

16<sup>th</sup> EASA biennial conference [New anthropological horizons in and beyond Europe](#)

EASA2020 – P049: “**Uncomfortable Ancestors: Anthropology (not) Dealing with Totalitarian Regimes.**” Convenors: Fabiana Dimpflmeier (University of Pisa) and Reinhard Johler (University of Tübingen). The panel hosted up to 30 attendees. <https://easaonline.org/conferences/easa2020/panels#8690>

**Wednesday 22 July, 08:30-10:15 and 11:00-12:45 (Lisbon/London time)**

Panel 049 invited “papers that explore the involvement of anthropology and folklore studies in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in Europe (and beyond)” in order to “better understand the ‘shadows’ of anthropology and include in its history the less explored phases and harsher personalities of our discipline (its ‘uncomfortable ancestors’)” and “to stimulate their acknowledgment and re-elaboration.” The panel hosted 10 papers reflecting on the involvement of anthropology and folklore studies in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in Italy, Germany and Austria, Lithuania, Russia, Romania, Albania, and Turkey and showing how – and how deeply – anthropology was involved not only with ideology, propaganda and consensus policies, but also with everyday practices, representations, material culture and folklore. The panel was divided in two slots, grouped by time and focus, briefly introduced by the two convenors: the first dealing with the 1920s-1940s, Italian Fascism and German Nazism; the second referring to post WW2 regimes, with a special focus on Communism, ending with the more contemporary case of Turkey.

The first session was opened by three Italian scholars, Paola Sacchi, Sofia Venturoli and Barbara Sorgoni (University of Torino) who presented “Unexpected Routes. Corrado Gini’s Ethnographic Expeditions: Theoretical Assumptions and Political Consequences.” Focusing on the statistician Gini, the paper showed his little known approach to miscegenation divergent from official anthropological theories during Fascism. “The Totalitarian Turn of Folklore Studies in Italy” of Maurizio Coppola (EHESS) meticulously reconstructed and summarized the relationship between folklore studies and Fascism in the 1920s and 30s, showing how innovation and tradition were constantly used by the regime in non-contradictory terms. Paolo De Simonis and Dario Nardinis’s (University of Florence) paper, “Fascism and Anthropology in Florence between Writings and Social Practices” offered a vibrant and original exploration of the social practices used by the Fascist regime to build consensus in Florence, lingering on the various forms of cultural and traditional re-enactment promoted by Alessandro Pavolini, Florentine Minister of Popular Culture.

The following two papers dealt with anthropology and Nazism from an Austrian perspective. In her dense presentation of a specific case study, “Ethnic Fragmentation: Viennese Racial and Folklore Research in Occupied Poland (1940-1944),” Lisa Gottschall (University of Vienna) focused on the Góral population of Poland and the way Anton A. Plügel’s anthropological researches impacted on its identity and survival during and after Nazism. Peter Rohrbacher (Austrian Academy of Sciences) dedicated his paper to “Folklore Studies for the Waffen-SS: Caucasus and Turkestan Research from Vienna at the End of the Second World War.” Introducing his on-going research on voice recordings from the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Rohrbacher thoroughly underlined the little known regional connections of the “Eastern Turkic SS Corps” with the Viennese Turkologist Herbert Jansky.

The second session was mainly dedicated to Communists countries. Vida Savoniakaite (Lithuanian Institute of History) talked of “Anthropology and Totalitarian Regimes:

Eduard Volter as ‘Uncomfortable Ancestor’ (1884-1941),” richly reconstructing his life and oeuvre and high-lightening his importance in Lithuanian anthropology. Sergei Alymov (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences) described the ambivalent effects of the Stalinist regime on Russian anthropology. In his paper, “Soviet Ethnography on the World Stage: from World War II to Détente,” he emphasized the dynamics of relations between Soviet ethnographers and their foreign colleagues in the 1940-60s, showing how the discipline acquired a global outlook and developed tactics aimed at attracting the minds of scholars from the Cold War geography. Two insightful examples from Romania were presented in the following two papers. Alina Ioana Branda (Babes-Bolyai University) gave a paper on “Totalitarianism and Ethnology/Anthropology in Romina. A case study.” Taking into consideration the Cluj Archive of Foklore and the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, Branda focused not only on the strategies developed by the Romanian regime to control the ethnological production and research, but also on the local levels of compromise and resistance. In “Ethnography in Dictatorial Situation: The State and/of Knowledge in Communist Albania” Olsi Lelaj (Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Arts Studies, Tirana, Albania) presented an insightful critical understanding of the relation between Albanian ethnographic knowledge and the dictatorial state, underlining how anthropology participated in sustaining a state-led holocaustic culture while the totalitarian state implemented an ideologically motivated vision on society. Erdogan Gedik (Goethe Universitaet), Abdurrahim Özmen (Dicle University), and Hande Birkalan-Gedik (Goethe Universität) presented the final paper “The Haunting Phantoms of the Ancestors: Coming to Terms with Anthropology and Folklore in Turkey,” in which they explored the development of anthropology and folklore in relation to the state ideology in Turkey from the 1930s-1940s until the 2000s under the current regime. The informed paper switched the focus of the panel from past regimes to present dictatorial states, stimulating the emergence of a series of delicate questions. The challenges of how to face the future of Turkish anthropology in the aftermath of the actual intellectual brain-drain, loss of funding, economic deprivation, compromised scientific publishing, and a general lack of social trust, encouraged a general and lively discussion on what we can learn from and how we should come to terms with our past. To this end, supported and appreciated by all scholars, was the idea of conducting broad comparative research involving different totalitarian regimes in time and space. The debate lasted until 2pm (Lisbon/London time) and included several positive feedbacks and invitations to further develop the ideas expressed during the panel. The recording is available on the EASA website.