

## **TROUBLING INTIMATE OTHERS AND THE GOOD (old) LIFE**

### **PANEL ABSTRACT (Discussant Joel Robbins)**

In this panel we explore how relationships with intimate others might change with old age and what roles family, friendship and care relations play in old peoples' search for good lives for themselves and their significant others. Who are the intimate others in old age – kin, friend, stranger, hired help, pets, toy animals or the state or NGO other? These questions as well as a deepening conversation between philosophy and anthropology are the points of departure for this double panel.

What emerges from the papers are troubling intimate others and searches for the good. Firstly, the papers highlight the considerable ambiguity of intimate relations whether kin or not. Secondly, the papers trouble common sense notions of intimacy and explore how intimacy emerges along diverse registers of closeness and distance: geographical, emotional, temporal, biological or other kinds. Thirdly, the papers trouble notions of self and other – how do we distinguish self and other in situations where it is hard to know where one person ends and another begins.

Finally, the papers address the trouble of searching for the good in situations of suffering – both for our interlocutors and as researchers. Recently Joel Robbins and Sherry Ortner have suggested distinctions between 'suffering slot' anthropology, dark anthropology and anthropologies of the good thus highlighting the question of whether anthropology ought to concentrate mainly on the dark disparities and injustices that people suffer - or the ways in which they seek out, experiment with or cultivate the good. In this panel, we seek to overcome the possible dichotomization that can arise from these demarcations by asking what the good life in old age might amount to, when people age in situations of radical uncertainty or insecurity of diverse kinds. This seems especially pertinent in a field where notions of successful, healthy and active aging have had considerable impact on care policies, discourses and imaginaries. We thus explore what the good old life might amount to among Ik elders in Uganda, institutionalized elderly in Denmark, black grandmothers in Los Angeles, German nursing home residents who carry with them memories of the Second World War, and among exile Tibetan elderly left behind by their migrating children. By bringing the voices of our interlocutors in conversation with philosophy we hope to present the good old life in the presence of intimate others as 'not yet settled', as an ongoing striving in the face of - and beyond - death.