



Schweizerische Ethnologische Gesellschaft  
Société Suisse d'Ethnologie  
Associazione Svizzera di Antropologia  
Swiss Anthropological Association



## ON POLITICS AND PRECARITIES IN ACADEMIA: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

November 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern

### CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS (deadline 7<sup>th</sup> August 2017)

*Annual General Meeting (AGM) Seminar of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) organised in collaboration with the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern, PrecAnthro Group and the Swiss Anthropological Association.*

The interplay of nationalism, right wing populism and neoliberal policies affects European residents in general and university education and academics in particular. Recent developments in Turkey, Hungary, and Russia have shown appalling consequences of anti-intellectualism, creating precarity for thousands of academics and damaging intellectual development. Furthermore, academia is also challenged by early career scholars who blame universities, research centres and their neoliberal structures for social and professional insecurities and for creating precarity as normalcy in academia. Precarity, 'once seen as the fate of the less fortunate', today, Anna Tsing (2015, 2) states, is 'life without the promise of security', an indeterminacy that is less the exception than the condition of our times.

**The 2017 EASA AGM Seminar will bring together debates on different strands of precarity, analyse sites of disempowerment at the intersection of precarity and politics and discuss potentials of collaboration, solidarity and unionization.**

The event is structured in three Workshops (W1 *Politics and Precarious Lives*, W2 *Structural Precarity in Anthropology*, W3 *Transnational Collaboration Against Political and Structural Precarity*) followed by a conference press briefing that will disseminate publicly the results of this two-day meeting. A keynote speaker (Özlem Biner, LSE) will discuss the topic of this AGM from a theoretical point of view but also through the lens of her own experiences and practices inside academia.

Scholars from different national contexts and geographical areas are invited to send an abstract (max 200 words) in relation to W1 or W2. For each workshop, 3-6 short presentations (max 7 minutes) will be scheduled in order to share knowledge on local transformation and on current strategies and potentials for solidarity. This format will simultaneously allow us to bring together regional variations of precarity in order to multiply options for collaboration that will be discussed in W3.

#### **Workshop 1: Politics and Precarious Lives**

In January 2016, over 1400 academics in Turkey and abroad signed a petition calling for an end to state violence and curfews in the South-eastern region of Turkey, and calling for continued peace negotiations. Academics who have supported the petition "Academics for Peace" were straightaway blamed by the state President for supporting terrorism 'with their pencils'. As was widely discussed, many of them were dismissed, some were put on trial and several even imprisoned. The coup attempt from July 15, 2016 has contributed significantly to a further deterioration of the political atmosphere in Turkey and about 4000 people, many of them left-wing intellectuals, have lost their jobs in academia. Ironically, many academics who had fiercely criticized the Gülen movement in Turkey for years are now accused of supporting the coup which has been attributed to the Gülen movement by the AKP government. In the following months, the German Philipp Schwartz Initiative for scholars under threat received more applications from Turkey than from Syria. Scholars at Risk<sup>1</sup>, an international network to protect scholars and to promote academic freedom, launched petitions in support of academic colleagues in Turkey, as did many European university associations and networks. Many Turkish academics have now left the country and seek refuge and access

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/>

to European universities, others remain in Turkey and continue their struggle by organizing public lectures in 'Solidarity Academies' and 'Street Academies'.

On April 10, 2017, the President of the Republic of Hungary signed amendments to Hungary's national higher education legislation which will threaten the existence of Central European University (CEU), an institution relevant particularly for post-socialist countries. Academics at the CEU are protesting against these amendments, and continue their teaching and research programs, and the local population and thousands of academics globally support their protest.

On April 28, 2017, *Rosobrnadzor*, the state organization overseeing the quality of education in Russia, forced the European University in St. Petersburg to halt all educational activity. The order against this private post-graduate school for the social sciences and humanities came after a St. Petersburg district court ruled that the university had violated several legal regulations.

In this context, the workshop will discuss effects of different variations of nationalism and 'representative dictatorship' (Gürses 2017) on scholars as much as the consequences of closed borders. Academics' experiences with local, national and transnational interventions (Scholars at Risk Network (SAR), CARA<sup>2</sup> – a lifeline to academics at risk, CEU petitions<sup>3</sup>, etc.), highly relevant and significant for the entire community, will be addressed. These warning examples require attention of our fellow anthropologists but also of our colleagues from different scientific backgrounds that share the same 'uncertain future'. Contributors are invited to present different contextualized cases and consequences as well as forms of agency and organization.

## **Workshop 2: Structural Precarity in Anthropology**

In recent years, there has not only been a severe political attack against academia, independent of academic discipline - natural sciences, social sciences, or humanities - there has also been an increasing protest within different disciplines at European universities over the long-lasting experience of precarity, particularly among early career academics. Several groups and platforms (Doc sans poste, San Precario, External Lecturers, etc.) referring to this problem of academic uncertainty have been established in different countries (France, Austria, UK, Italy, etc.) and at the European level. The organizers of the open meeting of early career and precarious anthropologists *#PrecAnthro: toward a transnational Anthropological Union* at the EASA conference in Milan 2016 called for a transnational anthropology network of precarious anthropologists.

In collaboration with this network, we invite short contributions to this EASA AGM-seminar on academic uncertainty. Based on the shared awareness that, while employment precarity is on the rise within and beyond anthropology, there is no effective platform specifically dedicated to these problems. There is no transnational organization to address issues of short fixed-term contracts, limited bargaining power and social or economic security in anthropology. Under the burden of the 'publish or perish' imperative young and/or precarious scholars have to secure research and teaching experience (sometimes unpaid) while realizing that their work benefits not the public, but universities and publishers under increasingly neoliberal regimes. The workshop will bring together diverse experiences of precarity and subject positions concerning different contexts and geographic areas. Participants will be invited to focus on politics of precarity, gender and precarity, and paths for labour organization and collective action.

Yet, what are politics of precarity? Eli Thorkelson (2016) challenges the concept of precarity and blames advocates who are not themselves in this situation for establishing a "movement of othering" in order to defend their privileges. This is an important tension, and a possible impediment to collaboration between established tenured and precarious academics: this may cause tensions and the construction of two parties or a blurring of boundaries and constructive thoughts of collaboration during the workshop. The PrecAnthroGroup has been invited to make the introduction to this workshop and co-organize the debate.

This workshop ties in with the previous activities of the EASA Executive Committees (2013-2014; 2015-2016) concerning early career anthropologists and precarity in Europe, such as the Early Careers Scholars Forum (Milan 2016) and the panel 'Anthropology as a Vocation and Occupation' (Tallinn, 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cara.ngo/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ceu.edu/node/17948/>

### **Workshop 3: Transnational Collaboration against Political and Structural Precarity**

In the third workshop, the potential for inclusive strategies for anthropology and beyond will be discussed.

1. EASA's concrete options for intervention – in collaboration with and input from those affected – can include watchdog efforts in collaboration with existing activities in different national contexts and seek to assert influence in cases of structural violence, exploitation and proliferation of precarity and the permanent threat of insecurity.
2. Updating – with input by those affected – the existing database on number and types of contracts offered in anthropology departments across Europe in order to better understand the current situation with precarity in the profession.
3. Develop strategies of collaboration and unionization across borders and boundaries.

This workshop will bring the positions and results of Workshop 1 and 2 together and is meant to discuss options for future collaboration and to prepare a statement for the public.

### **Press conference 'Let's Give Voice to Scholars at Risk and Precarious Researchers'**

The aim of the two-day seminar is to bring together different experiences and potentials in three workshops and discuss recent threats and activities of scholars at risk and variations of precarious lives in academia. The press conference will focus on relevant issues about anthropological contributions to the politics of precarity in populist-nationalist, as well as in neoliberal 'publish or perish' academic contexts.

### **Expected impact**

This two-day EASA AGM seminar focusing on politics and precarities in academia, will serve to a significant degree to gather information on the actual situation of precariousness in Europe in order to make it more visible and develop strategies of support beyond petitions. The workshops (W1, W2, W3) and the keynote will address questions concerning the precarious generation of anthropologists and scholars at risk. Each workshop's debates will be specifically addressed in a report which should lead to an EASA position paper.

EASA will include reports on variations of precarity in academia in the position paper that will be officially presented to different universities, the European Commission's Director General for Research, Science and Innovation, but also to the Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

The press conference 'Let's Give Voice to Scholars at Risk and Precarious Researchers' will distribute information about the actual situation and will answer questions from journalists. This conference should be considered as a follow up to the press conference organized in Prague in 2015 "Making Anthropology Matter" where the importance of anthropology and need for anthropological input in a constantly changing world was underlined.

In collaboration with the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA) project "Global Survey of Anthropological Practice", this meeting will contribute to the creation of a database of precarious researchers and a collaborative transnational approach to scholars at risk to be realized in partnership with the other anthropological associations that are members of the World Council of Anthropological Associations.

After the seminar, a selection of contributions may be published in the Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale Journal, subject to the normal peer review process.

### **Applications for W1 and W2**

Applications should include a 200-word abstract of your contribution, which comprises title and an explicit topic that will be addressed on the main priorities, and challenges of W1 or W2 (see above).

Junior scholars are encouraged to apply. Those presenting at the seminar will benefit of free travel and accommodation.

Please send your application and/or any question you might have to [politicsandprecarities@gmail.com](mailto:politicsandprecarities@gmail.com) no later than 7<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

### **Important dates**

Abstract submission deadline: August 7th 2017

Author notification: August 25<sup>th</sup> 2017

### **Scientific Committee:**

Sarah Green, University of Helsinki, SA/AS Journal, Editor in Chief

David Loher, University of Bern (co-organizer EASA AGM Seminar)

Georgeta Stoica, French Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD France), (organizer EASA AGM Seminar, PrecAnthro liaison, lobbying)

Sabine Strasser, University of Bern (organizer EASA AGM Seminar, PrecAnthro liaison)