

Invited, special international guest lecture

Thursday, 23rd March
BGB-302, 15:00 – 17:00

Anthropology Meets Criminology: Policing as Practice of Categorization

Guest speaker: Thomas Bierschenk, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz (Germany)



This talk will present selected results from research on how police officers and migrants, in a German context, translate between different languages and, further, between different normative ideas in these everyday interactions. By the act of translation, actors verbalize, negotiate, validate, and question such ideas and beliefs. While actors and media often understand ‘culture’ in these interactions as a pre-existing framework that determines or shapes interactional outcomes, the project asks how cultural difference in everyday police work is repeatedly produced, but also sometimes dissolved. Cultural difference is thus not examined as a determining factor of interaction, but as a possible, dynamic result of these interactions, alternatively to other categories of differentiation like gender and class. The focus is on innovative methodological approaches we used – role play, video recordings and team ethnography. The presentation will also briefly refer to the conflicts around a urban hot-spot which during summer 2021 was heavily frequented by young people, provoking neighbours to frequently call the police. It will end by pointing to a recent book publication ([Policing race, ethnicity and culture. Perspectives across Europe](#), MUP 2023) which deals with these issues in more depth and breath.

Thomas Bierschenk is professor emeritus at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at the Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. He has widely published on development, the state and bureaucracy in French-Speaking West Africa, and more recently on bureaucracy and policing in Germany. His many publications include, most prominently, the co-edited book [States at Work. Dynamics of African Bureaucracies](#) (2014) and the co-authored article [How to study bureaucracies ethnographically](#) (2019; see also [video presentation](#)). The co-edited book [Policing Race, Ethnicity and Culture. Ethnographic Perspectives across Europe](#) (Manchester University Press 2023) is just off the press.

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