



Lecture Series of the Department of Development Studies

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Audio-visual witnessing: Explorations of the usage of media during crises in Northern Sudan

Wednesday, 27 November 2019, 4.15-5.45 pm

Seminar room IE, Department of African Studies
Spitalgasse 2, Courtyard 5, 1090 Vienna

Chair:

Antje Daniel

(University of Vienna, Department of Development Studies)

With the rise of new camera technologies, smartphones, and digital infrastructures media witnessing of human suffering, conflict and crises has become a global phenomenon. As a political practice, media witnessing is comprised of various actors, interests, and resources. Based on long-term ethnographic research in the Sudan, the paper proposes to analyse genres of representations, which I call here "crises witnessing". First, I critically explore how communities aimed to visually document, witness and communicate a silenced history of forced displacement in Northern Sudan. With the construction of the Merowe Dam (2003-2009), the River Nile was impounded, and thousands of peasants have been flooded out of their homes without warning and even before resettlement had taken place. I discuss how the displaced people used the anthropologist's video camera as a means to provide visual counter-evidence against hegemonic discourses of Sudan's successful hydroelectric future. I will argue that my video camera evoked specific genres of representations in moments of crisis that are claims of truth-telling and differ from everyday interactions with a video camera. These, often performative, genres of crises witnessing which aim at the production of visual evidence, I contend, resonate with globally distributed media realities. In a second step, I will relate these insights to different modalities of citizen witnessing during the recent Sudanese revolution and discuss how global mass media used the smartphone footage of protestors. I will present short video clips of my footage, which I edited during the dam-induced flooding and I will show short BBC clips of the Sudanese uprising.