Decolonial Feminisms Seminar Series, Stockholm University

Research Methods and Relationships in Challenging Times
December 8, 14:00–17:00, Strix, Gula villan

Abstracts:

Maria Darvish
Visiting Scholar, Department of Ethnology, History f Religions and Gender Studies
The afterlife of researching the far right: Backlash, positionality, and well-being

This contribution reflects on my experience researching gender, far-right extremism, and nature over the past ten years, first as a master's student and later as a PhD student. Following the defense of my dissertation, I received far-right backlash and racist responses connected to the public communication of my research. While this was not unexpected, I found it more unsettling than I had hoped.
I want to reflect on what it means to spend years trying to understand fascist and far-right ideas and movements. Over time, I feel this has shaped how I read my own work and even myself. In some ways, I have become so preoccupied with understanding these actors that I have started to see my research through their eyes. This has raised questions for me about positionality, researcher well-being, and the longer-term effects of studying harmful ideologies. I would like us to think together about these – and similar – experiences and their (methodological) implications.

Fataneh Farahani
Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies
Navigating the Epistemic Minefield: Resisting the Single Story

Ethnography in politically challenging times requires attention not only to competing accounts, but also to the conditions that make some forms of knowledge speakable, credible, or visible. I describe these conditions as an *epistemic minefield*: a shifting terrain shaped by colonial legacies, sociopolitical conflict, and unequal demands about who may speak and under what conditions. Working within it means holding contradictory narratives in view without collapsing their complexity into a single story (Adichie, 2009).

My doctoral and postdoctoral research on the construction of heterosexual femininities and masculinities in the Iranian diaspora brought these tensions into focus. Islamophobic and Orientalist accounts often cast Iranian women as passive victims and Iranian men as inherently violent. Yet responses that challenged these representations could, in turn, obscure patriarchal relations. The Woman, Life, Freedom uprising (2022) made women's histories of resistance newly visible, while also revealing the limits of dominant media and academic narratives. Diverse political struggles and everyday practices were often compressed into familiar figures of victimhood or heroization, detached from the histories that made them possible. The 2026 US–Israeli military confrontation with Iran further sharpened divisions within the diaspora over liberation, intervention, solidarity, and political responsibility.
My research on the entanglement of hospitality and hostility during Europe's so-called refugee crisis extended these questions to the institutional conditions of ethnographic work. The

categories used to govern and represent refugees also shaped how their experiences could be researched and what counted as legitimate knowledge.

Together, these projects inform an ethnographic practice that does not seek a unified voice or premature consensus. Instead, it attends to the temporal, affective, and unpredictable dimensions of knowledge production, while remaining accountable to the conditions in which research takes place. I ask how ethnography can sustain complexity and disagreement without pretending to stand outside the epistemic minefields it seeks to navigate.

Fariba Majlesi
Department of Education, Stockholm University
Method After Encounter: What Research Cannot Settle in Advance

Research amid displacement and political violence often proceeds with commitments to listening, recognition, and care. But what if these commitments themselves participate in the relations of power through which lives become knowable and available to research?

My dissertation, *Living Encounters, Writing Encounters: Cartographies of Listening in Migration*, emerged from conversations with women whose lives were shaped by migration and institutional uncertainty. The women entered the inquiry with their own political knowledge and interpretations of the conditions they inhabited. Yet insecurity, changing permissions, and risks of exposure continued to shape what could be spoken, translated, and written. One woman asked, “Tell my life as if you write poetry.” Elsewhere, a sister described a loved one's presence in the writing as “a part of it, and not a part of it.” These expressions placed different demands on representation, withholding, and the very possibility of writing. They also unsettled the assumption that what enters a research encounter necessarily becomes available as evidence.

I approach these tensions through *method after encounter*. Method remained necessary, but its procedures could not determine in advance what the encounters would demand. Nor could commitments to care, recognition, or justice guarantee that research would not reproduce unequal relations of knowledge and power.

Rather than proposing another methodological framework, I bring an unresolved question: what becomes of politically committed research when encounters transform its ways of listening, knowing, and writing, without securing its ethical innocence?

Anna Nyström
Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies
When the political context changes the reading: Butler, nonviolence, and paranoid splitting

My reflection concerns methodological considerations as a PhD student. I began my project on Judith Butler’s theory of the self and its ethical implications in 2021 in Philosophy and in February 2023 in Gender Studies. By 2023, the Tidö government had formed, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine had begun a year earlier. During the same period, Sweden applied for NATO membership, and Sweden's criminal policy decided to increase the inmate population by about 300% over ten years. Around me was a discourse that emphasized security and a

collective longing for safety, expressed through militarization, violent retribution, policing, and harsher punishment. This was not the Sweden I thought I knew. However, this shift in discourse also changed how I read Butler. I turned my research project into an investigation of Butler's ethics of nonviolence in relation to Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory. In Butler's reinterpretation of Klein, Butler sought to understand the human subject's problem with destructiveness and what could turn the risk of violence into nonviolent cohabitation. In Butler's use of Klein to discuss the logics of war and violence, I found descriptions of certain psycho-affective conditions in which "enemies" are cast as all bad to justify violence against them, while others worthy of protection are idealized as all good. These resonated with the discourse around me. However, since I could not investigate the current empirical context in Sweden in my thesis, I chose to frame it with a foreword describing the contextual motivation for my study.

Fanny Pérez Aronsson
Department of Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University
Researching young children's experiences of racism: an exploration of sticky emotions in children's refusal to participate in research

How can we understand children's refusal to participate in research? Based on field notes and personal reflections from a failed ethnographic fieldwork, I reflect on how the very focus of the research project, children's experience of racism, along with the researcher's role as an outsider imposing on children in their own spaces, wanting something from them, contributed to the intended fieldwork failing to fully launch and eventually being interrupted and reimagined. Further, I wish to explore how the researcher's perceived position as an outsider in a variety of ways (researcher, non-local, adult, white) may have reinforced these tensions, and how this experience contrasted starkly with my previous work involving young people, racism and anti-racist activism.

Drawing on previous scholarly work on methodological and ethical challenges in ethnographic work and research involving children, I explore the stickiness of emotions involved in the research project, both for myself and, more speculatively, the children (not) participating. My intention is to eventually publish a paper on how we can understand children's refusal to participate in research which adults may have labelled as "important" to children's lives, and how such a refusal can inform our methodologies going forward.

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