31. The politics of lists: Contestations of inclusion and exclusion at the state/non-state interface

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Martin Sökefeld, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Anthropology has convincingly deconstructed the image of the state as a uniform actor, and it has also emphasised multiple interconnections, entanglements and interfaces across blurred state-society boundaries. One such interface that hitherto has rarely attracted ethnographic attention involves lists that entitle people to become beneficiaries of particular programmes, such as welfare, health or development schemes, or rehabilitation programmes in emergency contexts. Such lists are material as well as conceptual, in that they discriminate against and create specific categories of subjects. Furthermore, they are sites where, to paraphrase James Scott, the formal – the rules and procedures of bureaucracy – meets the informal – untidy and unruly social life. More often than not such lists are subject to lengthy negotiations among a host of conflicting or collaborating actors, and they are met with determined resistance by those who are excluded. People develop their own practices and strategies to appropriate or challenge the categories embodied in lists. Moreover, they frequently author particular, often affect-laden discourses of rights, justice and morality to support their claims. “Being on the list” does not only entitle for particular benefits but may also create specific modes of community and belonging. In many cases today, “list-making” is outsourced to non-state actors on a local or a global scale. Thus, lists are often also sites of the intersection of local and transnational reasoning.

We regard such lists as promising points of departure for the ethnography of state and power. Contributions to the workshop analyse such “politics of lists,” particularly in the realms of welfare, disasters and humanitarianism, which discuss related questions of agency, subjectivity, morality and belonging.

Thursday, October 5, 9.00-10.30:

Lists in flux, lives on hold? Understanding the accessibility to, and exclusion from, transplant medicine

Julia Rehsmann, Universität Bern, Schweiz

Transplant medicine in Germany, structured by laws and regulations about eligibility for treatment, serves as promising empirical background to explore the complexity and ambiguity of lists. Waiting lists, tools to distribute the scarce good of donated organs as transparent, fairly and impartially as possible, are organised by numbers based on laboratory values. But like the list they compose, these numbers are in constant flux. In this paper I want to explore this state of flux, examine how it comes into being and how those affected by it, patients but also medical staff, deal with the uncertainties that come along with the incalculability of fluctuating waiting lists. As the central tool to organise
accessibility to, exclusion from, and distribution of liver transplants in Germany, these lists are not only dependent on medical values, but also spatial, temporal, and individual factors and furthermore, raise highly ethical questions, as categories of eligibility are excluding certain groups of a possible life-saving treatment.

“They Need to Follow the Rules”: Humanitarian Lists in an IDP Camp in Montenegro

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On the basis of an ongoing historical and ethnographic research, this paper explores how lists served as a technique of biopolitical control and improvement in a camp for displaced persons on the outskirts of Podgorica, Montenegro. Financially supported by the UNHCR and managed by the Montenegrin Red Cross, this “largest refugee camp in the Balkans” has provided housing for people who mostly identify as Roma and Balkan Egyptians and who fled from violence in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999.

For years, the Red Cross workers have relied on clarity and brevity of lists in their various projects aimed at the improvement of the camp population through education, healthcare, hygiene, etc. Furthermore, by educating the camp inhabitants what they need to do to get their names on the lists, the Red Cross workers strived to “change the awareness” of the camp residents about the need to respect administrative procedures, deadlines, and authorities. In this way, a humanitarian organization had become one of the actors who worked on transforming the “unruly” population of the camp into modern state subjects. The effects of this work, however, were not always in line what the humanitarians intended.

Signatures of belonging: Welfare and performances of community and state in China

Christof Lammer, Universität Wien, Österreich

Most studies of listing practices have focused on powerful public or private institutions that aim at rendering a complex world legible and governable (Scott 1998). In contrast, list-making by citizens who want to be ‘seen by the state’ (Street 2014), for example through petitions, has rarely been studied. This ‘stategraphy’ (Thelen et al. 2014) of social welfare in rural Sichuan examines how welfare applicants attempt to shape the production process of a list of signatures by shifting the state–society boundary. In the context of pervasive (anti-)corruption discourses in China, citizens are asked to participate in the bureaucratic selection process for the rural minimum living allowance. This ‘democratic appraisal’ should help to avoid the influence of personalistic networks. However, potential beneficiaries turn state-mandated list-making into
a performance of local belonging, thus putting their neighbor-citizens in a situation of conflicting demands. Hence, I argue that, depending on the production context, lists do not necessarily individualize and fragment, and not only powerful actors try to use the created appearance of objectivity for their own interests.

Saturday, October 7, 9.30-11.00h:

Transparent procedures and altered lists: Shelter houses, reconstruction politics and state-society boundaries after the earthquake in Azad Kashmir

Pascale Schild, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

With case studies on reconstruction after the 2005 earthquake in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-administrated Azad Kashmir, I demonstrate how lists that entitled families to become beneficiaries of a prefabricated housing scheme intertwined with local constructions and contestations of ‘the state’. Authorising political discourses and practices of ‘good governance’ and ‘corruption’, the lists provided state officials and families in Muzaffarabad with important symbolic and material means in their struggles over state-society boundaries.

In the disaster aftermath reconstruction authorities announced that families whose houses collapsed due to the earthquake would receive prefabricated shelters. Data collection officers then surveyed the beneficiaries and entered their names in lists. Despite – or rather because of – the lists, the distribution of the shelters created conflicts, since many families to whom state officials promised the shelters were left empty-handed. While state officials insisted on the transparent procedure that the lists ensured, people frequently pointed to the altered lists and the fraudulent practices of bureaucrats and politicians, who deprived them of what was rightfully theirs.

‘Turkey’s real production situation’. Translating morality into political claims in voluntary corporate sustainable auditing tools

Deniz Seebacher, Universität Wien, Österreich

In 2013, Ayna holding created its own social compliance auditing tool in reference to international standards, national laws and the team’s expertise on what they referred to as Turkey’s ‘real production situation’. The result was a 120 items long catalogue, categorizing and (e)valuating production practices such as child work, illegal employment or health and safety issues. For the team, it was important to create a tool that was applicable and could demand actual, feasible change from the suppliers. Reflecting the team’s believes the auditing list became a tool for controlling their supply chain - deeply entangled with and accounting for the countries ‘real situation’.
Voluntary auditing tools translate moral evaluations into unquestionable matters and manageable moral tasks. Drawing on anthropological literature of the corporate form and of morality, I will discuss how morality itself becomes a political resource for corporations in the (e)valuation of social issues in their supply chains. By framing practices as welfare (rather than rights) for the workers such tools enable corporations to claim moral superiority vis-a-vis the state in developing the country’s economy.

The politics of the petition list

*Katharina Bodirsky, Universität Konstanz*

This paper engages with the politics of the “academics for peace petition” of January 2016 that was signed initially by 1128 academics in Turkey and international supporters. Petitions are a form of symbolic politics that presume a political echo chamber where demands are heard and negotiated. In this case, however, the petition list became a means for identifying opponents that were construed as enemies of the people whose true belonging was in doubt. The paper examines the role of the list in processes of state-making by situating it within a broader politics of counter-terrorism. It then explores how the “politics of the petition list” illuminates desires, tensions, and constraints for political practice. What were the various reasons for getting on the list when its effectiveness as a form of symbolic politics was unlikely? The paper portrays how signatories experienced the “politics of the petition” by highlighting not only its immediate repercussions but the strains of waiting: waiting for the consequences of “being on the list” that, for most, were unclear in their when and how. The “politics of the list” thus serves as a lens onto contemporary experiences of processes of state transformation.