

46. (Counter)public Contestations: Feminist Theorizing for Anthropological Ethics (Workshop)

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In this workshop we are interested in thinking with the fact that feminist theories - and particularly contributions from beyond the Global North - continue to be marginalized in anthropology. Yet, feminist initiatives, narratives, and discourses are increasingly articulated across the globe and met with reactions ranging from enthusiasm, to critique, and sometimes rejection in public, (semi)public, and private spaces. Covering, for example, digital activist realms where some men meet and question feminist visions and the purpose of "women's empowerment" in Kenya, or Swahili-speaking diaspora-led feminist mobilizing across borders - we are interested in how men and women negotiate gender justice by way of engaging with a diverse range of feminist sources of knowledge.

Following recent claims that feminist anthropology can be considered a 'traveling theory capable of addressing critical social problems beyond gender' and that it holds the 'potential to transform anthropology into an antiracist, decolonial, and abolitionist project' (Mahmud 2021), we ask: how can we make use of empirical studies of feminist theorizing and its emplaced oppositions to contest anthropological knowledge production and theory making more generally in order to make it more robust? If we think of theorizing as 'to make an argument, to make sense of the world, to name and create' (McGranahan 2022), how then can feminist forms of knowledge production and their (counter)public contestations potentially help to find more timely ways of anthropological sense-making and ethics?

We invite contributors to present empirically saturated case studies that a) analyze the diverse ways in which women and men engage with, apply, or contest both existing patriarchal gender relations as well as (feminist) attempts to overhaul them, and b) ask and seek answers to what these insights can do for anthropological knowledge production today.

Anti-feminism or male-to-male guidance? Reflections on fieldwork among Kenyan masculinity consultants

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This paper builds on digital and face-to-face fieldwork among Kenyan masculinity consultants lamenting society's focus on women and girls which, in their opinion, does not emancipate women, but turns them into materialistic, consumer-oriented actors who lose the ability to sustain non-instrumental relationships. Taking inspiration from the red pill movement, a global and staunchly anti-feminist and highly contested knowledge formation, these masculinity consultants have garnered a large audience among heterosexual Kenyan men who feel pressured by women's allegedly exorbitant materialistic demands and are looking for male guidance. Reflecting upon feeling torn between, on the one hand, sympathy for men's suffering and intellectual agreement with the consultants' critique of feminisms focusing mainly on women's economic empowerment, and, on the other hand, discomfort with and refusal to agree with the more radical propositions about women's allegedly hideous nature, I analyze four ethnographic strategies to deal with politically influential interlocutors who possess ideologies that fieldworkers do not wholeheartedly agree with or partly mistrust: (1) moral rejection, (2) cultural trivialization, (3) professional bifurcation, and, (4) reform-oriented critique. The paper concludes that (4) is the only intellectually justifiable and ethically responsible strategy.

"This is what my fear told me": Feminist Anthropology and Research Ethics

Livnat Konopny Declève, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

By looking into an experience of fear and dissonance during fieldwork and that of my interlocutors, the presentation discusses the epistemological importance of fear as a key to understanding political action and political imagination. Although the Cartesian divide between body and mind has long been challenged, there is ongoing resistance to incorporating ethnographers' emotional experiences in their ethnographic works. More recently, following the "turn" in critical theory on affect, researchers have started emphasizing the methodological and epistemological importance of emotions and the futility of the divide between affect and rational thought. However, feminist scholars who critique the 'affective turn' point out that its emphasis on affect as transhuman and universal has a masculinizing effect. Furthermore, inspired by recent discoveries in neuroscience, the "turn" implies that there is something "new" there and thus discounts the contribution of feminist theory to the subject. Aligning with feminist anthropological scholarship and based

on research done with left-wing Jewish women living in Palestinian localities in the West Bank, I demonstrate how the dissonance between fearing Palestinians despite left-wing stances can create reflexivity, resistance, and solidarity for both the researcher and interlocutors. I will also touch upon ethical issues the research brought up.

One, too, many? Feminist diversity as a productive challenge for ethnographic positioning

Andreas Streinzer, University St. Gallen

The paper formulates the need for “positionalizing” in a multiplicity of feminisms. One entry point of my project on distributional politics in Austria is the politics of state funding for feminist organizations. Controversies riddled this field, making the heterogeneity of feminist politics visible. The paper takes these controversies as openings (Manalansan IV 2016, 596) for ethnographic positioning and the necessary questioning of its premises. The contrasts I discuss include: Tensions between generations of feminist organizers and accompanying accusations of e.g. the lack of theoretical sophistication of earlier generations or the supposed lack of material politics of younger ones. Women’s organizations built on white second-wave feminism clashed with such built on Black or Global South genealogies. Along other fault lines, controversies were fought about prioritizing transgender rights or funding for domestic abuse victims. It is specifically the research field of distributional politics where scarce resources force a multiplicity of feminist projects into competition in which the ethnographer is asked to align, distance, validate, or counter standpoints made by activists and organizations (Dave 2011). All in all, asking about positionality in a field so ridden with emplaced oppositions helps sharpen theorizing about the politics of knowledge and its ethical anthropological practice.

What to make of the “victim –perpetrator” dichotomy? A critical reflection on the “Human Rights” discourses of “domestic violence” in Bangladesh

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The proposed paper critically examines the practices of contemporary “domestic violence” discourse in Bangladesh. It discusses how it constructs “domestic violence” as an “object of knowledge” and its effects. The paper contends that constructions of “domestic violence” discourse have fallen into the trap of universal knowledge production. It centralizes the juridical strategies in its campaign, which focuses on criminalizing domestic violence and constructs knowledge on domestic

violence from a victim/ perpetrator dichotomy where women are portrayed as sheer "victim," and men as the perpetrator. However, the lens of "the practice of everyday life" provides a view of how such construction of women as "distinct victim" figures is often fraught. It is often difficult to unravel women's struggles from domesticity and work, where multiple structural inequalities constitute their everyday living. The paper interrogates and reveals some troubling aspects of this hegemonic construction of domestic violence, programmatic interventions, and its legal literacy framework of Human Rights practices.