

15. Doing Psychological Anthropology in Times of “Contested Knowledge” (Workshop)

Leberecht Funk, Freie Universität Berlin

Julia Vorhölder, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

AG “Psychological Anthropology”

Chair: Edda Willamowski, Freie Universität Berlin

Over the last 15 years or so, psychological anthropology has experienced an unprecedented growth – or revival – in German and European anthropology. Even though its beginnings can be traced back to German *Völkerpsychologie*, and the subfield of ethno-psychoanalysis attracted some attention especially in German- and French-speaking anthropology in the 1970s, contemporary German psychological anthropology only took off in 2008, when Birgitt Röttger-Rössler started her professorship at the FU Berlin. Since then, a new generation of psychological anthropologists has emerged, and their various research interests have considerably shaped what has become psychological anthropology in 21st-century Germany.

Drawing on the DGSKA 2023 conference theme – ‘contested knowledge’ – we want to reflect on the history of German psychological anthropology, (re)define its foci, determine its position in society, and discuss its methodological approaches. We invite papers that are grounded in empirical and historical research and problematize the processes of knowledge generation from a theoretical, methodological, engaged, and/or ethical perspective. In a self-reflexive way, we want to examine how we as psychological anthropologists deal with postcolonial critique, with inequality and power imbalances, and the problem of concepts. More precisely we ask: How do we organize the process of knowledge generation and how do we define knowledge? What are respectful and ethically sound ways of collaboration? How do we share “our” knowledge with others, for example with practitioners and people from outside the academia? How do we communicate across disciplines? What are the limits of postcolonial critique? Are there situations in which it is necessary to speak “about” and even “for” others? How do we deal with the fact that we ourselves are embedded in academic power structures?

Keynote by Birgitt Röttger-Rössler, Freie Universität Berlin

Unengaged Psychological Anthropology? Some Critical Remarks

In my contribution I address issues of collaboration and knowledge sharing, communication across disciplines and the borders of academia as well as the limits of postcolonial critique.

Based on my own research during the last years, I would like to point out two areas in which psychological anthropology in my opinion needs to become more critically involved. On the one hand, there is the global spread of psychological theory models about the healthy socio-emotional and cognitive development of children, which are not only based on Eurocentric presuppositions and ignore social anthropological findings about the diversity of life forms and developmental paths, but also partly use a questionable (neo)colonial vocabulary. On the other hand, I shall deal with the question of knowledge transfer into non-academic sectors and share my experiences in this regard. I consider a careful knowledge transfer as an important task that cannot be done on the side and deserves more academic recognition as well as consideration in university training.

In both areas, psychological anthropologists would need to be much more engaged and actively communicate their findings. My assumption is that their hesitancy in this regard is related to multilayered insecurities triggered – among other things – by the postcolonial critique.

Quests for knowledge: Negotiations between anthropologies, psy sciences and local communities

Kathrin Bauer, Freie Universität Berlin

Doing research on the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and its absences in different Colombian communities entailed fieldwork in a variety of settings as well as multiple forms of engagement with local scholars from different disciplines. In this panel, I will reflect on the complexity of encounters between scholars and theories from different regions and disciplines, between scholars and non-scholars and their negotiations of authority, knowledge and interests.

I start by discussing my engagements with Colombian scholars. After addressing ways of communicating and ethical considerations, I turn to how these interactions influenced the research which leads me to the subject of knowledge and the various encounters involved in its generation, diffusion and negotiation processes. In the field, I came across a range of perspectives held by practitioners and laypeople in different communities. To understand the local dynamics related to this plurality, it is essential to examine the "global spread of psychological theory

models on healthy socio-emotional and cognitive development of children” and how (and to which extent) this happens in Colombia.

I conclude by summarizing the complex negotiations and highlighting how they are marked by global power configurations as well as local forms of social interactions and structural circumstances.

Psychoanalysis, Experience, and the Production of Charisma

Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, Rutgers University of New Jersey

If the practice of fieldwork allows for a specific permeability to a context, in what does this permeability consist in? Instead of “data” or “physical evidence,” the term experience is apposite to characterize what we do, when we engage in the central method of anthropology. In the field we expose ourselves to experiences. Experience, however, is not a controlled category within the social sciences. It is not a method one can learn or labor to be good at. Experience is often delayed, reaches us afterwards retroactively, when a translation of what was felt and seen is articulated in writing. Although physically present, the field worker is frequently not entirely aware to what is unfolding when something important is happening. In this paper I will explore the concept of experience of fieldwork as it relates to transference, countertransference, “afterwardness” and the unconscious. I will pay particular attention to how *Nachträglichkeit* features in the production of charisma of India’s current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and in the context of ethnic majoritarianism.

Epistemological affects, emotion work and white fragility in researching mentoring relationships

Franziska Seise, Freie Universität Berlin

Mentoring relationships with underage refugees and the emotions and affects of actors involved offer a promising lens to investigate on how we – as individuals and as a society – are imagining, experiencing, and navigating a (culturally) diversifying urban space. Who defines the premises under which encounters take place? Who negotiates the challenges that result from power asymmetries and the plurality of norms and values – and how?

Within my research in a Berlin based NGO, I took on various roles which were associated with different positionalities, perspectives, expectations, and accountabilities. This methodologically and ethically challenging multi-perspective involvement afforded me with unique accesses to the field, but also with affects and emotions that became crucial epistemological devices within the processes of

knowledge generation: I came to experience the emotion work of actors when negotiating uncertainties, tensions and challenges within the culturally diverse mentoring relationships.

What is more, analyzing my own affects enabled me to understand an uneasiness I experienced when addressing sticky issues such as stereotyping, racialization and discrimination in the field of mentoring. I interpret this uneasiness as an expression of white fragility, which defines the limits of the ineffable within and beyond academia – a position still difficult to contest.