

## DeZIM-Workshop Series 2023

# Decolonizing Mental Health. On a Reflexive Understanding of Health and Suffering in Transcultural Research Contexts

Organizing Team: Laura Hertner, Nora Kühnert, Simon Ruhnke (BIM), Judith Altrogge (IMIS), Julia Stier (WZB)

**Key-Note Lecture & Discussion with Prof. Dr. Ana Antic and Dr. Lamia Moghnieh  
(Thursday, September 7, 6-8pm; open to the public)**

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**Workshop with Prof. Dr. Ana Antic, Dr. Lamia Moghnieh and others  
(Friday, September 8, 9am-4pm; application needed)**

**(1) Key-Note Lecture & Discussion with Prof. Dr. Ana Antic and Dr. Lamia Moghnieh**

*Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Unter den Linden 6, Room 2094, September 7 2023, 6-8pm*

At least since the Covid 19 pandemic, global health has been a strand of discourse and research that has gained increasing attention. With the discourse primarily focusing on infectious and other somatic diseases, aspects of Global Mental Health often take a back seat, and the relevant health concepts have limited universal applicability. Yet, such universal applicability is too often mistakenly assumed e.g., by researchers, to compare psychological suffering transnationally, to quantify the extent of psychological distress caused by migration or to examine its influence on migration aspirations. Therefore, a reflexive understanding of health and illness is imperative in addressing experiences of mental suffering in transnational and/or migration research contexts. The thematic focus and goal of this event at the Humboldt University will be exploring the pitfalls, tracing the challenges and deriving solutions on how to overcome them in future research.

Prof. Dr. Ana Antic, Professor of European History and Medical Humanities at the University of Copenhagen, will argue in her key-note that even research that explicitly questions the hierarchical and racist implications of contemporary, Western-influenced psychiatry can run the risk of essentializing cultural differences, environmental determinants and concepts of mental health and illness, and thus understanding them in a reductive and evolutionary manner. This has fundamentally affected perceptions and discourses about migration, and the relationship between migration and pathology. She will rely on lesser-known historical concepts and psychiatric practices from the Global South and Eastern Europe to show how such essentializing reductionism can be challenged and overcome. Together with Ana Antic, we will ask: To what extent are mental health conditions universally and globally identifiable?

The second keynote by ethnographer Dr. Lamia Moghnieh will bridge the gap between theoretical considerations and (ethnographic) research practice and answer some of the questions raised by Ana Antic using Lebanon as an example. Lamia Moghnieh is a psychologist, social worker and anthropologist at the University of Copenhagen. In her dissertation she examined the puzzle of humanitarian psychiatry regarding the difficulty in detecting trauma of Lebanese communities after the July War in 2006, the invisibility of experiences of suffering, and the strong, national narrative of *sumud*, a kind of collective

resistance, not only in terms of psychological resilience, that took on various nationalistic, political and economic claims and meanings. With her research on the transformation of the narrative of mental suffering through the competition for recognition with other communities' experiences of violence such as the Syrian refugees, she makes clear why social and historical contextualization is particularly relevant in research on global mental health.

After the keynotes we invite the audience to discuss with the speakers and each other about the challenges outlined and solutions suggested.

Moderation will be hosted by Prof. Dr. Ulrike Kluge. The event will take place in English.

**Event format:** English language - open to the public - event of the two-part Workshop Series "Decolonizing Mental Health. On a Reflexive Understanding of Health and Suffering in Transcultural Research Contexts."



**Ana Antic** is a professor of European History and Medical Humanities at the University of Copenhagen. She is a social and cultural historian of psychiatry and 'psy' disciplines, with an interest in the history of war and violence, decolonisation and the Cold War, as well as the relationship between Europe and the broader world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She is the author of *Therapeutic Fascism: Experiencing the violence of the Nazi New Order* (2017) and *Non-Aligned Psychiatry in the Cold War* (2022). She is currently leading an

ERC project on the history of transcultural psychiatry in the context of decolonisation, *Decolonising Madness*, and is the head of the interdisciplinary Centre for Culture and the Mind.

**Lamia Moghnieh** is a medical anthropologist and a mental health practitioner. Her research broadly looks at the interplay and impact of psychiatry on social understandings of self and illness in postcolonial and post-conflict societies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)/South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA). She holds an MA in Social Science from the University of Chicago, an MA in Psychology from the American University of Beirut and received her PhD from the University of Michigan. Recently she is affiliated with the University of Copenhagen.

