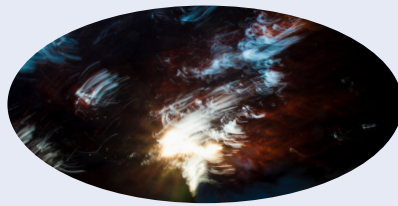




South Asia Forum
Lecture Series
Spring Semester 2019

Everyone is cordially
invited to participate!



All lectures take place at:
Andreasstrasse 15; Room AND 3.44

16¹⁵-18⁰⁰

10 April 2019

Ursula Rao (University of Leipzig)

Promises of Traceability, or How to Make Social Security Accessible and Secure at the Same Time

In a situation of chronic dissatisfaction with welfare distribution, digital governance and biometric technology are promoted as game changers that promise to visibly improve public administration, making it robust, forgery-free and cost efficient. India is among the leaders in testing new biometrically enabled welfare projects in order to realize a win-win-scenario of creating a more inclusive and securer safety-net. This paper uses the example of a biometrically enabled health insurance to analyse the institutional arrangements invented to ease access to welfare and better control a diverse and dispersed population. Tracing the development of the policy in Delhi and Chhattisgarh over a course of five years (2009 to 2014), I describe the process of interlacing the vertically integrated welfare state with new digital identification practices; alternatively conceive as being static or flexible, secure or risky, incentivizing or deterring illegal rent seeking. A new design seeks to reconfigure the state as a flexible entity that will be customer-centric and adapt to the spatializing practices of citizens, rather than impose a particular spatial fix. By paying close attention to spatial arrangements and the

way they channel the movement of people and data, I describe the contours of a securityscape that works for some and fails others, and while doing so, confronts all participants with tensions that arise not only from lack of resources, human or technological failure. People face up to the impossible task of squaring the circle and reconciling the two opposites of protecting structure and lives. The securitization of the state undermines the goal of inclusiveness challenging policy makers to either abandon their welfare aspirations or relax surveillance.



ISEK – Institut für Sozialanthropologie und Empirische Kulturwissenschaft

8 May 2019

Poornima Paidipaty (The London School of Economics and Political Science)

Disparities and Decolonisation: Statistical Thinking and the Measurement of Inequality in Nehruvian India

India's nationalist leaders had long argued that the nation's poverty was a direct consequence of colonial greed, ignorance and mismanagement. The success of decolonisation, from the start, was pegged to postcolonial economic development. However, the Nehruvian state lacked fine-grained income data to estimate the size and capacity of the overall economy. They turned to the Indian Statistical Institute, headed by PC Mahalanobis, for help. The applied mathematicians and economists at the Institute developed a novel technique of large-scale economic sampling to fill in gaps in national income data. Along the way, they had to address significant conceptual and logistical problems. How should planners and statisticians measure informal labour and the labour of women within the household? How does one know that a sample is representative of a larger region or sector? This paper examines the tensions and uncertainties of these early experiments in sampling and explores their broader political implications for decolonisation.

22 May 2019

Nayanika Mathur (University of Oxford)

The Mark of the Beast: Identifying, Hunting and Conserving Big Cats in India

This paper explores the process through which a specific big cat comes to be identified as a «man-eater» in India. It begins by running through some of the historically differentiated manners in which man-eaters have been attempted/claimed to be identified before moving onto an ethnographic exploration of the present in the Indian Himalaya. All through a recurrent distrust of the “natives” claim of the existence of man-eaters is discernible. Alongside this distrust exists a trend of blaming the native for the leopard or tiger's turn to man-eatingness. In the second half of the paper I shift to discussing the post-1972 scenario once the Wildlife Protection Act was passed, which includes a blanket ban on the killing of any big cat unless it is specifically identified as a «man-eater». The question I ask here is what difference has the legal protection of big cats and the creation of a new state document – the hunting permit – that regulates killing effected to the project of managing man-eaters. I describe the complicated game of retrospective erasure that need to be played – involving the disappearance of various matter ranging from the body of the big cat to photographs to the silencing of accomplices and members of media – in order to paper over the illegal death of the innocent big cats. I stress the point that all shikaris (hunters) make, which is the inherent impossibility of ever being able to incontrovertibly identify a big cat prior to killing it. Yet, given the transnational drive of preserving big cats and in the context of India's own conservationist legal regime the hunting permit and associated documents remain on, often as impediments to swift action and always as a necessary fiction of the reasoned government of big cats.