

# INEVITABLE ENDS

## MEDITATIONS ON IMPERMANENCE

the final conference of 'Precious Relics: Materiality and Value in the  
Practice of Ethnographic Collection'

May 2<sup>nd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup>

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION: **João Biehl**

Susan Dod Brown of Professor of Anthropology, Princeton University

May 3<sup>rd</sup> 14.30-15.30

@Moesgaard Museum Auditorium

### *TRACES-OF-WHAT-ONE-DOES-NOT-KNOW*

| Storying Affective Archives of War and Transcendence |

History has haunted ethnography since its inception. Does the fixity of history overpower the plasticity of people? How do the historical and the unhistorical combine in the refiguring of social life and futurity? How can affective archives transform stories of what happened, and help us recuperate ideas of a forgotten otherwise? In this presentation, I address these classic yet always unfinished debates as I reflect on archival traces I have found in returning to the place of my beginnings in southern Brazil. I am a fifth-generation descendant of German immigrants who came to the region in the mid-1800s, and I here discuss a little-known fratricidal conflict I grew up hearing about from the elderly: the 'Mucker War' of 1874 that profoundly reshaped ideas of humanness and social belonging in the region. The Mucker, as they were called, were a group of settlers who gathered regularly at the house of Jacobina Mentz and João Jorge Maurer, where they sought community and healing through trances and herbal medicines. Denounced as mad and criminal by disgruntled neighbours, in summer 1874, over one hundred of these settlers were hunted down and killed by the Brazilian National Army, called in by a local Germanist elite and newly arrived missionaries. In this talk, I draw from erstwhile remnants of the Mucker that have come my way throughout the years: from elegiac tombstone inscriptions and earthly iconography to communal registers and unwritten reminiscences; from oral testimonies of Mucker survivors to intergenerational botanical knowledge. I think of these opaque things and the sensorium they were once a part of as an 'unfinished system of nonknowledge' crafted in the face of death. Resurrected from the archive of the horrific, these Mucker traces-of-what-one-does-not-know confront us with the impunity of those who made war inevitable and speak to a whole anthropology of the sensible—the inscrutability and renderings of affected, affecting bodies, contemplating transience and marking out alternative futures in the everyday.