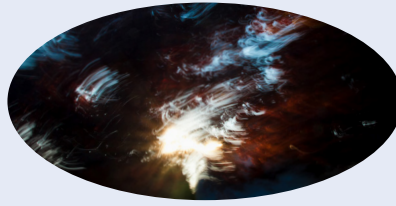




South Asia Forum
Lecture Series
Spring Semester 2020

Everyone is cordially
invited to participate!



In coordination with the University of Lucerne
(Frohburgstrasse 3), Room 4.B01, 4.15-5.45pm.

26th February 2020

Thomas Chambers (Oxford Brookes University), "[Lean on Me](#)": *Sifarish, Mediation & the Digitisation of State Bureaucracies in India*, University of Lucerne (Frohburgstrasse 3), Room 4.B01, 4.15-5.45pm.

Abstract: This paper traces the impacts of digitisation in Public Distribution Systems (PDS) and biometric ID provision in India. The stated aims of digitisation is the dis-embedding the state from everyday social relations and a reduction in forms of petty 'corruption', mediation, clientelism and patronage. However, the paper nuances these assumptions by focusing on everyday relations between the state, low-level Muslim *netas* (politicians) and those they represent in the Muslim *mohallas* (neighbourhoods) of a provincial North India city. The ethnography focuses on *sifarish* (obtaining a recommendation/leaning on someone) and ethnographically traces reconfigurations resulting from increasing digitisation. Utilising a combination of assemblage theory and political economy approaches, the paper illustrates how digitisation leads not to the removal of mediation, but to new ambivalences and reconfigurations. Not only does mediation not disappear but digitisation also creates possibilities for emerging forms of commodification and marketization within spaces of mediation between people and the state.

22nd April 2020

Sohini Kar (The London School of Economics and Political Science), [Enfolding the Poor: Microfinance and the Mediation of Risk in India](#), University of Lucerne (Frohburgstrasse 3), Room 4.B01, 4.15-5.45pm.

Abstract: Over the past decade, commercial or for-profit microfinance has grown rapidly in India under the auspices of both the government's financial inclusion agenda, and the increasing recognition of profit at the bottom of the pyramid. Microfinance institutions raise capital through loans from commercial banks, as well as private and public equity. As the poor are enfolding into global finance through these small loans, they are also drawn into the concerns of systemic financial risk. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Kolkata, India, this talk examines how financial risk comes to shape not just lending practices, but also how the poor are drawn into new circulations of capital, effectively financializing poverty. Focusing on the everyday practices of assessing creditworthiness and the collateralization of life through insurance, this talk demonstrates how urban poor borrowers are increasingly both objects of risk-taking and hedging.



ISEK – Institut für Sozialanthropologie und Empirische Kulturwissenschaft

29th April 2020

Arne Harms (University of Leipzig), [Paper, plants and people: On the social life of audits in Indian Carbon Forestry](#), University of Lucerne (Frohburgstrasse 3), Room 4.B01, 4.15-5.45pm.

Abstract: Carbon forestry promises to provide solutions to mounting environmental challenges and poverty. Globally funded carbon forestry projects involve enforcing specific usage regimes in dedicated forests. What appears to be a financialization of forests operates through results-based approaches to development assistance and nature conservation cohering around the notion of services. In this view, tree growth is reframed as carbon sequestration that can be quantified and rendered a service to buyers. While human caretakers in turn are rendered eligible for remuneration for their and their forests' services raised at dedicated markets. This talk analyses the paper trail emerging from one such project in the Indian Himalayas, demonstrating how people involved at its lowest rung tactically deploy documents produced through regular audits and subject them to temporal envisioning. The quantification of trees during audits brings about, what I call, updating, lively documents mobilized in efforts to showcase commitment and to work toward anticipated futures. I demonstrate that paperwork is mobilized to back up claims to forest resources, social welfare benefits and the cultivation of political clout. Bureaucratic artefacts associated with appears to be the financialization of nature thus come to be bound up with knotted temporalities and tactical engagements. While the drive toward financializing nature comes to be incorporated into the rather ordinary political struggles to access the welfare state, to perform power and to secure forest rights.

6th May 2020

Sahana Udupa (University of Munich), [Digital Dignity: Explorations of Religious Politics Online](#), University of Lucerne (Frohburgstrasse 3), Room 4.B01, 4.15-5.45pm.

Abstract: Building on ethnographic fieldwork on online practices among prominent Hindu and Muslim political groups in India and the diaspora in the UK, we explore in this paper what it means to imagine a life of dignity – a life free from fear and shame, but more vitally filled with onward moving opportunities within inclusive political cultures. With digital dignity as the anchoring concept, we show that

online practices of various sorts – archiving, webcasting, tweeting, blogging, mailing, live streaming, trolling, and tagging – have become central to tensions and aspirations surrounding religion, which limit and enable a politics of belonging. We draw upon anthropological scholarship on digital media and philosophical debates on dignity to examine the unique mediations that have come to define political conditions for religious groups within nation state structures at a time when nations extend their influence beyond their territorial boundaries through digital means of connections and reciprocations.

20th May 2020

Salla Sariola (University of Helsinki), [Research as Development: Biomedical Research, Ethics, and Collaboration in Sri Lanka](#), University of Lucerne (Frohburgstrasse 3), Room 4.B01, 4.15-5.45pm.

Abstract: In *Research as Development*, Salla Sariola and Bob Simpson show how international collaboration operates in a setting that is typically portrayed as “resource-poor” and “scientifically lagging”. Based on their long-term fieldwork in Sri Lanka, Sariola and Simpson bring into clear ethnographic focus the ways international scientific collaborations feature prominently in the pursuit of global health in which research operates “as” development and not merely “for” it.

The authors follow the design, inception, and practice of two clinical trials: one a global health charity funded trial and the other a pharmaceutical industry-sponsored trial. *Research as Development* situates these two trials within their historical, political and cultural contexts and thus counters the idea that local actors are merely passive recipients of new technical and scientific rationalities.

While social studies of clinical trials are beginning to be an established niche in academic writing, *Research as Development* highlights the critical and creative role that local researchers play in establishing international collaborations and making them work into locally viable forms. The volume shows how these clinical and research interactions bring about changes in culture, technologies and expertise in Sri Lanka, in contexts that have not previously been written about in detail.