

Anthropology as critique: a Balkan prism

Professor Stef Jansen

Form: 60h, lectures with elements of discussions and film fora

Level of studies: I & II cycle of studies (limit: 15 students)

ECTS: 10

Assignments and evaluation: Research proposal (2,500 words) for an ethnographic study on a topic relevant to the course. Topic to be chosen by students and approved by lecturer

Place: Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Gołębia 9

Timing: the course will be time-blocked and held between April 6 -- May 5, 2023:

Mondays 16:00-19:15, room 9

Wednesdays 16:00-19:17, room 9

Fridays 16:00-19:15, room 9

Course description

This course explores how social anthropology can contribute to critical understandings of contemporary societal dynamics of domination, inequality, struggle and solidarity. How can we study this through ethnographic investigations into the practices, hopes and fears that make up people's lives? How can we address the relation between our ethnographic findings and political-economic processes—for example, of capitalism, of geopolitics, of war, of migration, of colonialism—that seem to occur on much larger scales altogether? Which analytical approaches and theoretical concepts can help us in such studies? And how can our anthropological work inspire critical interrogation of dominant explanations of how social life is organised, can be organised and should be organised?

This course will approach those general anthropological questions—challenges for everyone interested in anthropology as critique—through the prism of everyday lives in the Balkans today. Rather than considering this region to be incompletely and imperfectly European, less advanced on a uniform path of development, we will approach lives in the Balkans as anthropological entry points that particularly sharply crystallise major issues of contemporary political contestation. Examples will include, amongst others, questions of sovereignty and the state; of informality; of borders; of postcoloniality; of infrastructure; of nationalism; of environmental degradation; of gender and sexuality; of populism and cynicism; of migration. What can a semiperipheral European prism on those issues offer to anthropology as critique?

The course will be organised around (a) lectures, including audiovisual materials (documentaries); (b) student discussions of readings; and (c) feature films followed by discussion fora.