

International Interim meeting of the AG Fachgeschichte (History of Anthropology) within the German Anthropological Association (DGSKA/GAA) on the topic of "Prevention and Refusal. Historical authority structures in ethnology and their influence on internal and public discourses".

- Report -

On 8 September 2022, the international online conference of the AG Fachgeschichte (History of Anthropology) (German Anthropological Association, DGSKA/GAA) took place on the topic „Verhinderung und Ablehnung. Historische Autoritätsstrukturen in der Ethnologie und ihr Einfluss auf interne und öffentliche Diskurse“ [Prevention and refusal. Historical authority structures in ethnology and their influence on internal and public discourses]. The focus was on academics who were marginalised in academic circles due to their personal identity, personal origin and gender, alternative approaches or divergent academic or political positioning. Udo Mischek (Göttingen) could be won as a discussant.

In the first contribution, “The emergence of Brazilian indigenism in the shadow of 'racial theories'”, Erik Petschelis (São Paulo, Brazil) described the dominance of racist theories around the turn of the century, which were influenced not least by the ideas of Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) and also corresponded to economic interests in Brazil. Some early representatives of a newly established ethnology, such as Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924) and Karl von den Steinen (1855-1929), opposed the disenfranchisement of the indigenous population, who were degraded to objects of “racial analysis” and subjected to physical violence. When the Czech explorer and natural scientist Alberto Frič (1882-1944) drew attention to the atrocities committed against the Brazilian population at the American Studies Congress in Vienna in 1908 and called for protests, he was accused of politicisation; the congress was to be devoted exclusively to academic topics.

Vida Savoniakaitė (Vilnius, Lithuania) spoke about academic connections within Europe and their meanings using the example of the statistical and ethnographic approach of the Lithuanian ethnographer and physicist Ignas Končius (1886-1975). The latter was significantly influenced by Eduards Volters (1856-1941), an expert on Baltic languages and cultures who had also studied in Leipzig, among other places, and in many respects followed the ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). Končius and Volters began a joint study of crosses and chapels in Samogitia in 1912. It was not least on the basis of this research that Končius finally described the “soul of the country”. Appointed governor of Vilnius University in 1939 and chairman of the Council for Mutual Aid, Končius was arrested by the Bolsheviks

in 1941, narrowly escaped death and finally managed to flee to the USA via Germany in 1944.

Gabriele Habinger (Vienna, Austria) discussed the situation of female students since the opening of the University of Vienna to women at the end of the 19th century and in particular the appraisal of their dissertations in ethnology under the title “Eine Arbeit von 'echt weiblichem Gepräge' - Weiblichkeitsklischees in Dissertationsgutachten am Wiener Institut für Völkerkunde” [A Work of 'Genuinely Female Character' - Femininity Clichés in Dissertation appraisals at the Vienna Institute of Ethnology”]. Using concrete examples, she explored the question of which criteria formed the basis for the assessment of doctoral theses and to what extent the female doctoral candidates were supported by the respective professors or hindered in their further academic path.

Katja Geisenhainer (Vienna, Austria/Frankfurt, Germany) traced the life, academic career, and political commitment of Otto Mänchen-Helfen (1894-1969) as well as his emigration from National Socialist Germany in 1933 and from Vienna to the USA in 1938. The focus was also on Mänchen-Helfen's cultural-historical positioning within ethnology and his statements against the cultural mission argument, which was repeatedly used even in left-wing political circles in the context of the colonial question at the beginning of the 20th century. The lecture concluded with an insight into the network that some well-known people had formed for mutual support during the Nazi period and in which Mänchen-Helfen was also involved.

Early ethnography in the GDR and its programme was the topic of the lecture by Ingrid Kreide-Damani (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid, Germany). The focus was on Heinz Kothe (1914-1985), who has rarely been mentioned in the history of the discipline. He received his doctorate in Göttingen in 1947 and, as a member of the KPD, moved to East Berlin in 1948. Initially admitted to Humboldt University under the protection of the Finno-Ugrist and folklorist Wolfgang Steinitz (1905-1967), Kothe and Steinitz fell out when it came to working out a concept of ethnography that would combine ethnology and folklore and within which Kothe advocated an interdisciplinary approach. Several reasons eventually led to Kothe's expulsion from the Section for Ethnology and German Folklore in 1957.

The last of the thematically chronologically ordered contributions was the autobiographical lecture by Volker Harms (Tübingen, Germany) with the meaningful title "Nun passen Sie sich endlich an!" Wissenschaft als Beruf in der deutschen Ethnologie der 70er Jahren des vorigen Jahrhunderts" [„Now you must finally adapt!" Science as a profession in the German

ethnology of the 1970s”]. Volker Harms was repeatedly referred to his active participation as a young assistant at the DGV (today DGSKA) conference in 1969 by different professors – Ulrich Braukämper (1944-2018) wrote in this context of the "trauma of a generation of ethnologists" – still years later in a negative sense. Parallel to these events, the DFG (German Research Foundation) rejected his application for a habilitation grant for an interdisciplinary project on the basis of negative reviews from ethnology, regardless of the positive reviews from the other two participating subjects and although part of the funding for the proposed project had already been approved by a foundation close to the educational sciences. These accounts show how unwelcome left-wing political involvement in the 1970s in West-Germany could affect one's professional career and how arbitrary decisions were sometimes made on applications beyond academic criteria.

After each presentation and especially at the end of the conference, there was enough time for questions and inspiring discussions. Every one of the very different contributions provided one of numerous examples of the impact of socio-political and academic power structures on the shaping of an academic discipline and on publicly conducted discourses in general, as well as on the individual careers of individual representatives of ethnology/culture anthropology in particular.