

**WS 03**  
**Doing good/doing right and the limits of negotiation:**  
**Perspectives from anthropologies of ethics and morality**

*02.10.2019, 9:30-11:00 Uhr, Raum D434*

Organisiert von / organized by:

**Katja Rieck** (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt/Main)

As David Graeber once pointed out, when poststructuralism took hold in the social sciences and humanities totalities like “society”, “symbolic order” or “culture” were shattered (Graeber 2001: 26). Thus, the plurality and malleability of social life – seen as a fragmented plurality of fields, discourses or language games – became the central focus of analysis, and came to be analyzed as a matter of tactics or strategy, a physics of social forces to be leveraged through negotiation. But where does this enormous emphasis on negotiability leave those aspects of social reality that actors insist to be non-negotiable: idealism, altruism, care, conviction, righteousness? Recently anthropologists have turned to the study of “the good” precisely to correct what is perceived as the lopsided perspective on the negotiability of social life that resulted from the poststructuralist turn.

This workshop invites empirical and theoretical contributions focusing on the moments of non-negotiability in “doing good” or “doing right”. It will focus on cases in which actors pursue what they see as a desirable endeavor: charitable or humanitarian works, artistic realization, environmental preservation, the pursuit of justice, cosmic perfection or religious community, etc. Among the questions that may be addressed are: How/why does a good become non-negotiable? Does this have to do with conceptions of subjecthood? Does non-negotiability entail the reification of power relations or structures, or is it an attempt to make them irrelevant? How do actors achieve foreclosure of negotiation, and how does this affect their endeavor? What light does this shed on conditions of agency? What perspectives on social life are opened up by examining the moments of non-negotiability in actors’ pursuits of a better world? And, how do we attend to the totalitarian moments of non-negotiable ethical action, especially in contexts of conflicting understandings of the good or right?

Vortragende / Speakers:

**Philipp Zehmisch** (Lahore University of Management Sciences)

**Negotiating limits – the ethics of ‘doing good’ among Pakistani progressives**

Progressives perceive the social and political situation in Pakistan as “oppressive” and morally “corrupted”, if not “evil” and “perverted”. They hold the establishment – a nexus of bureaucratic, military, corporate, religious and extra-legal actors – responsible: ranging from brain and wealth drain to the sell-out of infrastructures, from rampant poverty, social inequality, defunct public services to routine violence, from gender, racial, and caste discrimination to religious bigotry and chauvinism.

How do progressive respond and resist to this assemblage of fascist, authoritarian, and neoliberal forces? What are their conceptions of the good and in which ways are they attempting to initiate social and political change? On which ethical prerogatives and ideologies is their activism grounded? And why do activists reach their personal, material or psychological limits of engagement?

The presentation seeks to critically investigate the ethical foundations of progressive resistance by highlighting visions of pragmatic change and utopias aiming to “do good” among civil society actors, from leftists to liberals, artists to academics, and ethnic nationalists to “anti-nationals”.

**Larissa Denk** (Universität Hamburg)

**Doing good and how to (not) talk about it – Jewish South African presentations of giving**

In post-apartheid South Africa, attempts of changing society to the better and also failing at this task are ever so present. In contrast to other Jewish diaspora communities South African Jews belong to the previously advantaged. During apartheid, their privileges were based on their categorisation as ‘white’. In the realignment of power relations, they are now required to make amends and contribute to the upliftment of the previously disadvantaged. This requirement coincides with a variety of Jewish concepts, like tikkun olam (Hebrew for “repair of the world”), obliging its members to do good, to give and support others, also outside of the Jewish community. Giving however risks defacement when not done voluntary or without expecting a return and at the same time needs to be seen and recognised. Jewish South Africans therefore have to find a way to give and present their activities without devaluating their doing good as mere acts of obligation or requirement to belong to either the Jewish collective, or the new South Africa. This paper depicts how Jewish individuals attempt to present themselves as following an inner authority to do good.

**Paul Reade** (University of Bern)

**The end of negotiations and the beginning of everyday ethics**

This paper looks at everyday ethics in a tourist town in Mexico. The town has avoided the worst excesses of mass tourism, and environmental and socially responsible travel are emphasised by both local and foreign actors. However, the inequality between locals and visitors is stark, and conspicuous ethical behaviour at times appears as a luxury reserved for those who can afford it. Poverty and violence point to a fundamental injustice between the plight of the two parties in which the question of “the good” verges on the farcical. In light of such injustice doing good becomes problematic, especially when doing good has quickly become commodified and packaged into the tourist experience. Around this and sometimes in spite of it, locals carry on their own everyday ethics. I look at the case of the now illegal turtle eggs, the tourist promotion surrounding their protection, and the power these eggs give to local people who continue to consume them. The law, as well as the refusal to obey it, illustrates the point at which negotiation ends and everyday ethics kick in. By accident or not, it becomes a largely hidden and silent battle over power in which freedoms are acted out and subjectivities reinforced.

**Scott MacLochlainn** (MPI Göttingen)

**Death. Die. Kill: ethics of complicity and the problem of being a “good Christian” in the Philippines**

Situated amidst the ongoing state-sponsored extrajudicial killings and violence in the Philippines, heightened media attention to the legality and ethics of death, and the shifting legal and state norms of governance, this paper discusses what being a “good Christian” entails when Philippine discourses on morality and ethics inevitably circle in on the continuous number of people killed through state-supported extrajudicial violence. As Christians in the Philippines are discursively forced into being either “for” and “against” the extrajudicial killings that are at the forefront of

the Philippine government's stated "war on drugs," I describe how Christian communities currently navigate such lines of ethical division. I argue that the concepts of "affiliation" and "collaboration" are useful in understanding the discordant nature of religious and political death ethics amidst such times of uncertainty and violence. Ultimately I argue that there exists a slippage between individual and communal ethical stances—thus highlighting how an ethics of death in the Philippines emerges as a project of alignment and disalignment with particular types of subjectivity.

***Christos Panagiotopoulos*** (Cornell University)

**An ultimate good, for the ultimate evil: rehabilitating juvenile delinquency in France**

Since the mid-20th century the French Juvenile Judicial Services are devising alternative modes to rehabilitate juvenile delinquency beyond incarceration. The goal is to avoid the long-term adverse effects imprisonment has on youth, including the psychological traumas adolescents develop through abuse or solitary confinement, and instead establish alternative rehabilitative methods that help adolescents break the vicious cycle of recidivism, and become reintegrated. The reintegration of the most difficult cases of juvenile delinquency – oftentimes adolescents flirting with radicalization, extreme forms of violence, or psychopathic and antisocial traits – is conceived by state actors, juvenile associations and professionals as an ultimate value. My ethnographic immersion in an experimental rehabilitative mobile service in Paris, France, seeks to document and unpack the moral entanglements.