

Programme

Monday 5-7 pm, Lecture Hall 10

15.04.2024 *Book Launch*

Lifeworlds in Crisis

Andreas Behrends, Mirjam de Bruijn, Julia Pauli

22.04.2024 *Lecture*

The Ram Temple Movement and the Unmaking of Indian Secularism

Jaspal Singh

29.04.2024 *Lecture*

The Obscure Object of Population: Notes from a Shrinking, Aging Island

Tyler Zoanni

06.05.2024 *Lecture*

Normal Crises: The Politics of Violence and Peace in Africa

Elísio Macamo

13.05.2024 *Lecture*

Developmentalism, Debt Crises, and African Political Economy

Abotebuno Isaac Akolgo

27.05.2024 *Lecture*

Costumes and Kin: The Making and Unmaking of Female Togetherness in Accra

Ann Cassiman

03.06.2024 *Lecture*

More than just Jihadism: Changes in Pastoralism and its Consequences

Söhnke Stöckmann

10.06.2024 *Lecture*

From Hope to Despair: Democracy, Social Conflict and the Making of an African Crisis

Edlyne Anugwom

17.06.2024 *Lecture*

Curiosity in Crisis? An Exploration of In/Different Perspectives

Susann Ludwig

24.06.2024 *Lecture*

Social Chronicity Revisited

Henrik Vigh

01.07.2024 *Lecture*

Breathing Well in Dhaka? How a City Inspires and Suffocates (More Than) Human Life

Nasima Selim

Un/making Global crisis

Lecture Series in Summer Term 2024

Institutes of Anthropology and African Studies, Leipzig University

Prof. Dr. Andrea Behrends, Ph. D. Lara Krause-Alzaidi

The impression of unsolvable wars, of unsustained hopes to stop carbon emissions soon enough, of flagrant inequalities and the uncertainty of futures are topics that preoccupy us – on different levels, but all at the same time. The notion of an omnipresence and overlap of crises has become common sense. When Covid-19 ended, war in Ukraine began. And while the wars in Ukraine and in Sudan continue, the war in the Middle East took center stage in the media. One form of activism replaces the former. But will they be effective?

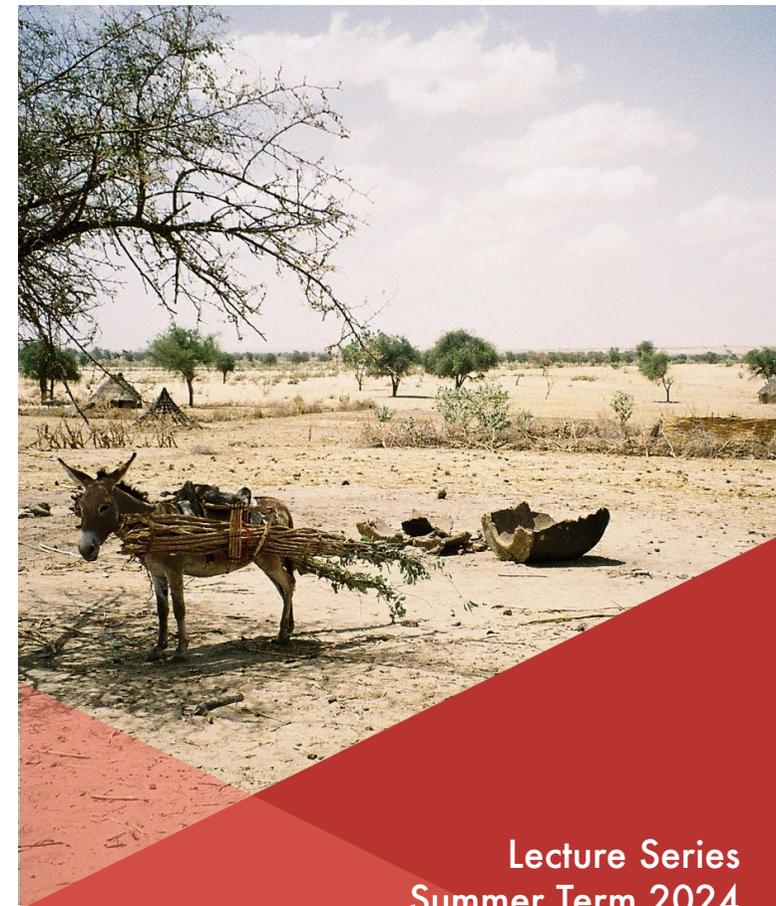
Talking about crisis means pausing and disentangling the fast momentum that crisis implies. It means to ask how crises are made and unmade by politics, by the media, by activism, by defining them as such. What gets to be a “global crisis” and what does not is subject to power-saturated, unequal practices. When crisis is proclaimed, it calls for interventions, security debates, regulations, maybe armament, but also for protests, activism, fear and hope. But by making one crisis central in the media, another one loses this attention and becomes invisible – and thus gets “unmade” although the problems persist.

We wish to provide a space for speakers and audience to focus on the slash in “un/making crises”: centering the simultaneity and complexity of different (historical and current) processes, practices, technologies, actors and interests at play in, and brought forth through crises. Contributions will critique the concept of crisis, focus on global flows and processes in their un/making, or provide insights into local practices that emerge in response to declared – and experienced - crises. In all that, we ask: What hopes do crises also hold for better futures, new beginnings, and planetary shifts?



UNIVERSITÄT
LEIPZIG

Institutes of Anthropology and
African Studies



Lecture Series
Summer Term 2024

**UN/MAKING
GLOBAL CRISES**

15.04.2024 *Book Launch*

Lifeworlds in Crisis

Andrea Behrends, Mirjam de Bruijn, Julia Pauli

In this first session, we will welcome everyone and give some general information on the theme and the lecture series. As a start, Andrea Behrends will launch her very recent publication on the topic of „Lifeworlds in Crisis“ with two invited commentators, Julia Pauli from Hamburg University and Mirjam de Bruijn from Leiden, NL. The book is about the continuing Darfur War, which has caused mass displacement since 2003, with hundreds of thousands driven from their homes and many forced into refugee camps in western Sudan and neighbouring Chad. Building on twenty years of research in the region, Andrea Behrends tracks the repercussions of this conflict—sometimes referred to as the ‘first genocide of the twenty-first century’—for those living through it: those who stayed put, those who fled from rural areas to towns, those who moved to refugee camps, and those who fought. Telling the story of everyday survival on the Chad–Sudan border, an area central to state politics in the larger region, her account sheds light on how people create belonging, exchange knowledge, develop new practices and build futures in the face of extreme uncertainty.

22.04.2024 *Lecture*

The Ram Temple Movement and the Unmaking of Indian Secularism

Jaspal Singh

This chapter presents a sociolinguistic analysis of a current political project that aims to saffronise India. I study two recent discursive events, the staging of national unity and Hindu superpower by means of erecting colossal statues and the renaming of cities that bear a recognisable Muslim toponym, to show how saffronisation is part of a larger branding of India as a non-secular Hindu Nation. This branding circulates alternative narratives in public discourse that erase the historical achievements of postcolonial India’s secular architects, as well as the role that Muslims played in India’s history, and instead enregister recognisable Hindu elements as political symbols for a vision of a new Hindu India. This sociolinguistic saffronisation is dangerous insofar as it might incite and further normalise communal violence.

Keywords: Saffronisation, Hindutva, Erasure, Enregisterment, Statues, Toponymy

29.04.2024 *Lecture*

The Obscure Object of Population: Notes from a Shrinking, Aging Island

Tyler Zoanni

Much critical social science scholarship on population politics, whether older writings on biopower or more recent STS analyses of data practices, assume that populations are all made up, and readily so. Thinking historically and ethnographically about Mauritius, this talk explores some ways that populations often prove obscure, elusive, and unstable. It centers two quite different, but related moments: efforts to control explosive population growth in mid-twentieth century Mauritius and contemporary anxieties about the island nation-state’s shrinking and aging population in the twenty-first century. The upshot is a call to reconsider how scholars, policymakers, and activists tend to think and act in relation to something called “population.”

06.05.2024 *Lecture*

Normal crises: The politics of violence and peace in Africa

Elísio Macamo

In this presentation, I will try to ascertain whether situations arising out of our need to interact with one another can be described as crises. The idea is to draw attention to the constitutive role crises play in social relations. There are important respects in which global crises are not external nuisances in the global architecture of human relations, but rather central parts of ensuring its functioning and fueling creativity. My analytical focus will be on violence in Africa and the misguided focus that has been placed on peace as a pre-condition for development.

13.05.2024 *Lecture*

Developmentalism, Debt Crises, and the nature of African Political Economy

Abotebuno Isaac Akolgo

The re-emergence of debt distress across several African countries has reignited debates about not only the crisis of development financing but also the struggle for economic transformation in the

last six decades in post-colonial Africa. In this renewed discourse about African political economy, most accounts remain fixated on immediate global and domestic shocks, or simply rehash old narratives of corrupt and/or incompetent governance in debt-distressed countries. A nuanced account of the current wave of indebtedness requires placing the moment in historical context, and thus tracing the structural, systemic, internal, and external constraints that keep most African economies from the structural transformation that will create inclusive and sustainable prosperity. Ultimately, the key to effectively diagnosing the present debt storm lies in understanding Africa’s political economy, in historical and contemporary terms.

27.05.2024 *Lecture*

Costumes and kin: the making and unmaking of female togetherness in

Accra *Ann Cassiman*

A common practice in West-Africa, especially among women, is to sew matching outfits made from the same fabric to wear on large public occasions, as an expression of solidarity and unity, but also as a spectacle of cosmopolitanism and self-making. The larger and more visible the groups wearing these ‘uniforms’, the more grandiose and spectacular the celebration.

In the popular neighbourhoods of the zongos (Hausa-speaking migrant communities) in Accra, the practice of yaayi (Hausa for ‘uniform’) has expanded to larger transnational networks beyond the family, including colleagues, members of associations, friends and neighbours. I will show how the practice of yaayi is now rocking in young women’s relentless efforts to shine and show off, and how it has become the focus of heated debates among women about shifting social obligations, morality, and consumer culture.

As a material manifestation and validation of extended relationships, yaayi functions not only as a technology of kinning in heterogeneous zongo communities, but paradoxically also as a technology of exclusion and shame, especially for those with limited financial and social means. My paper follows a group of seamstress apprentices preparing for their own graduation. As I will show, at the heart of doing yaayi is to ally with others while outshining them, embodied in one’s individual style, finish and workmanship. Yaayi thus redraws not only the lines of togetherness, but also those of social inequality, highlighting the new fissures of financial (in)capacity and skill. Finally, the graduation ceremony is the ultimate moment to publicly demonstrate one’s ability to juggle solidarity and rivalry on the public sartorial stage.

03.06.2024 Lecture

More than just Jihadism – changes in pastoralism and its consequences

Söhnke Stöckmann

From a European perspective West Africa is portrait as a region of multiple crisis such as war, Islamist jihadism and migration. Whereas these do have direct consequences for the local population, there are other dynamics which impact the lives of millions of people in the region but go under the radar of the European public. One of them is the “crisis” of pastoralism – the increased pressure on the livelihood strategies of (semi-)nomadic herders in the Sahel. In this lecture I would like to discuss this phenomenon and how it feeds into a number of more widely reported “crisis” and needs to be better understood to get a more comprehensive picture of developments and challenges in the region.

10.06.2024 Lecture

From Hope to Despair: Democracy, Social Conflict, and the Making of an African Crisis

Edlyne Anugwom

The paper apprehends democracy and governance challenges as the cornerstones of unending social crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa. In other words, it sees the unfulfilled promises of democracy and tussle for power as generators of both insecurity and social conflict impacting negatively on development in the continent. Incidentally, the faulty roots of democracy and social crisis can be related to the conditions under which these nations emerged independent. But while the crises in Africa may seem peculiar and manifest in distinct forms, they feed on and are ironically reinforced by global fissures and contentions around religion, politics, economy, and power. For instance, the obvious proliferation of terrorist groups and activities in West Africa and the Horn of Africa have no doubt drawn impetus from global terrorist groups like the al-Qaida, the IS and others. Therefore, global flows and processes of terrorism have found habitation in Africa and have in the process simultaneously afflicted democracy and governance. Also, the overriding influence of

neoliberal capitalism especially its globalizing financial impacts have ultimately informed developments in critical public spheres in the developing world. Therefore, overriding and reinforcing the context of crisis and underdevelopment in Africa in recent decades is the failure of democracy and the form of governance it generates. Thus, democracy has neither been the harbinger of development nor the instrument for untangling embedded tensions webbed around power, ethnicity, and religion in these nations. Apart from the deleterious effects social crisis exerts on current sociopolitical developments, it does not bode well for the future. It signals both uncertainty and the tenuity of relating democracy to development and growth in the continent. However, even amid crisis, these nations creatively envision pathways to survive and avoid implosion, though on fragile grounds. Thus, the proposed discourse envisages a sociohistorical overview of the origin and dynamics of crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa especially how the crisis fed by domestic and external or global forces unmake and reimagine the state project in the continent.

17.06.2024 Lecture

Curiosity in Crisis? An Exploration of In/Different Perspectives

Susann Ludwig

Ethnographic research allows researchers to immerse in the now and be surprised by whatever pops up. Stumbling upon a puzzle, assumptions are challenged and, thus, curiosity is triggered. Looking for clues to solve the puzzle, it is hard not to lose the puzzle. I anchor crisis in this paradox relationship between puzzle and solution and, thus, ask: what if I was indifferent to the solution of the puzzle and much more interested in maintaining and cultivating what is puzzling about it? By way of imagining a decolonial response to the crisis of research in Area Studies, Keguro Macharia (2016) highlights waywardness, which he describes as „a stubborn refusal to come to the point“. Inspired by this particular notion, I map out a few wayward moments from the field, i.e. a family courtyard in Bamako, Mali, a multipurpose venue in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, an interdisciplinary workshop on the Square Kilometer Array Observatory (SKAO) in Accra, Ghana and a desk or two in the city of Leipzig, Germany. So, in this presentation, I examine the relationship between crisis and scientific research by focusing on my own ethnographic practice. In doing so, I explore an epistemic otherwise, which does not settle for a point, and instead plays with the puzzle.

24.06.2024 Lecture

Social Chronicity Revisited

Henrik Vigh

The anthropology of crisis is booming. In the conjuncture of the Covid pandemic, the wars in Syria and Ukraine, the conflict in Gaza, climate change, terrorism, and the endless tragedy of high-risk migration, the concept has (re)emerged as a centre of theoretical attention within anthropology and related discipline. This paper looks at anthropological contribution to the theory of crisis in two interconnected ways. On the one hand, it details the way that the discipline has politically and analytically worked with the term and highlight the uniqueness of its approaches. On the other hand, it takes an ethnographic look at processes of conflict and crime and uses this to probe the limitations of such approaches. In doing so, it proposes an alternative grasp of the phenomenon attuned to the continuing and more prolonged aspects of the predicament. Rather than focusing merely on critical events, it argues that ethnography is, in fact, particularly well-suited to research the contingency between critical moments and critical continuities, crisis and chronicity.

01.07.2024 Lecture

Breathing Well in Dhaka? How a City Inspires and Suffocates (More Than) Human Life

Nasima Selim

How does a city inspire and suffocate (more than) human life? What does it mean to breathe well in Dhaka, one of the most “unbreathable” mega cities on our planet? The air quality index (AQI) proves this point time and again, especially during the dry season of the year. Breathing well in Dhaka, however, requires more than measuring air quality and the execution of air pollution control regulations (APCR). Interpreting and improving urban breathing interpellate the respiratory tropes and biosocial practices of both “inspiration” and “suffocation”. These inspirations and suffocations are respired by Dhakaite (more than) human life in a plethora of fractal crises: air pollution, respiratory disorders, distressed human-plant relations, un/learning indigenous breathwork traditions, and intersectional breathing troubles. *Breathing well in Dhaka?* offers a set of preliminary reflections from a recent field visit to the city (2023-2024). The talk also draws from the utopian aspirations and dystopic predictions about a city where the author spent more than three decades as an inhabitant and returned as a postmigrant ethnographer.