? By doing an ethnography *of* history, I get to uncover the meanings behind what is mistakenly rejected as a vacuous anachronism. Such an approach pursues the *poetics* of history, which embraces all forms and modes of expressing the past including anecdotes and gossip, but also reminiscence and rootedness in rural traditions. What makes the poetics of history especially meaningful is how it aspires to transform those insights into a signifier illuminating both identity and agency of the residents in the neighborhood who are in the middle of fighting the consequences of urban renewal projects in their neighborhood. Considering that my approach is part of an emerging field of study that seems very promising in elaborating on a partly confused relationship between Anthropology and History, I am very keen on offering one possible answer to what an ethnography of history might look like.

Keywords: ethnography, history, migrant, urban renewal, agency, spatial transformation

Soldiers tell tales: military narratives in multi-ethnic context

Bakos, Áron (Babe?-Bolyai University, Budapest, HUN)

The presentation aims to contribute to those questions of the session that consider the stories and their connection to social norms and ethics. Its findings are based on a multi-sited ethnographic research conducted in the Aranyosszék region of Transylvania (Cheia, Cornești, Vălenii de Arieș, Mihai Viteazu), that was carried out for three months between 2015 and 2017. My intention was to collect the military narratives of the members of the different generations of this multi-ethnic region and to construe them in the context of life and family histories and generally in the local cultural and social cluster. The research shows that ethnic relations for many tellers constitute a narrative and socio-empirical macrostructure that reappears in different topics, and the basic dichotomies of which organize how stories on the self and affiliated categories are created, how the social and historical realm is understood. However, in the context of the social realm we witness a fundamental shift in norms, a change in the relationship between the different ethnic groups as ethnic exogamy becomes more and more common, yet disputed. The aim of this presentation is to show how the shifting ethnic relations and the effect of these changes in the lives of different families and individuals is reflected on the level of the stories they tell about military service, and to map what differences can be recorded in the topics and the macrostructure.

The ways in which a story can substitute for a direct answer.

Kolodziej, Monika (Jagiellonian University in Krakow., Krakow, POL)

This paper examines the ways in which a story can substitute for a direct answer, based on my field research in Qinghai, People's Republic of China. My PhD research examines current trends shaping the identity of young Muslims in multinational and multiethnic societies, with a particular focus on the cultural crossroads found in the city of Xining, the capital of Qinghai province in western China, where the local culture is strongly influenced by the Han Chinese, Muslims, Tibetans and Monguor. My main goal is to trace identity contexts among Chinese Muslims, especially *Hui* (回族) and connect them with the multilateral cultural influence of other ethnic groups called *minzu* (民族).

My methodology draws on qualitative research methods, especially on non-invasive means such as personal interview. I decided to focus particularly on the approach known as the "case study method", observation, and reflective field notes, which examines in depth "purposive samples" to better understand a phenomenon. This method concentrates on small but focused samples of collected data. I have decided this to be the most suitable method, due to the particular political sensitivities evident in this geographical area. My research approach involves repeated and regular contacts with respondents, which fosters the building of a trust bond over time. In indirect, "high-context cultures" such as some of those in China, communicating negative opinions is sometimes viewed as impolite or even inappropriate. Thus, some stories and shared thoughts I heard at first differed significantly from informants' subsequent narratives. Not only in terms of providing more detail in subsequent discussions, but also by revealing more elaborated moral narration. In my attempt to sketch a bigger picture of the local Muslim community and their position in social structure, I also interviewed young people from other major *minzu* in the city (particularly Tibetans and Han) about their relations with Muslims. During my fieldwork I came across a wide range of stories explaining current interethnic stereotypes and prejudices as well as intraethnic narratives praising some supposedly characteristic features of the given groups. The frequent pattern I encountered, among all the local *minzu* I have researched, was a focus on second-hand narratives, whereby many people preferred to justify their personal attitude by sharing stories from the life of unnamed friends as well as close relatives. For example, a common answer to questions on interethnic marriage involved storytelling about some other people's experience, which supported the respondent's personal view on the subject. Regardless of the *minzu*, when skeptical to the idea of interethnic marriage, people often shared the same plot about unhappy marriage, which finally failed because of the different ethnicities' living habits. Thus in such cases, a story substitutes for a direct answer, and as my relationships with my respondents developed the more stories they shared with me. This of course provokes additional questions about my personal role in the storytelling process, and the ways in which my engagement may influence this process, questions of which I explore here.

Folk art and popular narratives in Yemen: The work and writings of Abd Allah al-Barraduni

Kamal, Noura (Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, AUT)

To obtain a wider understanding of the complexities of local societies, it is important to look beyond the "formal" production of history and literature, and to focus on "informal" aspects and narratives that are seldom documented in the accounts of historiography but continue to circulate among people in quotidian life (Bamberg and Andrews 2007). This particularly becomes obvious if one looks at Yemen, where for many centuries the ruling class has dominated the recording of history.

This presentation focuses on the exceptional work of Yemeni poet and scholar 'Abd Allāh al-Barradūnī (1929-1999), whose writings provide an in-depth insight into and analysis of Yemeni popular and folk art. The abundance of hitherto unconsidered legends, stories, proverbs, and poems collected by *al-Barradūnī* not only broadens and enriches the scope of Yemeni historiography, but also reflects upon the importance of local knowledge as a means to understand the past and its influence on the present. From this perspective, this paper explores the examples and analysis of folk art in *al-Barradūnī*'s work. According to *al-Barradūnī* himself, the analysis of folk art uncovers hidden aspects of society such as forgotten historical events, folk beliefs, habits and practices, and hence raises awareness of the role and importance of those people who have long been neglected by historiography.

Telling Stories about Anthropologists: Views from the Field

Dusacova, Natalia (The School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, RANEPa, Moscow, RUS)

People we research also tell stories about us. Sometimes these stories include reflections on the mistakes we make in the field. Being told to an anthropologist, they provide rich data on the norms established in the communities as well as demonstrate the strategies of dealing with the situations and conflicts touching upon the sphere of "cultural intimacy", as M. Herzfeld put it.

In my presentation I'd like to share and analyse the stories about anthropologists told by Russian Old Believers from Romania and the Republic of Moldova. These narratives were recorded during my fieldwork in 2010-2017.

Russian Old Believers are orthodox people who have not accepted the religious reforms of Patriarch Nikon in mid-17th century and still observe ecclesiastical rites in their pre-Nikon variant. Beginning with the end of the 17th century they started migrating to the margins of the Russian Empire and other countries. Maintaining their confessional identity, they are also rather conservative in everyday life. In Romania and Moldova Old Believers enjoy the interest of anthropologists who come to research these communities, often looking for "traditions preserved from older days".

When conducting my fieldwork, I was told a lot of stories about previous anthropologists who had visited these villages before me (from the Soviet times up to the present). In those narratives local people shared their impressions on the behaviour of "strangers" revealing unwritten laws of the communities.

Some of the narratives to be presented at the conference show how mistakes of anthropologists influenced the communities (for example, making local people involuntarily violate prescriptions, which was perceived as "a sin" among the Old Believers), while others include reflections on co-creating mythological narratives during conversations with researchers or describe the situations when the limits of established norms were tested.

'Fieldwork is Not What it Used to Be': Negotiating Narratives in Ethnographic Research

Aufschnaiter, Claudia (Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, AUT)

As anthropologists it is through stories that we become inextricably bound to the people we research. The central questions this paper discusses are therefore twofold: firstly, how do ethnographers and their interlocutors (co-)create anthropological "tales of the field" and, secondly, how do we as ethnographers negotiate narratives as an object of analysis in their own right in ethnographic research. The focus is hereby both on the stories and the storytellers. In the category "storytellers" I include both the ethnographers/anthropologists and their interlocutors. The particular interlocutors as storytellers that take centre stage in this paper are indigenous rights advocates working in the field of development, international aid, fair-trading, social justice, and self-reliance and economy-for-the-common-good movements.

How do development activists create narrative communities? How do stories connect vastly disparate actors in development networks? Who controls the creation and interpretation of narratives and the maintenance of their coherence in development work and organisations? Which are the dominant narratives and which ones are suppressed? How are contradictions managed? How do stories activate support and funding and therefore ensure the continued existence of development work and movements? Which are the stories that work, and which are the ones that do not work? Which specific role does value-driven storytelling play in this context?

In particular, how do development storytellers employ indigeneity narratives? What are the characteristics of indigeneity narratives? Who is indigenous and who is not, for the purpose of development encounters? How is indigeneity narrativised by development activists for different audiences? And how can we as anthropologists/ethnographers research this narrativisation of indigeneity in everyday staff interactions in development organisations, if our aim is to investigate activist imaginaries of "the indigenous" and the economics of indigeneity narratives?

During fieldwork on stories, as we cross narrative boundaries, ford narrative gaps, and perceive that stories take on a life of their own, may we find that "fieldwork is not what it used to be"? How do we as anthropologists negotiate the narratives we encounter? How do we deal with interlocutors who engage with our anthropological writing/storytelling and write back? If our narrative authority is questioned, how do we incorporate this into our research and how can we learn from this to advance anthropology's agenda in the present?

Addressing such issues as narrative allegiance and aphasia, stories as brands and the marketing of "the indigenous", the demonopolisation of representational space and indigenous counter-narratives, and narrative cooperation versus competition, this paper is not only a story about stories. It argues that narrative, as a fundamental currency of human interaction and communication, merits a deeper analysis as to its function in enabling, maintaining, and sabotaging development agendas.

Narratives in organisations: the social life of stories in search of meaning

Götsch, Barbara (Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA/ÖAW), Vienna, AUT)

Organisational life is full of meetings. And meetings are full of talk. In this paper, I will look at two different kinds of stories that emerge naturally in the context of organisations. First, there are those stories that appear as 'polished' accounts of some past event. The teller will try to capture the audience with a witty and lively rendering of 'what happened' and give the event a particular meaning. This is what represents a prototypical story: there is a plot and there is meaning.

However, there is so much more talk going on that is full of narrative. Consider those stories that only gradually emerge when a group of people jointly make sense of past events or circumstances (or even the future) that are not yet entirely clear to them. Here, different participants offer their knowledge and perspective, sometimes also challenging the perspective of a previous teller. Different viewpoints are then weighed-up and negotiated until – maybe eventually – some joint vision emerges.

The paper draws on fieldwork among an NGO in Morocco to discuss storytelling and sensemaking in organisations.

Ministerial Advisory Centres in Slovak Republic: Accounts of Governing and the Boundary between Politics and Impartial Expertise

Sedlacko, Michal (Kompetenzzentrum für Verwaltungswissenschaften, FH Campus Wien, Wien, AUT)

In the Slovak Republic, numerous internal ministerial advisory bodies, intended to provide high-quality analyses and evidence based policy making for national policy, have been established over the last two years. We have studied how the rational technocratic model of scientific policy advice as a specific mode of governing, acted out through these new institutional sites of expertise, survives in a highly politicised environment of Slovak public administration. Through a series of interviews with the heads of internal ministerial advisory bodies ('analytical centres'), complemented with other data, we studied everyday managerial and policy practices of the centres. Central to our study was the reconstruction of an intersubjective account; in interpretive policy analysis, 'accounts' are broadly related to theoretical concepts such as 'stories', 'narratives', or 'frames'. Colebatch (2010) understands accounts as helping practitioners make sense of the tasks at hand, solve practical dilemmas and guide action. Always there are multiple accounts 'in circulation', and a single account is never able to fully or sufficiently explain policy. Our further theoretical sensibilities include mode of governing (Colebatch 2018), work of governing (Clarke 2012) and mode of ordering (Law 1995).

The analysts' account paints an underlying eschatological opposition between Evil of corruption and private interest in the service of the state and the Good of public interest, pursued by a beleaguered minority of analytics. Analytics see themselves as a brotherhood of chaste mystics possessing oracular competence and access to econometric models, the sole language providing access to the Truth of Creation. Thus the account provides an antagonistic opposition serving, through boundary work, to define analysts' personal identities, as well as, through the account's totalising character, a teleological harmony, from which a higher purpose and underlying principles of analysts' work, as well as beliefs, are derived. Although analysts see their mission in the provision of impartial, objective analytical evidence for informed decision making, they negotiate the boundary between politics and expertise on a daily basis, and politics cannot entirely be bracketed from various aspects of their work. The account provides a practical guidance for coping with this significant internal contradiction; in this manner, the account serves in a role similar to organisational and policy 'myths' (Yanow 1996).

The undertaking of practicing scientific policy advice and organising the analytical centres is complex and takes place at several levels at once. It includes formal institutions and their transformation; nevertheless, institutional reform tells the lesser part of the story. Other dimensions include culture (the establishment of analysts' counterculture, Othering the dominant civil service culture), informal institutions and practices of organising and governing, as well as development of networks that provide external legitimacy. The account plays the role of a key 'organiser', an internal gel that co-ordinates and harmonises the various levels of this project of transformation. The account also links the characteristics of the official account of policy as authoritative choice with the insider account of policy as structured interaction and thus to a large extent collapses the distinction between 'front-stage' and 'back-stage'. The resulting picture is markedly at odds with the simple image of hierarchical, legal-rational authority CEE countries have as a model of governing in the West.

Palestinian Oral History: From refugees to workers, from new research methods to popular narrative genre

Wick, Livia (American University of Beirut, Beirut, LBN)

In this paper, I will be examining the connections between a genre of stories people co-construct with anthropologists and conditions of life, in particular political and social conditions. I will explore the emergence and diffusion of oral history as a common and visible narrative form in the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

First, I will describe the Palestinian oral history projects and map their spread starting in the 1970s. Unlike many post-genocidal and post-colonial oral history projects, the Palestinian case was decentralized and mass-based. The oral historians were from the start a heterogeneous group, many of them scholars, with some anthropologists. Others ran NGOs. A third group were writers, film-makers and school directors. They exercised various professions and much of their work in oral history grew out of their personal experiences in dispossessed communities (that is, displaced from villages and cities when the state of Israel was created in 1948) or as diaspora refugees. The oral historians ran large projects employing dozens of young fieldworkers and transcribers who documented destroyed villages and life before 1948.

In a second part, I will provide a reading of published oral history work and analyze the ways in which oral historians co-constructed and interpellated their subjects. They focused on collective loss and the need to recover the unwritten past of Palestine before 1948 and hence focused mainly on refugees. In addition, the oral histories were part of a wider interest in rural ways of life during the 1970s and 1980s, a moment in history when the Palestinian national movement glorified rural life.

In a third part, based on ethnographic research with midwives and nurses in Palestine for a year in 2003-2004 and regularly thereafter for shorter periods of time, I will examine the ways in which interlocutors requested and drew me into recording oral histories of their struggling lives of exploitative labor conditions, abusive marriages and forms of steadfastness against Israeli occupation. I will argue that there has been a shift in the kinds of people that oral history as a narrative genre interpellates from narratives of refugees and villagers to those of young, struggling and working women. The gendered, classed and generational aspects of oral history narratives were striking in my own work. While the nurses and midwives told detailed narratives about the self, their brothers and husbands often told stories or made remarks about being fed up. Many were unemployed or had temporary work and were circumscribed to their villages or camps. The fact that young men did not volunteer to give oral history narratives to me and the fact that they are not central to collections of Palestinian oral history whereas the women pushed me to record oral histories underlines the idea that certain people recognize themselves as appropriate subjects for the medium of oral history. The oral histories of a younger generation encourage narratives with a particular focus on the working, politicized and gendered subject.

Palestinian oral history has always vacillated between a research method and a type of politics. But now, I would say, it has transformed itself into a popular narrative genre and oft practiced form of story-telling by certain segments of Palestinian society.

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Dusacova, Natalia (The School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, RANEPa, RUS)

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