

Abstracts for Panel 3: We don't care about concepts! (And the people who care for them)

Conveners

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Panel abstract:

When working on projects on integration, diversity, and migration, we are constantly banging our heads against impossible concepts. Media, opinion makers, politicians, researchers, and others keep throwing up concepts that are more or less useless for us when we try to describe everyday realities in our fields. At the same time, we are forced to use some categories and words when we write and talk. The constant dialogue between the emic and etic concepts that make up our research is an invaluable part of the anthropological tradition (Rytter 2019). But how to take care of concepts when they are severely convoluted? Thus, this panel focuses on grappling with concepts that are flying around in the anthropology of migration.

Number of total abstracts submitted for the panel: 4

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Abstract: Signe Askersjö

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Paper title: "Joking with heart": taking care of awkward notions through joking

Abstract:

The recent debate on how to deal with concepts that become increasingly entangled in highly politicized narratives has spurred a call for separating emic and etic concepts in migration research (Anderson 2019; Dahinden 2016; Rytter 2019). In following this call, I argue that emic and etic categories and concepts also produce each other through how they become entangled in socio-political

processes. In the paper, I introduce these conflated categories and concepts as *awkward notions* due to how both categories and concepts have become ideas, opinions, and presumptions that often cause unease when discussed and managed. Building on in-depth ethnographic fieldwork amongst employees at a department store in Sweden, this paper explores how we can take care of such awkward notions by looking closely at the practice of joking. Joking does political work and while joking can be grounds for conviviality it can also be a foundation for contentions (Franck 2022; Trnka 2019). In the store, the employees made use of jokes, jibes, put-down comments, and ridicule to overcome sensitive and sometimes uncomfortable subjects and differences. Among the employees, joking is a practice that takes care of relationships when the jokes became ways of testing boundaries that may or may not be transgressed. Signs of affection, in terms of being able to joke about each other's attributes and showing love through names of endearment, illustrate how joking "with heart" becomes an important aspect of convivial socialites that mediate awkward notions.

Keywords: migration research; joking, social categories; care.

Abstract: Jörgen Hellman

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Paper title: A Day at the Office: In and out of diversity

Abstract:

The objective of this presentation is to show how informants provide the concept of diversity with an ambiguity that allow them to seamless move between making cultural, ethnic and religious diversity relevant and irrelevant. Using material from participant observation at a middle-sized urban office I argue that in a postmigrant society, moments of post-Otherness, in which stereotypes of Othering are made irrelevant, have a potential to transcend their contingent character and transform into everyday practices. However, as these practices are mundane and colloquial, they do not translate into social or political narratives, although they do challenge dominating discourses in which diversity is alleged to create conflicts in terms of a failed multiculturalism.

Abstract: Sara Kauko

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Paper title: A concept squeezed between public discourse and academic analysis: the case of social resilience

Abstract:

For the last two decades, the concept of social resilience has gained traction in social sciences. While now being a sexy research subject across multiple disciplines, it has also become commonplace in public and political discourses. These discourses fuel shared imaginaries of social resilience as a marker of strength, unity, perseverance, etc. They speak of a community's capacity to endure and manage adversity –and thrive.

But to think of social resilience merely as an admired collective capacity is problematic. This paper explores that problematic by focusing on the tensility between theorizing social resilience as a dynamic, context-specific process, and its public life as a laudable social quality. What happens when the analysis of social resilience-as-process in diverse behaviours and practices challenges popular understandings and discourses of social resilience-as-capacity?

I approach this question through a case study on Argentines' desires to emigrate amid an economic crisis. Given the recurrence of such crises in the country, Argentines have the fame of being particularly resilient people with a capacity to face hardship headstrong. Yet everyday conversations about emigrating are rife, and many express their desire to see their children leave since 'in Argentina, there is no future'. As a researcher, I analyse the act of dismembering the family due to migration as a form of social resilience. Yet in mainstream discourse, this act can imply 'giving up'. So, what to make of the discrepancy between the academic and public meanings of social resilience? Moreover, what does such discrepancy say about the meaningfulness (or usefulness) of the concepts we study?

[Abstract: Lisa Åkesson](#)

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Paper title: Digital part-time migrants: Juxtaposing emic and etic notions

Abstract:

In the last decades, the concept of "migrant" has increasingly been challenged in migration studies. There is a call to deconstruct the concept and question the binary distinction between "migrants" and "natives". This paper experimentally applies the concept "migrant" to white middle-class highly educated Swedes, living in Sweden, thus to a category of people that seldom, if ever, are labelled migrants. The paper builds on ethnographic fieldwork in the Swedish "hub" of a large globalised company and focuses on the intensive digital global relations that constitute an important part of the employees' everyday work life. It teases out aspects of the employees' experiences that are parallel to common emic notions of migrants: struggling with the language, feeling dominated and unseen, striving to "integrate", but also quietly challenging the dominance of the (Anglo-Saxon) "natives" in the global company world. A conclusion is that if we care for creative and non-essentialised academic use of the concept of migrant, we need to explore new ways of juxtaposing emic and etic notions.