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PUBLIC LECTURE BELONGING AND NARRATIVE, REVISITED

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Ruhr-Universität Bochum
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PUBLIC LECTURE

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Making oneself at home in the world is an anthropological disposition and narrative is the human practice used to this end. With this thesis, my book *Belonging and Narrative* confronted the widespread view of narrative as an ideological mechanism with an understanding of narrative as a vital component of human being. Drawing on phenomenological anthropology and hermeneutics, human geography and social psychology, I outlined an understanding of narrative as an instrument of assessing a place in the world and turning that place into a place of belonging. Contrary to the privileging of metaphors of movement and instability that was *en vogue* at the time, I examined the salience and significance of home. And contrary to the emphasis on the relationship between narrative and time, I accentuated the previously neglected relationship between narrative and space and place.

My lecture returns to the anthropological premises of my narrative theory in order to examine their current use. Two things are of particular interest here: (i) the body as the smallest unit (degree zero?) of being at home in the world and the problematic assumption of a supposedly neutral body in the phenomenological approaches I work with; and (ii) the nexus of narrative and being and the question of whether the unequal givenness of the world for different 'types' of human being can be overcome by narrative means.

Laura Bieger is Professor of American Studies at Ruhr-Universität Bochum and Mercator-Fellow at the SFB 1671 Heimat(en) at Universität Heidelberg. She is the author of *Belonging and Narrative* (transcript 2018), which considers the need to belong as a driving force of literary production and the novel as a primary place and home-making agent. In another book, *Ästhetik der Immersion* (transcript 2007), she examines public spaces from Washington DC to Las Vegas that turn world-image-relations into immersive spectacles. Her current work explores the reading public as a democratic institution and engaged literature as an instrument and infrastructure of social change.

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