

WS 17

The (non)negotiability of infrastructural development: examples from the Global South

30.09.2019, Teil 1: 14:00-15:30 Uhr / Teil 2: 16:00-17:30 Uhr, Raum A704

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Winding roads connect the rural hinterlands of rapidly urbanizing societies to the sprawling megacities concentrated in the Global South. Large hydropower dams regulate the flow of rivers in remote mountain ranges. Networks of high-voltage transmission lines crisscross the varied landscapes of the earth, delivering energy to growing markets and populations. In many places of the Global South, local communities see themselves confronted with major infrastructural projects that promise economic development, progress, and modernity. Commonly conceptualized as material networks that enable movement and connectivity through space and time, infrastructures are also part of wider ideological projects and thus central to the organization and exercise of state power. Besides spurring growth in economically disadvantaged regions, infrastructural development may also generate new opportunities for exploitation, contribute to environmental damage, or result in forced displacement of populations, and, consequently, the loss of livelihood resources.

This workshop engages with roads, water systems, and electrical power grids in the Global South from an anthropological perspective. We invite contributions dealing with (but not limited to) the following questions: How do local populations deal with (adapt to, alter, resist, negotiate) infrastructures (as well as their breakdowns) in their everyday lives? Which (aspects) of infrastructural interventions are negotiable, and where are the limits of negotiability? How does infrastructure development contribute to the construction of particular (gendered, neo-liberal, moral, political) subjects and subjectivities? How do roads, pipes, and wires shape citizen perceptions of state governance?

Vortragende Teil 1 / Speakers part 1:

Stephanie Ketterer-Hobbis (Wageningen University, NL):

The Politics of electricity and infrastructural integration beyond the state (Solomon Islands)

Over 80% of Solomon Islanders live off-the-grid and a majority of those who have access to grid-based infrastructures, in particular electricity, struggle to afford them beyond sporadic use. Unsurprisingly, politicians regularly promise improvements to these infrastructures, increasingly so also through solar energy solutions and hybrid mini-grids. Based on thirteen months of fieldwork in urban and rural Solomon Islands, this paper examines how non-elites negotiate their desire for more reliable access to electricity within the complex patron-client relationships that connect them to the resources of the Solomon Islands state and its development partners. The diverse object biographies of both functioning and defunct solar photovoltaic systems (PV) in a comparatively large village in Malaita Province reveal the strategies developed by non-elites to gain access to PV through state representatives as well as foreign donors without, however, increasing their dependencies within patron-client relations. On the contrary and despite their growing infrastructural integration, non-elites have effectively used their negotiations for PV to limit the reach of state power.

Hanno Mögenburg (University of Konstanz)

Still struggling for power: politics of electricity and infrastructure in Post-Apartheid Soweto

Since infrastructures are critical to state-building projects, it is notable that postapartheid South Africa continues to face severe social unrest addressing the undersupply of basic services for electricity, water, or sanitation. Several Social Movements formed around these issues, among which the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) became (in)famously known for their radical interventions. The self-acclaimed “emergency electricians” pride themselves with illegally having re-connected thousands of the poorest households to the grid in the wake of drastic price hikes and disconnections by the parastatal electricity supplier ESKOM. Thereby they programmatically resort to a common everyday tactic of Sowetans, who tamper with their meters or improvise various kinds of informal connections to their neighbours, public buildings, underground cables or pylons, literally taking infrastructure and all it stands for into their own hands. Hence, I argue that intrinsic to these disputes along and work with the lines, people not only (re)negotiate questions of belonging, citizenship, legitimacy, and legality but also of what it means to be an expert in times of neglect.

Elisabeth Huber (FU Berlin)

**Using waste and sanitation services in West African cities:
Interrogating exit, voice and loyalty as common strategies**

Whereas urban sprawl is taking on exceptional dimensions in West Africa, the construction and extension of infrastructure lags far behind: Less than 5 percent of Bamako’s urban area is served by canalization and the majority of peri-urban and informal settlements in Ouagadougou are not covered by the municipal waste management system. Depending on the residential area in these two cities inhabitants have either no, one or several officially recognized options for disposing waste and sewage. By comparing residential histories over the past years this contribution will shed light on the motivation and outcome of infrastructural decisions. Are exit, voice and loyalty (Hirschman 1981) the only strategies to deal with absent, dysfunctional or competing services? How have privatization and the introduction of foreign service providers changed the repertoire of possible behaviors? Based on findings from multi-sited ethnography I will explore the levels of trust, hope and self-determination implied in the use of formal and informal environmental infrastructure.

Steffen Köhn (FU Berlin)

Negotiating access. Vernacular infrastructures and the state in Post-Castro Cuba

Cuba, as a one-party system communist state since the 1960s, has one of the lowest internet penetration rates in the world. Access has been restricted by Government policies that ban all independent private media, the US trade embargo, and the continuing crisis of the Cuban economy that prohibits investments in digital infrastructure. This persisting digital scarcity has led Cubans to develop vernacular infrastructures, homegrown infrastructural interventions that compensate for the limitations of the state-supported digital architecture by extending, bypassing or replacing it. Millions of Cubans can access the latest in global media content thanks to El paquete semanal, an offline peer-to-peer-data-sharing network in which digital material is distributed physically via external hard drives. El paquete has come to constitute a participatory platform for local media publishing, advertising, and digital market activities, thus expanding individuals' agency in the country's hitherto state-controlled public sphere and allowing its users to experience themselves as members of a global consumer culture. Hence, I will analyze El paquete as an arena in which the relationships between citizenry and the state are currently being re-negotiated.

Vortragende Teil 2 / Speakers part 2:

Şermin Güven-Griemert (FU Berlin)

Opposing the non-negotiation of water policy concerning the river Tigris/Turkey

My contribution is based on an ongoing multi-sited ethnography about opposition to Turkish water policy concerning the GAP (South-eastern Anatolia Project) at the river Tigris. Locals and activists attempted to halt the unilaterally implemented water projects including the construction of a dam by putting parts of the flooded landscape under protection of the UNESCO cultural heritage, which ultimately failed. The affected population is mainly Kurdish and the planned water projects have influence on the neighbouring states of Iraq and Syria as well. I will discuss initiatives who see the participation of all the population of Mesopotamia as non-negotiable and want to give voice to those who are marginalized and excluded from the discussion about water management. They proclaim they want to transform water into an instrument for solidarity and peace by respecting the principles of equity, effectiveness, participative decision-making, sustainability and accountability - in contrast to using it as a nationalized tool for political dominance in the region, which perpetuates in their view ongoing conflicts and entrenches inequitable power dynamics.

Oliver D. Liebig (LMU Munich)

Negotiating renewable energy infrastructure: an indigenous view from Mexico

At the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico, where a particular strong wind blows each year constantly for six months, there is a boom of large-scale wind energy projects. To make the best use of the wind, one of the biggest projects aims at infrastructuring particular natural topographies: small, narrow peninsulas that extend into a lagunar landscape; on these peninsulas, wind park companies and the Mexican state push for building the largest wind park in Latin America. Resident indigenous groups, however, went to resistance against this wind park project, claiming that the park's infrastructure poses a threat. To them, renewable energies appear not as measures protecting the environment, but as a driving factor for environmental damage and cultural oppression. The paper examines the negotiation processes around renewable energy infrastructure at the Isthmus. I analyse, why indigenous groups see the infrastructure as a threat to the environment and their ways of living. Building up on this, I describe their negotiations as a struggle for the recognition of other-than-human beings in political discourses around infrastructural development.

Antje Gunsenheimer (University of Bonn)

Intratribal negotiation processes in favor and against megaprojects:

The case of the Río Yaqui Pueblos (Mexico)

The paper compares Yaqui resistance in 2018 and 2019 against the megaproject of the gas pipeline "Aguaprieta" with former movements against earlier projects of the Mexican government between 1950 and 2013. After their peace agreement with the Mexican state in 1940, the eight autonomously governed settlements of the Río Yaqui Pueblos in Sonora (northwestern Mexico), had to face various infrastructural projects which were advertised as necessary for the regional economic progress and, also of great benefit to them (the water pipeline "Independencia", the Interstate Highway No. 15 and dam projects). In the end, all megaprojects brought fundamental changes - positive and negative - to the environment, to the living conditions and to the economic resources of all people living in the Yaqui territory. With regard to the workshop's topic, I will identify changing actor profiles, alliance patterns and arguments over time in favor or against the above mentioned infrastructural projects among the indigenous people and their 'outside' allies.

Based on the accounts of testimonies, I am aim to illustrate how megaprojects are changing intra-tribal negotiation processes on belonging and solidarity in favor of a new understanding of independent citizenship.