

ERC PROJECT "DOING DIGITAL IDENTITIES (DIGID)"

"PROLIFERATIONS OF DIGITAL IDENTIFICATION INFRASTRUCTURES IN THE (POST)COLONIAL WORLD: TRUST RELATIONS, METHODOLOGIES AND TRANSLATIONS"



31ST OF JANUARY - 1ST OF FEBRUARY 2024
LEUPHANA UNIVERSITY, LÜNEBURG



Workshop Rationale

Welcome to the second workshop of the DigID-project (2023-2028) entitled "Proliferations of Digital Identification Infrastructures in the (Post)Colonial World". Our interest in this topic emerges out of the DigID-project's research agenda which investigates how the digitization of identification practices reconfigures relations between citizens and state authorities. We want to trace and study these reconfigurations at three sites: birth registration, citizen-government transactions and border controls. The implications of digital ID devices are studied ethnographically in one international and five country case studies (Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, Malawi, Sierra Leone). Based on insights gained in these multi-sited, collaborative ethnographies, the DigID-project aims to develop a novel understanding of material citizenship in the digital age which allows to capture and expose how material devices and infrastructures shape and affect the lived experience and practical meaning of citizenship.

Digital identification systems are enacted through inherently transnational sociotechnical arrangements that involve material infrastructures. The enactment of such systems often includes diverse transnational actors with intersecting or competing interests, such as national governments, global lending institutions, multinational corporations and ad-hoc public-private forums. Consequently, the enactment of digital infrastructures supporting digital identification systems reflects this transnational mix of actors where technical setups developed in one context are adapted to others-often from the direction of the Global North to the Global South. We propose to discuss the proliferations of digital identification infrastructures, that is how technical interfaces and infrastructures get rapidly adapted into diverse sociocultural, environmental and technical ecosystems across national borders. These proliferations feature and hinge on multiple processes of translation: reproduction, reassembly and reconfiguration.

Workshop Rationale

Particularly, we aim to discuss these proliferations with a sensitivity to how these processes are shaped by colonial logics and orders and in turn is shaping them. We are open to discuss any kind of infrastructures that undergird digital identification systems in the (post)colonial world. These infrastructures can be specific to the work of identification systems (e.g., biometric capture and reader, digital identity wallet, data centres) or information and communication services in general (e.g., base transceiver station, fibre optics).

One of the appealing aspects of digital identification systems is its technoutopian promise. These systems have the potential to strengthen the fragile relations of trust between (post)colonial states and their citizens. Digital identification systems promise a reciprocal gain for both state and citizens. From the perspective of national governments, digital identification systems warrant a more accurate authentication of citizens identity/legibility. On the side of the citizens, digital identification systems could provide a more secure infrastructure of legal personhood and improved public services. The mutual benefit of entrusting digital identification systems with citizens personal data can have a unifying effect for (post)colonial states and their citizens. The delicate nature of this relation means that this trust is constantly in flux and changing. During this workshop, we will observe how this ever changing trust/mistrust dynamic plays a role in the enactment of digital infrastructure in (post)colonial contexts.

For 1.5 days we will unpack our questions and observations with a group of selected scholars. We will commence our workshop with a keynote lecture on "Can Trust be Engineered" by Prof. Keith Breckenridge (University of the Witerwatersrand) (Wednesday, 31.01.2024). The workshop (Thursday, 01.02.2024) will include two panels and one round table discussion on a variety of methodological and conceptual themes.

Formats and Roles

This workshop is intended to provide space for presenting work-in-progress and open discussions for researchers and practitioners at different levels of their careers. While most participants will have assigned roles, we ask everyone to contribute to a conducive discussion atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to participate equally. The workshop will include two panels and one round table discussion.

Panels:

Presenters: We ask presenters to prepare a 5-8 minute presentation that responds to the central questions of the panel, drawing upon your previous research experience. The presentation can take whatever form you like (eg, slideshow, reading notes). All we ask is that the presentation is brief enough to allow more space for group discussion.

Discussants: Please see your role in opening up the discussion and generating questions. Please keep your intervention to a total of around 5 min.

Chairs: Please be strict with respect to time in order to allow for enough time for discussion.

Round Table Discussion:

Participants: Rather than a formal presentation, participants will be asked to speak briefly (up to 5 minutes) about their experience with the topic. They will then answer questions from the moderator.

Moderator: The moderator will facilitate this discussion by time keeping and asking questions to open up the discussion.

Programme

31.01.2024

**17.00 Arrival & Welcome Coffee at Klippo,
Central Building C.40 on the ground floor (optional)**

18.00 Keynote Lecture by Keith Breckenridge (University of the Witwatersrand)

Location: Room C.40.704 (Central Building, 7th Floor).

"Can Trust be Engineered?"

Many countries on the African continent are building powerful new biometric population registration systems. Often matched with new credit scoring regulations and – in some cases -- digital payment switches, these tools are designed to have powerful effects on finance. The advocates of these systems describe them as trust infrastructures, mainly because they can be used to simplify payments and strengthen credit distribution in the context of unreliable identification and collateral systems. But what is trust? And can it be generated technologically? These are especially important questions on the African continent where, as Celestin Monga and many others have shown, trust has been radically curtailed over centuries. In this paper I explore the geopolitics of trust over the last century and suggest what will be necessary if the biometric infrastructures are, indeed, to build trust.

19.30 Taxi/Walk to dinner location

20.00 Workshop Dinner

Location: Trattoria De Flaviis, Am Stintmarkt 2, 21335 Lüneburg

Programme

01.02.2024

Workshop

Location: Room C.40.530 (Central Building, 5th Floor).

9.00-9.30 Arrival & Coffee

9.30-10.00 Welcome & Round of Introductions

10.00-11.30 Panel 1: Digital Identification Infrastructures and Trust Relations

Presenters:

Aaron Martin (University of Virginia)
Fredy Mora Gamez (University of Vienna)
Vijayanka Nair (San Diego State University)
Dinita Putri (Director for Asia at Luminare)

Discussant: Keith Breckenridge (University of Witerwatersrand)

Chair: Oisín O'Brien (Leuphana University)

Central Questions:

1. In (post)colonial contexts, citizens' trust in government can be fragile. Governments use digital infrastructures, relying on the promise of machinic impartiality, to address this fragility. Digital identification systems serve as examples, showcasing how state authorities leverage digital infrastructures to strengthen trust relations between the state and citizens. In this context, how are "trust services" established and maintained through digital infrastructures? In what ways are trust-generating mechanisms embedded in digital infrastructures?
2. How can we account for challenges to trust relations when they are mediated by digital infrastructures? How does digital infrastructural crises and disruptions affect the durability of trust relations? How do mistrust and distrust emerging from such crises and disruptions generate new possibilities for trust relations?
3. What kind of trust services which are mediated by digital identification infrastructures are out there? How are users recruited into these trust relations? Do users always have a choice whether or not to participate in a trust relation?

Programme

11.30-12.00 Coffee break

12.00-13.30 Roundtable: Researching in and out of digital identification infrastructures in (post)colonial settings

Participants:

Paula Helm (University of Amsterdam)
Hannah Knox (University College London)
Johan Lindquist (Stockholm University)
Keren Weitzberg (Queen Mary University of London)

Moderator: Stephan Scheel (Leuphana University)

Central Questions:

1. Can you speak about your experiences studying digital infrastructures in post(colonial) settings? What challenges have you encountered, and what methodological strategies have you employed to overcome them?
2. Accounting for the digitally marginalized, such as people with limited or without access to ICT infrastructures and devices, is often an apparent methodological challenge. How do you approach researching the digitally marginalized in the context of proliferating digital infrastructures?
3. The impersonality of the machine is often a guiding ideology behind government's adaptation of digital infrastructures. However, we know that the machine always works in tandem with human actors. How can we methodologically account for the role of humans in the work of digital identification systems?

13.30-14.30 Lunch

Location: Klippo Cafeteria, Central Building C.40 (ground floor).

Programme

14.30 - 16.00 Panel 2: Translating Materialities: contestation and adaptation of digital identification infrastructures

Presenters:

Ildikó Z. Plájás (University of Amsterdam)

Alena Thiel (Martin-Luther-University)

Dhanashree Thorat (Mississippi State University)

Discussant : Ursula Rao (Max Planck Institut)

Chair: Sindhunata Hargyono (Leuphana University)

Central Questions

1. Digital identification infrastructures are introduced on top of the previous technological regimes of identification. This rearrangement often leads to a liminality where the new "digital" system is in the process of translation while the old system is not fully relinquished. Consequently, fragmentations occur in identification system. In what ways do such fragmentations occur in (post)colonial settings?
2. How do socioenvironmental forces in the (post)colonial world affect the adaptation of digital identification infrastructures?
3. Do the proliferations of digital infrastructures in (post)colonial settings generate political contestations? How does the practice of citizenship and civil society action emerge out of these proliferations?
4. How do (post)colonial relations structure the proliferations of digital identification infrastructures? In what ways is the legacy of colonialism reproduced through these digital identification infrastructures

16.00-16.30 Final discussion

Practical Information

Campus Map of Leuphana



Transportation to the University

From Lüneburg train station you can take public buses (5001, 5011, 5012, 5600) to Leuphana University. See schedules on: <https://www.hvv.de/en>

For more travel directions to the university, see:

<https://www.leuphana.de/en/university/maps/travel-directions.html>

For cabs call: Citycar Röhlig (04131/2222), Taxi Zentrale Lüneburg (04131/ 52025), LG Taxi (04131/2230200). Please note that we can only reimburse cabs in exceptional cases and for short distances only.

Please keep all original receipts and submit them to us for reimbursement after the workshop.

Hotel

You are hosted at Hotel Bremer Hof, in the historic centre of Lüneburg. The address is Lüner Straße 12-13 21335 Lüneburg. Check in is available from 15.00 and check out is before 11.00.

Wifi:

You can access eduroam through diverse access points at Leuphana University. Alternatively, the "guest" network allows you to surf the Internet and access your e-mail accounts. This access is unencrypted. To log in, please use:

WiFi Access during the workshop

user: ercdigid
password: 8096

Short Biographies

Kelly Bescherer (Leuphana Universität Lüneburg) is a PhD candidate in an interdisciplinary research training group, "Cultures of Critique". Her work explores identification as a site of epistemic conflict, focusing on the role of identificatory practices in Germany and the EU's politics of deportation. As part of this research, she is investigating the impacts and neocolonial dimensions of EU initiatives for digital population registration in Senegal and throughout West Africa. Kelly worked for several years in the field of immigration law prior to starting her PhD and aims to produce research in dialogue with social movements.

Keith Breckenridge is a professor at the University of the Witwatersrand and acting Co-Director at Wiser. He holds the Standard Bank Chair in African Trust Infrastructures. Keith studied at Wits and Johns Hopkins and completed his PhD at Northwestern in 1995. He writes about the cultural and economic history of South Africa, particularly the gold mining industry, the state and the development of information systems. For the last twenty years he has been writing about biometric identification systems and their political effects, especially on the African continent. He has published widely on the history and contemporary politics of biometrics, with papers in *Africa*, *History Workshop*, the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *Public Culture* and comparative anthologies on systems of identification. This interest in biometrics has also drawn him in to the global institutional history of state documentation, especially the forms of birth, death and marriage registration that are ubiquitous (but very poorly understood) in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Salah El-Kahil is a PhD candidate at Leuphana University Lüneburg, holding bachelor's and master's degrees in sociology. He has contributed to projects centered around migration, social policy, social theory, and labor sociology. His research has investigated data and security, exploring how security agencies' practices influence national and cultural identity narratives. In 'Doing Digital Identities', Salah conducts a case study examining the social and political implications of emerging digital ID infrastructure in Germany, paying particular attention to identity wallets.

Sindhunata Hargyono is a postdoctoral researcher in the DigID project focusing on the Indonesian country case. He holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from Northwestern University (2023). His dissertation examines the intersection between aesthetics and politics in an Indonesian border infrastructure development project. His current (pre-fieldwork) research project centers on the digitalization of the state identification system and its impact on a differentiated citizenship landscape in Indonesia. The research is particularly interested in the informal and material dimensions of citizenship. His research interests encompass the anthropology of the state, citizenship, and infrastructure.

Paula Helm is an Assistant Professor at the University of Amsterdam specializing in Empirical Ethics and Reflexive AI, with a focus at the convergence of STS, Media Studies, and Ethics. Her larger goal is to bring Technology-Ethics from mere public relations to engineering and development processes through radical co-design. For this, Paula is investigating integrative methodologies at the intersection of Computer Science and Humanities. Her most recent projects include an investigation on infrastructural requirements for responsible digital transformation in the Amazon Assemblage, conducted in collaboration with the Sateré Mawe Indigenous People, as well as an interdisciplinary inquiry into Pluriversal Language Technology for Epistemic Justice, conducted in collaboration with the Life Language Initiative in Trento.

Short Biographies

Hannah Knox is Professor of Anthropology at UCL. Her research focuses on the relationship between technical infrastructures and social change through ethnographic studies of projects of technical transformation with a particular focus on climate change, energy and digital technologies. She has published several books including *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise* (2015), *Ethnography for a Data Saturated World* (2017), *Thinking like a Climate: Governing a City in Times of Environmental Change* (2020), *Digital Anthropology* (2021) and *Speaking for the Social: A Catalogue of Methods* (2022). She is currently working on a new project, looking at the relationship between energy, data and social change in net-zero Britain.

Laura Lambert is a postdoctoral researcher in the DigID project with a focus on Sierra Leone. She holds an M.A. in Social Sciences (Humboldt University) and a PhD in Social Anthropology (Martin Luther University), which was funded by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. Based on an in-depth ethnography, Laura's PhD research examined the EU externalization of refugee protection to Niger. Among her main research interests are the remaking of European migration control and asylum policies in the cooperating African third states, asylum and migration bureaucracies, migrant struggles, future-making, infrastructures, and international organizations.

Johan Lindquist is Professor of Social Anthropology and Director of the Forum for Asian Studies at Stockholm University. He is a member of the editorial boards of *Pacific Affairs* and *Public Culture*, has published articles in journals such as *Ethnos*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Mobilities*, *Public Culture*, *Pacific Affairs*, and *International Migration Review*, is the co-editor of *Figures of Southeast Asian Modernity* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), the author of *The Anxieties of Mobility: Development and Migration in the Indonesian Borderlands* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), and the director of the documentary film *B.A.T.A.M.* (DER, 2005). Lindquist's research has most generally been concerned with the relationship between transnationalism and migration, with a particular focus on Indonesia and Southeast Asia. While his dissertation research dealt with the lives of migrants and tourists on the Indonesian island of Batam—part of a transnational Growth Triangle that connects Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia—he has later focused on the forms of brokerage and infrastructure that shape contemporary transnational migrant mobility from Indonesia to countries across Asia and the Middle East. Most recently, he has conducted multi-methods research on Indonesian click farmers who sell followers and likes on social media platforms such as Instagram.

Aaron Martin is an assistant professor of media studies and data science at the University of Virginia. A social scientist specializing in technology policy and data governance, he studies how regulation can facilitate just, inclusive, and secure digital societies. In addition to focusing on how transnational policy is established by international bodies and humanitarian organizations, he explores how users in historically marginalized communities, including refugees and other vulnerable people, understand and shape technology and its regulation.

Short Biographies

Fredy Mora Gámez is a researcher at the Department of Science and Technology Studies, University of Vienna (Austria). Fredy is also an associate professor (docent) of technology and social change at the Department of Thematic Studies (TEMA G) at Linköping University (Sweden). His research, mainly taking place in South America and Southern Europe, condenses two interconnected lines of inquiry: on the one hand, how migration is produced by information infrastructures and institutional sociomaterial practices. On the other hand, Fredy is ethnographically interested in everyday material practices by people on the move. He is currently the principal investigator of the project 'Calculating migration: a multi-sited ethnography of algorithmic governance and redistribution keys' (Riksbankens Jubileumfond, P20-0618), a collaboration between Linköping University and the European New School of Digital Societies (Frankfurt).

Vijayanka Nair is Assistant Professor at San Diego State University. Nair's research ethnographically examines large-scale, technology-driven governance experiments in contemporary South Asia. She holds a PhD in Anthropology from New York University and an MPhil in Social Anthropological Analysis from the University of Cambridge.

Oisín O'Brien is a PhD candidate at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. He holds a master's degree in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Amsterdam, where he specialised in visual anthropology. During his master's he completed his first ethnographic film titled "The White Ship" which focused on national heritage problems and architectural symbolism in Tallinn, Estonia. His research interests include post-soviet urban space, national division, and digital societies. Within this project, Oisín will explore the integration of digital identification into the everyday lives of Estonians and how digital ID schemes are designed as trusted services to guarantee their widespread use in Estonia.

Ildikó Z. Plájás is an assistant professor at the University of Amsterdam. Previously she was a postdoctoral researcher at Leiden University in the ERC funded project Security Vision: the algorithmic security politics of computer vision, where she conducted a (visual) ethnographic research in a computer science lab working on the interpretability of image recognition algorithms. Her PhD research conducted in the frame of the RaceFaceID Research Project at the University of Amsterdam investigated how visual technologies in governance and identification enact racial otherness in Europe.

Dinita Putri is the Director for Asia at Luminare, a global philanthropic foundation founded by The Omidyar Group. She is responsible for building partnership to countering digital authoritarianism in Indonesia and to research tech platform governance in regional Asia. Previously, Dinita has worked with The Web Foundation as well as the Ministry of Comms in Indonesia where she delivered research related to smart city, open data, data protection, privacy, and AI. Dinita received her MA in Big Data in Culture and Society from Kings College London with dissertation exploring the ethical dimension of using machine learning to predict suicide risks.

Short Biographies

Ursula Rao is Director of the Department "Anthropology of Politics and Governance" at the Max Planck Institut for Social Anthropology in Halle and Honorary Professor of Anthropology at the University of Leipzig and the University of Halle. Her current research focuses on e-governance and the social consequences of biometric technology in India and she is working on a book length manuscript about iterative learning in the India's digital bureaucracy. In that relation, she has published in 2022 the article 'Policy as Experimentation. Failing 'forward' towards Universal Health Coverage in India'. *Social Anthropology* 30(2): 81–100. Rao has also written on urban space, Hindi- and English journalism and ritual theory. She is co-editor (together with Mark Maguire and Nils Zurawski) of "Bodies as Evidence. Power, Knowledge, Security" (Duke University Press, 2018).

Stephan Scheel works as a Professor of Political Sociology at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg and is the Principal Investigator of the ERC-project 'DigID – Doing Digital Identities'. In general, Stephan's research interests lie at the intersection of critical border, migration and security studies as well as citizenship and science and technology studies. In context of the DigID-project, Stephan will be responsible for the country case study of Malawi where he will study the implications of a large-scale registration campaign, which was conducted by the government in 2017, for citizen-state relations.

Alena Thiel - "I am PI of the Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie Project MUNDI which focuses on data practices in Ghana's Disaster Risk Reduction and Early Warning. I have previously completed third-funded projects on the impact of identification technologies on statistical productions (DFG) and the measurement politics around Ghana's national biometric ID system (DAAD PRIME). In addition to my work on identification, I have published on digital tools in Ghana's 2021 Population and Housing Census, biometric payment practices, and more recently, the introduction of Ghana's digital addressing system."

Dhanashree Thorat is an Assistant Professor of English at Mississippi State University. She is an Executive Council member of the Center for Digital Humanities, Pune in India and advises the center on DH curriculum development. Her research is situated at the intersection of Asian American Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and Digital Humanities. She is currently working on a scholarly monograph examining colonial genealogies undergirding the material infrastructure of the Internet in the Global South. Her work thus argues for decolonizing infrastructural development and highlights alternate modes of regional co-building of Internet infrastructures in the Global South.

Keren Weitzberg is a senior lecturer in the School of Politics and International Relations and a fellow at the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences at Queen Mary University of London. Working at the intersection of science and technology studies, migration studies, and critical race studies, she examines problematics related to mobility, digital identity, biometrics, and fintech. She has over fifteen years of experience carrying out archival research, fieldwork, and interviews in cross-cultural, multilingual settings in Kenya and collaborating with non-profits, artists, and practitioners across the US, UK, continental Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. She has published in a variety of academic forums, including *The Journal of African History*, *Big Data & Society*, the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, *Modern Intellectual History*, and the *American Historical Review*, as well as popular outlets, such as *The Washington Post*, *London Review of Books*, *Africa is a Country*, and *The Conversation*.