FOURTH BIANNUAL ANTHROPOLOGY RESEARCH DAY

29.5.2020 ZOOM CONFERENCE

Please join us for a discussion of the research presentations by:

Session 1: 10:00–11.30

Kostadin Karavasilev (MA Anthropology, Leipzig), Care-Turned-Exclusion?: How Medical Documents (Re-)Assemble Subjects With a Mental Illness Diagnosis in a Context of Care and a Context of Work

Luna Ali (MA Anthropology, Leipzig), Narrating the Individual Through the Collective: The Formation of Memory Under Dictatorship in Syria

Session 2: 17:00–18:30

Jordan Oelke (MA Anthropology, Leipzig), The More-Than-Human Ethics of Sensitizing Sanitation on the White River in Ocho Rios Jamaica

Jamie Bowcock (MA Anthropology, Leipzig), The Sangha on Social Media: Online identity-formation among Sri Lankan Buddhist monks

Registration: Please register for the two sessions of the Zoom conference under claudia.lang@uni-leipzig.de until 27 May 2020. You’ll then receive a link to join the conference.

Recorded presentations will be available on Moodle from 25 May (https://moodle2.uni-leipzig.de/course/view.php?id=26874#section-0). Please watch the presentations before the Zoom conference. In the conference, we will only discuss them.
FOURTH BIANNUAL ANTHROPOLOGY RESEARCH DAY, MAY 2020

Session 1: 10:00–11.30

Kostadin Karavasilev (MA Anthropology, Leipzig), Care-Turned-Exclusion?: How Medical Documents (Re-)Assemble Subjects With a Mental Illness Diagnosis in a Context of Care and a Context of Work

During my fieldwork on mental illness, especially bipolar affective disorder, in Bulgaria, I observed practices of care in psychiatrists’ offices in a hospital and a clinic. I also enquired about care practices within the families of people with a mental illness. Many of my interlocutors – professionals, people with mental illness as well as their family members – agreed that having a diagnosis of mental illness makes it difficult to find work in Bulgaria. When some of my interlocutors presented employers or future employers with medical documents stating their mental illness they often did not get the position or, if they were already hired, were soon after let off. Given that the medical documents had been issued in a context of care – a hospital or a doctor’s office – their transition to a context of employment led to exclusion thus creating a ‘paradox’ of care turned into exclusion. According to Annemarie Mol (2002, 2008) care does not seek to control or confine. However, the documents that in the clinical context are part of the assemblage of care turn into technologies of exclusion in the context of employment. Based on examples from my fieldwork, I will use the idea of the social assemblage (Latour 2005) to unpack the care-turned-exclusion ‘paradox’ and the role of the documents in re-assembling subjects as ones in need of care into ones that are excluded in different contexts.

Luna Ali (MA Anthropology, Leipzig), Narrating the Individual Through the Collective: The Formation of Memory Under Dictatorship in Syria

When Hafez al-Assad died in June 2000 he had reigned Syria for 30 years. An entire generation of almost 12 million Syrians had grown up without knowing any other president. On the one hand an era had ended with the death of the ‘eternal leader’, but on the other hand his successor was already in sight. What happens when the physical body of a life-long dictator dies? How did Syrians make sense of this uncertain situation? What fears and hopes came into actions? By interviewing Syrians of various classes, ethnicities, ages and political backgrounds, this planned master thesis allows insights into everyday life experiences under an authoritarian regime in a moment of uncertainty. Scrutinising the narrative strategies employed by the interviewees, the study paves the way to conceptualise a new understanding of the relation between individual and collective memory as well as its relevance for (re)establishing political order.
Jordan Oelke (MA Anthropology, Leipzig), The More-Than-Human Ethics of Sensitizing Sanitation on the White River in Ocho Rios Jamaica

A crisis of viral proportions is required to unveil the damages that tourism facilitates in the white river, and marine life-worlds, through overdue water testing, the re-presentation of rare marine-life, and other signs in the absences of the everyday pollution. Prior to this crisis, the researcher’s field work in Ocho Rios Jamaica consisted of engaging the white river community, businesses and neighborhoods further upstream on topics of river pollution. The collaborating NGO’s ideology of how to care for the health of the sea, coral and marine-life, centrally involves the concept of sanitation. Viewed as a ‘positive’ viral infection of the mind, sanitation is cultivated through rhetoric in meetings, and workshops dealing either directly with the topic, or indirectly through marine conservation literacy, and AIDS awareness for example. Yet, how can a notion of sanitation stemming from middle and upper class social environments be expected to flourish in the lives of persons with more pressing concerns? Not to mention the chaotic state of chaotic order in contact zones between human and non-human, local and tourist, black and white? A negative space exists between the NGO’s ideology and the reality of white river communities, which they aspire to sensitize into caring for their efforts to protect marine-life worlds, coral, and thus tourism. Although impossible to close the gap, attending to river-side community interventions and concerns can help to reconcile with the chaotic order which permeates across more than human life-worlds involved in participatory climate adaptation studies.

Jamie Bowcock (MA Anthropology, Leipzig), The Sangha on Social Media: Online identity-formation among Sri Lankan Buddhist monks

At the University of Taxila in Sri Lanka, which formed the locus for my fieldwork, Buddhist monks study along with lay students. While supposedly adhering to a stricter set of moral rules, the monks engage in a lifestyle that broadly overlaps with that of their secular peers. The potential for dissonance emerges at the imbrication between the image of ‘ideal’ monastic and the social pressures that are synonymous with life on campus. This investigation aims to uncover how these multiple personalities are played out on Facebook, and to what degree my participants’ digital profiles mirror their real-world incarnations. Against this backdrop, my enquiry examines the motives and modalities behind the creation of social-media selves, and how these manifest among the undergraduate monks of Taxila. To gain an understanding of the monks’ life-worlds and identity formations, I conducted two months of participant observation and semi-structured interviews at various local temples and the university. Gradually becoming ‘friends’ with my interlocutors online enabled me to ascertain more about their projected self-image. Data gathered from Facebook timelines informed subsequent rounds of questions, posed both virtually and in person, with the aim of aligning the different layers of identity on display.

While focussing on monastic undergraduates, my research also featured a cohort of their lay student peers, as well as other members of the sangha at different life stages. Selecting a sample that was not restricted in scope facilitated a comparative analysis of the variables that influence spiritual and psychosocial development. My study takes cues from the school of Symbolic Interactionism, advanced by Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead, while employing the Buddhist doctrine of anattā or ‘non-self’ as an epistemological framework.