

About the MEGA seminar “TIME TO CHOOSE!” 12-14 August 2019

We all make choices every day. They range from the habitual and often unreflected actions of daily life, like what to eat or wear, to life-changing decisions such as keeping a baby or migrating across borders. People argue, dispute and mobilize; politicians deliberate and bargain, leaders are elected, resources allocated and futures shaped. Through choices, plans are made, the future is envisioned and uncertainty is managed; individuals, families, communities and indeed nations are constantly confronted with what might be. As anthropologists, we too make decisions about how to conduct ourselves and represent our field. These ideas bear deep political and ethical implications. How do we treat the fact that our choices in the field and beyond may impact the lives and futures for those we work with? What are our responsibilities as anthropologists and what are the effects of our decisions?

In spite of its clear pragmatic omnipresence in social life and in our work, choice and decision-making constitute a surprisingly underexplored theme in anthropology. This seminar is therefore an invitation to develop anthropological approaches to choice and decision-making that move beyond classic debates around structure versus agency, economic theories and psychology, and explore the structural, phenomenological and epistemological aspects of choice that shape social life: the range of options an individual faces in moments of making a choice, the social and cosmological elements involved in the process, how choice is conceived and regarded, and what it does - to a person and to her world.

We, the seminar organisers, are excited to announce that Paige West, Unni Wikan and Faye Ginsburg will be giving keynotes on their own work on choice!