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Part 2 | Session 8 | 13 Jun 2024 | Ethnography and Inequality: Reflections on the Decolonization of Anthropology's Methodological Assemblage

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What does the decolonization turn imply for the discipline of anthropology? In this lecture, we acknowledge that decolonization contains promising potentials to address the inequalities that characterize anthropology as an academic discipline, while we simultaneously emphasize that these approaches ultimately fail to undo the epistemic violence that is implied in any ethnographic endeavor. We argue that ethnography, anthropology's defining and almost canonic methodological assemblage, builds on a heuristic that presupposes different forms of inequality, which are ultimately rooted in coloniality. Institutionalized science remains quintessentially colonial as it centers on an accumulation of knowledge and hence power.

Can we destabilize the colonial legacies that form our contemporary understandings of science without destabilizing anthropology as an academic discipline and its institutionalization?

Our discussion is going to address this central question in three steps. First, we will outline the epistemic problems encountered in the decolonization turn as they unfold in anthropology. Second, we ask how to decolonize power-knowledge relations within anthropology. Third, we emphasize that a decentering or negation of the Self is not only a prerequisite of doing ethnographic fieldwork, but also essential to decolonize the disciplines. Finally, this encompasses our understanding of what

decoloniality actually means.

Our format is intentionally open for discussion, inviting the audience to share their views on our framework, in order to expand our inquiry into one of anthropology's most pressing contemporary issues.

Readings

Baumann, Benjamin. 'Enunciating Ambiguity: Thailand's *Phi* and the Epistemological Decolonization of Thai Studies'. *South East Asia Research* 30, no. 2 (3 April 2022): 161–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2022.2064761.

Baumann, Benjamin, Strauß, Sophie and Zehmisch, Philipp (2024). Ethnography and Inequality. In: Jodhka, S.S., Rehbein, B. (eds) Global Handbook of Inequality. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97417-6_116-1.

***Anjum Alvi**, a cultural anthropologist, received her PhD in 1999 from the Free University of Berlin, where she taught for 18 years. Since December 2008, she has taught at the Lahore University of Management Sciences in Pakistan. She relates philosophical and anthropological perspectives to emphasize the inseparability of subjective and objective perspectives. She searches for transforming patterns between cultural contexts and identifies challenges in intersubjectively relating cultural contexts. Her main research interests are Muslim veiling (Current Anthropology 2013), kinship (JRAI 2007), notions of self and person (Social Anthropology 2001), ethics in anthropology (Anthropological Theory 2020), and ethics and Mauss (as a co-author, coming Current Anthropology).*

***Benjamin Baumann** is Assistant Professor at Heidelberg University's Institute of Anthropology. Before joining Heidelberg University in April 2020, he was a research associate and pre-doctoral fellow at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin's Department of Southeast Asian Studies. He is a multidisciplinarily working anthropologist and studied*

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anthropology, but received his PhD in Southeast Asian Studies. His ethnographic research examines rural lifeworlds, socio-cultural identities, and local language games in the border regions between Thailand and Cambodia. He is currently working on a postdoctoral research project that outlines the possession complex at the heart of Thai animism and its emplacement in rural villages in Thailand's lower Northeast. His current research looks at the cultic life of termite mounds and asks how a mutuality of being between humans and various nonhumans is reproduced in possession phenomena and mediumship rituals that center around these earthly structures.

***Visisya Pinthongvijayakul** is an associate professor in the Program of Community Development, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Chandrakasem Rajabhat University in Bangkok. His research interests cover spirit mediumship, ritual, gender and sexuality. Recently, Visisya has explored how environmental change and state infrastructure influence the lives of human and animal in Northeast Thailand. His articles have been published in Journal of Southeast Asian Studies and American Anthropologist. Visisya is a Georg Forster Research Fellow at Heidelberg University's Institute of Anthropology.*

***Philipp Zehmisch** is Senior Academic Staff at the Department of Anthropology, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg. His postdoctoral research investigates everyday ethics and politics in the Pakistani-Indian borderlands seeking to understand the long-lasting legacies of Partition. Philipp's monograph "Mini-India: The Politics of Migration and Subalternity in the Andaman Islands" won two awards and was published with Oxford University Press (Delhi, 2017). He also co-edited two edited volumes and published journal articles and book chapters on Subalternity, Indigeneity, Labour Migration, Partition, Anarchy, and Love in South Asia.*