

WS 04

Making things political: political anthropology meets STS in the Global South

02.10.2019, 9:30-11:00 Uhr, Raum D433

Organisiert von / organized by:

Eva Riedke (Universität Konstanz)

Jannik Schritt (TU Berlin)

This workshop engages with the proposition, rooted in pragmatist philosophy, that it is particular 'issues' that prompt people's engagement in politics. More than shared or opposing political ideals, or democratic procedures, it is particular 'matters of concern' – matters which demand to be 'taken care of' – that occasion public involvement. What then, do we make of this? As Bruno Latour put it, we are encouraged to see "politics turn around issues that generate a public around them instead of trying to define politics in the absence of any issue". This workshop seeks to focus on the practices of issue definition and forms of political mobilization.

We seek contributions that explore both the efforts of civil society, NGOs, social movements, politicians and others to turn 'non-issues' into 'issues'. The focus is on concrete material-semantic practices that aim to draw attention to the manner in which representative institutions are at given moments failing to mediate the experiences of everyday life. In what manner does a focus on so-called 'performances of concern' – often removed from the established realm of government and representation – enable insights into the formation of present-day postcolonial politics and the manner in which entrenched hierarchies of power are challenged or reinforced? We encourage contributions to look at public involvement beyond debate and discursive scrutiny, broadening our understanding of what in fact comes to constitute 'political practice'.

We invite contributions that cut across (classical) political anthropology and Science and Technology Studies (STS). We ask to what extent is it helpful to retrace older genealogies to enliven current arguments and vice versa? To what extent does empirical research in the Global South not only prompt us to 'apply' and 'apply and tweak' established propositions concepts and frameworks, but also to challenge and strain them, demanding new propositions and vocabulary?

Vortragende / Speakers:

Jannik Schritt (TU Berlin)

Eva Riedke (Universität Konstanz)

Introduction

Simon Holdermann (Universität zu Köln)

How to do water with things:

The infrastructural politics of water supply in the Moroccan High Atlas

Water is an existential issue, and, if perceived as common good, often always already public and in the center of political negotiation. My contribution, however, will address issues of water distribution, not access to water. In contrast to some parts of the High Atlas mountains, where the availability of water is a central problem, in the region where I have done field work and about which I will be talking the access to water is ensured by a river and several springs.

In the course of the wider transformation processes of the particular region, dealing with water use is also changing: A local NGO has been entrusted by the state with the responsibility for a new

water supply. Water reservoirs were built, water pipes laid, water meters installed and households connected. Thus, this paper asks what collectives are brought together by the material-semiotic consequences of the 're-infrastructuring' of a common good? It tracks which technical capabilities are employed, which forms of bureaucratic management are enacted, and which processes of standardization are initiated in order to call into being a hydraulic public and the politics of its infrastructure.

Tamara Gupper (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt/EHESS Paris)

Political activists' use of smartphones:

The role of smartphones in the process of (re-) negotiating political issues in Senegal

In the course of my Master's thesis I will do research on the role smartphones play in the political work of activists in Senegal. In this context, two aspects of the involvement of smartphones in the political discourse are to be highlighted:

Firstly, smartphones serve as a tool which facilitates the political work of activists. Smartphones, in combination with online platforms, simplify communication between activists and provide a medium on which statements can be published and events organized. As online platforms are much harder to censor by authorities and are accessible by many people, the use of these platforms through smartphones or other ICTs provides activists with a very effective tool in their pursuit for certain political or societal change. By that, smartphones play an active role in the re-negotiation of seemingly non-negotiable conditions.

Secondly, smartphones and online platforms themselves can become issues in the center of political discourses. This happens, for example, when online content of activists is deleted by government agencies. The discussion about the rights to interfere with the content published through the activists' ICTs both displays current hierarchies and serves as a medium to negotiate them.

Janna Vogl (Universität Erfurt)

The making of 'women's issues' in South India: cooperation and conflict

In engagement with Latour's suggestions, the paper argues that it is not only issues themselves that bring publics into being. The question remains how exactly a group of people come to see themselves as 'affected' by a 'common issue'?

Using qualitative and ethnographic data collected among women's rights NGOs in South India, the focus will be on local interventions of women from the "target groups" – the urban poor or rural (Dalit) women. It becomes visible how women rely on shared interpretative patterns to understand certain incidents (e.g. rape cases) as infringements of their moral expectations, and later as a 'women's issue'. Tracing the way in which incidents turn into 'issues' also allows to describe processes of inclusion and exclusion – cooperation or conflict – between local women and the NGO.

This allows general conclusions about protest mobilization. 'Publics' form around 'issues' and rely on prior interpretative patterns. They consolidate in emotionally invested processes of collective action, or not. Importantly, this approach enables us to retrace processes in which 'publics' become efficacious temporarily, but do not consolidate or pass the threshold of 'politics'.

Robin Dianoux (University of Milan/EHESS Paris)

Assessing the nature and importance of biodiversity:

Discourses, impact evaluation and compensation schemes in Colombia

Changing from a matter of pride and facts to a matter of concern, biodiversity related issues are always more present in the public discourses and policies of Colombia. This led to the recent implementation of a great number of programs to safeguard it and to follow the global trend of biodiversity offset policies. The analysis puts in perspective the ways biodiversity and its associated threats have been presented in the Colombian newspapers and, on the other hand, the evaluation of the impacts that specific projects can have on biodiversity and how they can be compensated. Indeed, the redefinitions of what is biodiversity are reflected not only on the general ethical stances about what should be worried about, what should be done and how, but also on the very technical way to look at biodiversity that is embedded in biodiversity offsets, an instrument that is contested by many non-state actors. This paper is based on several months of ethnography at the National Authority of Environmental Licenses in Colombia as well as on the analysis of grey literature and a corpus of newspaper articles.