



Wednesday Seminars

SOMMERSEMESTER 2019

Helena Wulff

Ambiguous Arrival: Emotions, Emplacement and the Migrant Encounter with Sweden

DO, 13.06.2019, 17.00, ÜR, IKSA, NIG, Universitätsstraße 7, 1010 Wien, 4. Stock



Helena Wulff is Professor of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University. Her research interests are in expressive cultural form based on a wide range of studies

of the social worlds of literary production, dance and visual culture.

She is currently engaged in a research project on "Migrant Writing in Sweden: Diversifying from Within" which is funded by Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences 2016-2021 as a part of the multi-disciplinary research programme

"Cosmopolitan and Vernacular Dynamics in World Literatures." Among her publications are the monographs "Ballet across Borders: Career and Culture in the World of Dancers" (1998), "Dancing at the Crossroads: Memory and Mobility in Ireland" (2007), "Rhythms of Writing: An Anthropology of Irish Literature" (2017), and the edited volumes "The Emotions: A Cultural Reader" (2007), and "The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century" (2016).

Sweden used to be a country where an ethnically inclusive policy was a matter of national pride. This stance ended abruptly in 2015 when 160 000 refugees came in, mostly from war-torn Syria and North-Africa. The border to Denmark was closed, and a scrupulous customs control made entry into Sweden difficult. In my ongoing literary anthropological study of migrant writings in Sweden, I explore fiction and journalism about experiences of exclusion by writers who have moved to Sweden as children or young adults, or were born there. In this talk, I compare three autobiographical arrival stories to Sweden along a time axis in terms of emotions and emplacement. Importantly, these three textual accounts represent different migration streams to Sweden over time, from the 1960s labour recruitment scheme to the war refugees in the 1990s and the 21st century. Still, the stories reveal the same imaginary about Sweden as a country of safety and hope. Key in the stories is the ambiguous nature of arrival: a combination of strong contradictory emotions of relief and fright.