

## **9. Knowledge and Affect: Developing the Concepts of 'Stimmung' and 'Atmosphere' for Sociocultural Analysis (Workshop)**

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Knowledge has long been theorized either as primarily cognitive or primarily practical. In this telling, knowledge has regularly been contrasted with affects and emotions. Recently, however, those approaches in the social sciences and humanities which question this dichotomic separation of knowledge and affect are on the rise.

We believe that such scholarship can be mobilized to understand urgent political developments. In current social movements, for instance, the question what is 'knowledge' and what is 'affect' becomes more and more a matter of contention in itself. This can be observed, among others, in struggles around issues such as the climate catastrophe, the corona pandemic, decolonization, structural racism, women's reproduction, or the rights of trans\*persons. Terms such as 'cancel culture', 'wokeness', 'Willkommenskultur', or 'Nachkriegsstimmung' are discursive crystallizations of such contentions of what is 'known' and what is 'felt'.

Anthropologists are well equipped to theorize and analyze the spaces in which knowledge and affect interact. One way to do this is by developing concepts such as 'atmosphere' and 'Stimmung'. While atmospheres describe the 'in-between-ness' of a situation that the subject grasps as soon as it becomes part of the situation, the concept of Stimmung is broader and less localized. The aim of this workshop is to explore the interconnectedness of knowledge and affect by asking: How do knowledge and affect merge in Stimmungen and atmospheres and how does this change our understanding of what and how we know things?

We assemble papers from a variety of approaches and topics that help to understand better the relationship between moods, atmospheres, affects, and knowledge.

### **The Atmosphere of (II) Liberalism?**

***Tatjana Thelen, Universität Wien***

In 2023, a local Hungarian entrepreneur closed a conversation by pointing at my student and saying: "Look at him, he's always taking notes". Comparing the

ethnographer to the spy is a known trope (Verdery 2018) that in this situation was embedded in a biographical narrative depicting the speaker as someone who was always looking for opportunities. Early on, he had been an exchange worker in the GDR, after unification he had opened a restaurant, and now we were sitting in front of his latest project, a small hotel. He had mentioned how the Stasi had been everywhere, but added that now he was even more cautious about politics. This remark could be easily attributed to the current authoritarian politics in Hungary. However, it reminded me of another experience twenty years before: my host had closed the windows before we sang socialist songs. In this paper, I trace these *Stimmungen* that rule out an all-too-easy dismissal of certain positionalities or a direct link between an atmosphere of mistrust and a specific political situation. Adding some temporal depth, the argument moves beyond the presentism of ethnography and the binary between what we seem to know for certain and how we feel about it.

### **What Counts as Diagnostic Knowledge? Negotiating Evidence, Experience, and Affects in German Sleep Medicine**

***Julia Vorhölter, Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung, Halle***

Encounters between doctors and patients are often affectively charged. Patients may be suffering, worried, or desperate to receive information and care. Doctors want to help patients, but may be stressed, under time and economic pressures, or insensitive towards patients' self-presentations and behaviors. Most forms of medical knowledge are produced amidst these charged encounters in daily practice. Diagnosis is a particular form of generating knowledge. It relies, where possible, on scientific evidence – blood tests, x-rays, or in the case of sleep disorders polysomnography. But diagnostic knowledge is always also affected by both doctors' and patients' embodied experiences (patients might be in pain or fatigued; doctors might have 'gut feelings' about patients and their suffering) *and* by the atmosphere of their encounter (doctors might find patients moody or difficult and therefore dismiss their suffering; patients might lack trust in the doctor and thus question medical knowledge). Drawing on fieldwork among German sleep doctors and patients suffering from sleep disorders, my paper analyzes the complex negotiations of what is 'known' and what is 'felt' in doctor-patient encounters. I argue that the ways evidence, experience, and the 'affects of encounter' are valued, or not, have profound effects on the possibilities of diagnosis and treatment.

## **Decolonialism, *Laïcité* and Affective Knowledge Production in French Academia**

***Nur-Yasemin Ural, Universität Leipzig***

There is an increasing polarization between two approaches to French academic knowledge production. A growing number of scholars are advocating for an in-depth examination of France's colonial past (and present) along with feminist and LGBTQ criticisms. This opening is simultaneously perceived as a profound threat to the French academia. One of the battlegrounds of these "culture wars" is undoubtedly the concept of *laïcité* (French secularism). The deeply 'felt' threat to this fundamental republican value is crystallized through the production of affective knowledge around neologisms such as *woke* and *islamo-gauchisme* (islamo-leftism). These controversies are neither insignificant details of academic rivalries, nor are they exempt from state power and the general sentiments of society. They result in the creation and dissolution of institutions in which subjects become part of certain emotional regimes. Given this context, I am particularly interested in the creation of the Observatory of Decolonialism and Identity-based Ideologies in 2021. This platform created by 76 academics and researchers struggles against "the imposition of a radical critique of so-called decolonialism and intersectionality". This article highlights the knowledge production strategies of this platform as a snapshot of present-day sentiments regarding *laïcité* in France.

## **Affective Framing**

***Jonas Bens, Freie Universität Berlin***

This paper investigates the practice of producing plausibility in the courtroom and beyond. By rethinking framing in terms of affect, this paper analyses how actors in the Dominic Ongwen case before the International Criminal Court (ICC) – both professional lawyers in the courtroom and activists on the ground in northern Uganda – try to create affective arrangements in order to convince others of the truth of their narratives of the past. They achieve this not only through discursive means such as courtroom rhetoric, but also by creating specific atmospheres outside the courtroom, for example, by curating memorial spaces in northern Uganda in order to influence the ICC's decision. The paper contributes to the wide-ranging discussion on how those enacting the law produce 'truth' by managing sentiments.