

Call for Participation

Anthropology of Gender in the Balkans: Focusing on Historical Transformations and Analytical Strategies

Georg-August University, Goettingen, 09-10 September 2019

The workshop “Anthropology of Gender in the Balkans” has two goals. First, it aims to bring together anthropologists who explore gender in the Balkans ethnographically to present their work and to connect. Second, it aims to invite its participants to discuss how they research and write about gender dynamics, hierarchies, oppressions, and inequalities in the Balkan countries, without reiterating the problematic discourse about the backwardness of the region and the need for the Balkans to catch up with Europe.

There is a vibrant anthropological scholarship that explores gender practices in the Balkans both ethnographically and critically. However, a focused discussion on strategies that anthropologists use to critically research gender in this region is missing. Therefore, the key question of the workshop is: what analytical, epistemological, and narrative strategies do we as anthropologists use to articulate ethnographically grounded criticism of gender asymmetries and inequalities in the Balkans beyond the usual balkanizing tropes and frozen concepts?

This is an important question because the anthropological analysis is thoroughly comparative: anthropologists learn by making the strange more familiar, or by making the familiar seem strange. Translating human behaviour across different degrees of familiarity and difference may involve a critical perspective, but it does not have to. Our workshop asks – when anthropologists do write critically about gender in the Balkans, how do we do it? What analytical, epistemological, and narrative strategies do we use?

We invite the participants to take a part in this workshop and to present papers on the critical anthropological writing about the Balkans within two thematic strands: 1) historical transformations 2) analytical strategies.

Historical transformations

One productive strategy to offer critical analysis, yet avoid the danger of balkanism, has been to conduct feminist / gender / women-centred research focusing on past and historical transformations. There is a growing body of literature that focuses on the emancipation of women during socialist modernity and takes this as a reference point for a criticism of contemporary gender policies and relevant legislature both in the Balkans and in the rest of Europe. There are also anthropologists who look at the historical changes in kinship and property regimes in the Balkans in order to critically explore contemporary logic and organization of gender practices and relations. We invite the participants in this strand to present their research and include a brief reflection on their analytical, epistemological, and narrative choices in writing critically about gender in the Balkans. Can we explain the collapse of socialist (second) world by

deficiencies and aberrations of its “state feminism” as the core of the socialist egalitarian politics? Do we look to the (socialist) past, or at contemporary processes as an inspiration for comparative thinking?

Analytical strategies

What (other) theoretical and methodological strategies do anthropologists who study gender in the Balkans employ? Do we disregard “the Balkans” as a framework and approach our fieldsites as already “properly” European? Do we abandon an implicit comparison between “the Balkans” and “Europe” altogether? Or do we try to place our analyses in a wider framework of global ethnographic and historical comparisons? What analytical merits does the anthropology of gender get if it joins its efforts with feminist historiography, postcolonial, black, queer and Neo-Marxist feminist studies?

Keynote speakers are Nita Luci (University of Prishtina) and Zsófia Lóránd (University of Goettingen).

If you are interested in presenting a paper, please send a 200-word abstract and a short bio note to genderbalkans@gmail.com by 20 July 2019.

We also invite advanced BA, MA, and PhD students and other early-career anthropologists who have not yet completed their fieldwork to participate in the “Research in Progress” panel by presenting their research plans and issues they encountered when studying gender in the Balkans. To apply for this panel please submit a 200-word description of your planned talk, a short bio note to genderbalkans@gmail.com by 20 July 2019, and clearly indicate that you want to participate in the “Research in Progress” panel.

Hotel and partial travel expenses will be covered for all the participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Kosovo, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as Germany, thanks to a grant received through the DAAD program “East-West Dialogue: University Dialogue with the Countries of the Western Balkans 2019”.

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