

**Prof. Dr. Helen Verran**

Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, Australia

Guest at the RTG Research Training Group „Contradiction Studies“

Thursday, May 25th, 2023

## **I. Workshop: How to participate with care. Multiple epistemic positions in experimental ethnography**

### **Registrations**

please by midnight on Tuesday, 5/23, to [knecht@uni-bremen.de](mailto:knecht@uni-bremen.de)

### **Where:**

GRK Contradiction Studies, Grazer Strasse 2, Conference Room & online:

<https://uni-bremen.zoom.us/j/99132601507?pwd=U0VCbndsZ0hTZ2NUcDJMK1o5OEN2dz09>

Meeting-ID: 991 3260 1507, Kenncode: 788536

### **When:**

Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2023, 10:45 to 13:15

13.30-14.45: Dinner at Mensa U Bremen

The "Ethnography-Now" group in the Research Training Group "Contradiction Studies" cordially invites you to a workshop with Helen Verran on ethnographic responsibility and ethnographic storytelling. Verran uses the term Relational Empiricism to refer to situated, empirical-ethnographic forms of inquiry that allow for a specific attention not only "to the other" (the "classical" anthropological conception) but an attention also to the relations that constitute the objects of inquiry themselves- and this attention also includes the practices of the researchers. Martha Kenney, who published one of the first explanatory texts on the work of Helen Verran, summarizes this "practice that goes beyond reflexivity as reporting on the conditions of knowledge production" in the difficult-to-translate term "accountability" - the accountability or recognition of responsibility. This accountability includes taking objects apart, de-naturalizing them, narrating relations of knowledge production, and producing shared stories - moving from participant observer to participant storyteller. Using Helen's and our field notes as examples, we discuss the questions of how other ontologies can be described, how ethnography functions in places where ethical concerns arise, and what it means to understand ethnography as "methods-semblage."

### **What to read for preparation:**

Verran, Helen (2021). "Writing an Ethnographic Story in Working Toward Responsibility Unearthing Ontological Troubles", in *Experimenting with Ethnography: A Companion to Analysis*, Andrea Ballestero and Brit Ross Winthereik (Hg.), Durham, Duke University Press, 235-245.  
<https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/51886>

Brattland, Camilla, Kramvig Britt, and Verran, Helen (2018). "Doing Indigenous Methodologies: Toward a Practice of the 'Careful Partial Participant'", in: *Journal of Indigenous Studies and First*

*Nations and First Peoples' Cultures*, Bd. 2(1), 74-96.

<https://researchers.cdu.edu.au/en/publications/doing-indigenous-methodologies-toward-a-practice-of-the-careful-p>

## II. Presentation in the RTG-Contradiction Studies Colloquium

### Where:

Building GW1, Room A0150 & online:

<https://uni-bremen.zoom.us/j/99132601507?pwd=U0VCbndsZ0hTZ2NUcDJMK1o5OEN2dz09>

Meeting-ID: 991 3260 1507, Kenncode: 788536

### When:

Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2023, 18.00 to 19.30 (no registration necessary)

### What:

**Helen Verran: Contradiction as Epistemic Affect. Using the logical operator of paradox in articulating epistemic decolonising"**

In this presentation the verb *dicto* which lies at the core of 'contradiction', is taken literally as an expression of situated human embodiment. The effect of this analytic move works in two directions. It renders collective acts of word using as a form of expressive ontologising. Second, it affords contradiction as experiential, as a matter of epistemic affect. In this talk I develop this framing to demonstrate how the experience of contradiction might be deployed in imagining epistemic decolonising"



### CV

Helen Verran is an Australian historian, empirical philosopher of science and ethnographer, primarily working in the Social Studies of Science and Technology (STS). She taught history and philosophy of science at University of Melbourne / Australia for nearly twenty-five years. Since 2012 she has been research professor at Charles Darwin University. Her research focuses on epistemic practices in diverse situations where scientific traditions work 'in the wild'. Verran's book, *Science and an African Logic* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), received the Ludwik Fleck Prize in 2003. It analyses counting, and its relation to the ontology of numbers based on her field observations as a mathematics lecturer and teacher in Nigeria. The book draws on her realisation of the radically different nature of Yoruba counting, and discusses how this realisation grounded her post-relativist theorising. Verran continues to nuance analytics of numbers and numbering as social and material practice (e.g. in the 2018 special issue *After Numbers? Innovations in Science and*

*Technology Studies' Analytics of Numbers and Numbering*). She contributed to actor-network theory and is credited for contributing postcolonial studies perspectives to nuancing STS. Her work is also seen as part of ANT's ontological turn.

Helen Verran has worked in the Northern Territory / Arnhem Land on and off since 1987. Most of her work has been with Indigenous organisations. She has investigated the use of digital technologies, environmental management, and the provision of education in remote Indigenous settlements. In the last years, she has contributed to the discussions of post/colonial museum practices, epistemologies and ontologies.

### Recent / selected publications

Verran, Helen (2021). "Trafficking Vague Cosmological Boundaries: Towards Knowing Experiential Relationality in Museum Epistemics", in *Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*, Bd. 15 (2), 149-164.  
<https://doi.org/10.14361/zfk-2021-150212>.

Verran, Helen (2021). "Screens and Ontological Work: Four Projects of Yolngu Aboriginal Australian Meaning-Making Mobilising ICT Machines", in: Jan Büssers, Anja Faulhaber, Myriam Raboldt, Rebecca Wiesner (Hg.): *Gendered Configurations of Humans and Machines*. Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Barbara Budrich, 205-229.

Verran, Helen (2020). "Narrating a Number and Staying with the Trouble of Value", in: *Data Journalism Handbook*, Jonathan Gray, Liliana Bounegru (Hg.), Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 56-69.

Verran, Helen (2018). "Politics of Working Cosmologies Together While Keeping Them Separate", in *A World of Many Worlds*, Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (eds). Duke University Press.

Verran, Helen (2017). "Ein postkoloniales Moment in der Wissenschaftsforschung: Zwei alternative Feuerregimes von Umweltwissenschaftler\_innen und aboriginalen Landbesitzer\_innen", in: *Science and Technology Studies. Klassische Positionen und aktuelle Perspektiven* (trans. Katharina Schramm), Susanne Bauer, Torsten Heinemann, und Thomas Lemke (Hg.). Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin, 495-550.

Verran, Helen (2001): *Science and an African Logic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### Literature about Helen Verran:

Kenney, Martha (2015). „Counting, Accounting and Accountability. Helen Verran's Relational Empiricism. Discussion Paper“, in: *Social Studies of Science* 45 (5), 749-771.

Raasch, Josefine / Estrid Soerensen (2014). „Helen Verran: Pionierin der Postkolonialen Science and Technology Studies“, in Diana Lengersdorf / Matthias Wieser (Hg.): *Schlüsselwerke der Science and Technology Studies*. Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag VS, 257-267.

Schramm, Katharina (2017). „Einführung: Postkoloniale STS“, in Susanne Bauer, Torsten Heinemann, Thomas Lemke (Hg.): *Science and Technology Studies. Klassische Positionen und aktuelle Perspektiven*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp: 471-494