



**Baltic Anthropology
Graduate School**
bags-phd.org



19 & 20
DECEMBER
2019
RIGA



UNIVERSITY OF TARTU



The Wenner-Gren Foundation
supporting worldwide research in all branches of anthropology

WEDNESDAY 18TH DECEMBER

20:00 Informal meet up, location tba

THURSDAY 19TH DECEMBER Riga Stradiņš University (Dzirčiema iela 16, K-204)

10:30-11:00 Registration (in the lobby) and morning coffee (next to the lobby, cafeteria "Daily")

11:00-11:30 Introduction and welcome, dr. Aet Annist, University of Tartu

11:30-13:00 Keynote dr. Katja Seidel, University of Vienna: **Anticipating the Nicaragua Canal: Indigenous Rights and Unpredictable Futures of Global Capitalism**

13:00-14:00 Lunch break, cafeteria "Daily", ground floor, block E

14:00-14:45 BAGs staff and guests: **Precarity and trauma in the academic world. Accounts of ritual and rebellion in personal and institutional experiences.**

14:45-16:00 Discussion and solutions. All participants

16:00-16:30 Coffee break, cafeteria "Daily", ground floor, block E

16:30- 17:30 Student presentations (Chair: Andre Thiemann)

- Vidmantas Vysniauskas, Vytautas Magnus University: **Communication of traumatic experiences among locals in Salcininkai region**
- Andris Suvajevs, Riga Stradins University: **An accountant and a gambler walk into a bar: the tragedy of austerity in Latvia**

17:30-20:00 Documentary **Gestures of Resistance**, Dzirciema iela 16, K-204

Discussant/respondent Jean-Sébastien Marcoux (University of Montreal) (via Skype) and Patrick Laviolette, including Q&A with the director/filmmaker Olga Stefan

20:00 Dinner

FRIDAY 20TH DECEMBER

Riga Stradiņš University (Dzirciema iela 16, K-201)

9:00-9.30 Morning coffee, cafeteria "Daily", ground floor, block E

9:30-11:00 Keynote lecture by dr. Asli Vatansever, Humboldt University Berlin: **Living in the purgatory: Exile as trauma and possibility**

11:00-11:30 Coffee break, cafeteria "Daily", ground floor, block E

11:30 – 12:30 Student presentations (Chair: Aet Annist)

- Edite Pauna, Riga Stradins University: **Suicide and silence**
- Daina Pupkeviciute, Vytautas Magnus University: **Sustainable practice in sustainable action: academia and environmental activism in the face of climate crisis**

12:30-13:30 Lunch break, cafeteria "Daily", ground floor, block E

13:30 – 15:00 Presentation and workshop by Ugne Starkute and Saara Mildeberg, Social Science for Social Action project: **Anthropologists outside academia: Baltic collaboration in the project**

15:00-15:30 Coffee break, cafeteria "Daily", ground floor, block E

15:30-17:00 Concluding roundtable and discussion on the future of Baltic anthropology; farewells

ABSTRACT

Katja Seidel, **Anticipating the Nicaragua Canal: Indigenous Rights and Unpredictable Futures of Global Capitalism**

This keynote addresses the theme of the conference by discussing the anticipated interoceanic Gran Canal de Nicaragua, a 200-year-old dream and failure of capitalist imagination. In 2013, Daniel Ortega, President of Nicaragua and former leader of the Sandinista revolution, and Chinese businessman Wang Jing, chairman of HKND, signed a concession agreement and announced the construction of the 278 km long shipping route. Six years later, the world is still waiting for the Canal that claims to turn a poor country into a hotspot of global trade and prosperity. In the context of an increasingly authoritarian government, I discuss the responses of indigenous and ethnic groups in the margins of a politically, culturally and geographically divided state. I examine how the infrastructure project creates "states of anticipation" (Choi 2015), in which the presence of the Canal, even in the absence of its material manifestation, has become a powerful force that provides yet another political opening to establish state power in the most remote areas of Nicaragua. Approaching the Canal as a meaning-making entity, I argue that memories and anticipations

of expropriations and cultural loss deepen historico-political discourses of injustice. To analyse the productivity of anticipation is thus of direct relevance to the anthropological understanding of the complex logics of postcolonial states.

Asli Vatansever. **Living in the purgatory. Exile as trauma and possibility**

Capitalism is an inherently crisis-prone system with a historical record of creating traumatic conditions on both societal and individual levels. However, the neo-liberal turn represents a new phase in which traumatic occurrences cease to be the exception and become the rule. Precarization and volatilization are now not merely instrumental in disciplining the masses; they are integral to the neo-liberal logic of power itself that explicitly aims at eradicating agency. Its methods may vary from *political marginalization* of certain groups to *economic exclusion* of an increasing portion of the workforce from the sphere of social security and formal employment. In some cases, political oppression and economic precarization may even converge to create a double pressure mechanism, as can be seen in the recent example of the crackdown on dissident scholars in Turkey following the Academics for Peace Petition since January 2016. Expelled from the universities and banned from public service, a significant number of the signatories found themselves forced to emigrate into an unknown that seems to offer nothing more than a short-lived oasis of temporary scholarships with little to no future prospects, and, thus represents a new episode of intensified precarity.

Following a brief overview on the question of trauma, loss and subjectivity in neo-liberal capitalism for the purposes of historical and theoretical contextualization, this keynote will present the results of an empirical study based on in-depth interviews with the Peace Academics in German exile. The main argument is that the kind of existential vulnerability one is exposed to in exile has the potential to inspire a new outlook on the relationship between the external factors and individual willpower, and encourage a collectivist conception of will and agency, to the extent that the subject comes to realize the ubiquity of structurally imposed uncertainty and manages to turn the traumatic experience into a common denominator with other precarious lives. The possibility of a new form of subjectivity along these lines of 'de-individualization of pain and loss' will be explored in view of the challenges that the displaced academics face on structural and individual levels, based on their own narratives.