

Centre for Culture, Media & Governance

Jamia Millia Islamia

New Delhi



Time and Space in Media Ethnography

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Abstract

Qualitative and/or ethnographic approaches are increasingly incorporated into research of various disciplines, such as media and cultural studies, political science, sociology, economic and technology studies. The falling back on these methods tells something about a growing consciousness regarding the limits of quantitative methods and their failure to give adequate insights into the intricacies and contradictions of the investigated subject and the stories it holds – which are essentially human and individual stories. On the other hand, this incorporation of ethnographic approaches has provoked some unease, if not resistance, within the discipline of anthropology, which considers itself to hold the key to 'real' ethnography (that 'untrained' anthropologists are unable to conduct). Anthropology itself, however, has to date only rather reluctantly engaged its prime, and basically only, method for the exploration of various pressing contemporary areas of research, amongst them chiefly: the media.

In this talk, I will unfold an overview over aspects and problems of media ethnography along two of its key components: time (i.e. the inherent momentariness and historicity of its practice) and space (i.e. the limitations and constructed-ness of its field). Based on examples from my ethnographic fieldwork on television production in India and Turkey over the past two decades, I will link practical questions regarding the organisation and conduct of media ethnography with reflections on their significance and impact on its results. I argue that media ethnography, even more than conventional ethnography, has to flexibly deal with the unforeseeable, the momentary, and the ephemeral that media themselves represent and that it has to give away the idea of being able to control its field of research. On the other hand, to take the speed of media change, and the omnipresence of media, as a gospel breeds the tendency of immunising us against noticing absences and continuities and therewith other dimensions of time, such as felt time and the relationship of time with truth.

About the Speaker

Britta Ohm is Associate Researcher at the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern, Switzerland. She has been conducting fieldwork in the media landscapes of India, and successively of Turkey, since the 1990s and also worked in film and German television. She holds a Diploma (M.A.) in Political Science from Free University, Berlin and a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the European University Frankfurt/Oder. She currently finishes a monograph: *The Undisputed Land: the Gujarat Pogrom and Medialised Democracy in India* (WT).

Event Details

Venue: CCMG Network Governance Lab

Date: Thursday, 26 February, 2015

Time: 11:30-13:00 pm