

Czech Association for Social Anthropology
and Charles University Anthropological Colloquium
are pleased to invite you to

224th GELLNER SEMINAR

Thursday 3 March 2026 at 5:30 p.m.
Seminary room 247, Faculty of Arts building
Celetná 20, Prague 1

Vinicius Ferreira

Rio de Janeiro State University

Radical Alterity and Epistemic Confinement: Authority and Difference in Anthropology



This lecture revisits debates on alterity and scholarly subjectivation in light of contemporary configurations of knowledge production in social sciences. Bringing together long-term ethnographic research on Indian social scientists working in European academic institutions and collaborative research on the politics of epistemic location, the talk examines how theoretical authority is differentially distributed within the discipline when it comes to international division of intellectual labour.

Drawing on ethnographic work and interviews with Indian and Brazilian researchers based in European universities, I show how inclusion of Global South scholars in international academic spaces often entails specific expectations regarding objects of study, scales of analysis, and modes of theoretical articulation. Scholars “from the South” are frequently recognized for their empirical familiarity, positional specificity, or representational value, while their capacity to move theoretically is more tightly constrained.

The lecture argues that these dynamics are reinforced, rather than dismantled, by certain strands of contemporary decolonial discourse. While decolonial studies have been crucial in exposing epistemic hierarchies and colonial legacies within anthropology, their institutionalized uptake has at times contributed to the re-essentialization of epistemic positions. In this context, alterity risks becoming an expected performance or an asset rather than a space for critical positionalities.

The lecture proposes the concept of epistemic confinement to describe the ordinary mechanisms through which anthropology manages difference while limiting theoretical mobility.

Vinicius Ferreira is an Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ) and an Associate Researcher at the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Politique de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. He is the co-editor of *Vibrant* (Virtual Brazilian Anthropology), a journal of the Brazilian Anthropological Association. He currently serves as the Co-Chair of the IUAES Commission on Migration and Coordinator of the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS). His research interests include academic circulations, history of anthropology, and political anthropology of knowledge.



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