

WS 34
Negotiations as an end in itself

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Organisiert von / organized by:

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This workshop aims at contributing to the emerging ethnography on activism by exploring the various trajectories of when negotiations never seem to come to an end and where there is an apparent interest for an endless continuation of negotiation in various ways. Whereas activism is generally perceived as a moral act that is based on, and oriented towards, achieving greater social good vis-à-vis conditions of inequality, injustice or violence, interestingly the negotiations about these can become an end in itself.

Various trajectories can be discerned as to how and why negotiations can become an end in itself. In a context of economic uncertainty and a competitive civic domain, for instance, an ongoing engagement with activism can provide valuable skills, material benefits, social capital or access to employment, thereby turning the activist's engagement into a means of personal livelihood. Here the figure of the 'professional activist' emerges, for whom there may be no interest in bringing negotiations to an end but whose interests may become judged as being at odds with the social imagery of 'selflessness'. Another trajectory may be that never-ending negotiations do not serve the cause activists' concerns as such, but rather the public presence and positioning of a particular social body, group or organization in a specific socio-political arena. In contrast to the example above, here not so much self-serving economic factors are involved, but questions regarding public representations, 'voice' and the social pressure 'to take a stand' in certain debates.

Focusing on the socio-cultural and economic rationales of activism in their present-day manifestations in Africa, the workshop will discuss these processes of endless negotiation in the domain of sexual and relational health and rights. In this context, negotiations that become an end in themselves bring up issues of (dis-)trust, (moral) justification as well as claims to sincerity and authority in the activists' cause.

Vortragende / Speakers:

Kim Molenaar (Leiden University)

'The Church has taken a back seat':

negotiating Botswana's sexual rights to get back at the steering wheel

Christian churches in Botswana seek ways to stay socially relevant and to increase their influence in politics. They show their competitive advantage, i.e. their relevance within society and politics, amongst others by providing a moral viewpoint on matters that are trending. The negotiating of the rights of sexual minorities should be seen as activism, since churches actively shape social networks and relations in order to prevent social change that is promoted by sexual rights organisations, NGO's and embassy's. Challenging sexual rights (organisations) has been a way to position the Church as a moral compass and as the voice of the many, since Christianity is by far the biggest religion. The claim to be the spokesperson of the many as well as the seeming power to influence them appears to be a powerful tool within a democracy and a way to open political

doors. Although the ones participating in the debate are genuinely concerned by the developments in the field of sexual rights in Botswana, the ongoing negotiations also gives them the opportunity to stay in the picture of those in power. The 'social ills' that churches say to combat are their vehicles to influence and power.

Rijk van Dijk (Leiden University)

Negotiation as generational performance:

weddings and the arts of negotiating respect in Botswana

Generational relations in Botswana are marked by the question - prevalent among youth - of how to negotiate the negotiations that take place between families while preparing for marriage. Marital negotiations between their family-representatives are beyond the control of the youth themselves and often seem endless. These negotiations concern the settlement of material conditions of the marriage including the brideprice. This paper focuses on the families' elderly who turn these negotiations into events where their status can be socially acknowledged. Serving the purpose of a generational performance of power, the young couples are expected to remain respectful irrespective of the negotiation's duration. Yet, they find ways to negotiate these extensive negotiations, specifically by taking control over the monetary aspects of the wedding arrangements. This represents an arts of the negotiability of respect; the marital negotiations require a particular art of dialogue and bargaining, while also the negotiation of those formalized negotiations require something similar, albeit at another level of social interaction. The youth's efforts to negotiate an ending is analyzed in a context where youth actively change notions of respect and prestige. This allows for the exploration of the co-constitutive interaction between respectability and negotiability at the level of local cultural politics.

Melina C. Kalfelis (GIGA, Hamburg)

Endless accessibility, endless commitment. Legitimizing extra-legal governance in Burkina Faso

In a city quarter of Ouagadougou, members of a vigilante group called Koglweogo occupy a public space to negotiate cases of thievery and other communal conflicts. Basically, they gather the defendants, their relatives and the accusers at their "center" to negotiate 'adequate' punishments. Koglweogo members, who belong to the community themselves, understand these negotiations as a key strategy to improve the security in their surroundings. For this purpose, they show permanent presence at the "center" and commitment to pass "righteous" judgements, which can entail fines, beatings and unlawful detention.

Against the background of an inaccessible legal system in Burkina Faso, this paper argues that the maintenance of these negotiations serve Koglweogo and the community as different ends in itself. For the group, it is particularly the negotiations' thoroughness und constant accessibility for citizens that legitimate their practices. For the community, these negotiations serve as entries to 'legal' processes apart from the state. However, as conflicts become disclosed through these negotiations, the question arises, in how far they perpetuate social (dis)trust.

Franziska Duarte dos Santos (Universität Konstanz)

"We hustle to survive."

Professional activism in the field of masculinities in urban townships in Gauteng

Building on ethnographic research in townships of Gauteng, the paper discusses the engagement of male gender activists who identify as 'hustlers'. The activists seek to construct a 'new' self-

understanding for men as a means to prevent the occurrence of gender-based violence. In a context of socio-economic insecurity, many initiatives in the field of masculinity try to (re)define manhood beyond categories such as economic accomplishment and productivity. The activists' undertakings to gather men are, however, sometimes at odds with this ideal. The promise to get assistance in improving one's economic status often works as an incentive for their target group. As the 'activism industry' can provide access to material and immaterial resources, producing oneself as an activist is, at least partly, shaped by the hope for social mobility. Yet, since posts in the sector are highly coveted and usually subject to funding streams, many professional activists are depending on an additional income. The paper elaborates the figure of the 'activist hustler' and focuses on their strains to 'reach the numbers' and 'stick out' with their programs as well as to earn their own livelihood.

Discussant: Pia Maier (LMU München /Universität Konstanz)

Pia Maier is an academic researcher at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at LMU Munich and a PhD student at University of Konstanz. She conducted fieldwork in workshops on trauma for helping professions in Germany and Nicaragua. In her research, she dealt with governmental and non-governmental organizations (some of them with religious background) in the areas of gender rights, violence, and rescue services.