

## **"Activist becomings in South Africa and Myanmar. Studying infrastructure and politics through activists' life-worlds"**

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Comprising four case studies, this anthropological project uses ethnographic research methods to explore the sociocultural dynamics by which activists in South Africa and Myanmar learn to shape (inter-)subjectivities, socialities, imaginaries and political fields when addressing the issue of material infrastructures. It uses the concept 'activist becomings' to highlight our interest in both the individual processes through which activism is incorporated into people's daily lives, as well as activists' collective aspirations and endeavours in bringing to bear their influence on the political configurations of their social environment. By analysing and comparing two countries that are currently undergoing momentous socio-political transformations after decades of repression, the project will provide important answers to interrelated questions concerning (a) the emergence of novel forms of political engagement, (b) the co-production of activist biographical self-shaping, political imaginaries and emergent socialities, (c) the interrelatedness of the material and the political, and (d) the role of meso- and macrostructural cultural and socio-political environments in these dynamics.

The two sub-projects (with two case studies each; see below for more details) will shed light on how and to what extent the space for political engagement and activism has expanded in these two countries, and along which axes. In the final phase of the project, this will allow a comparative assessment of the relationship between rapidly changing political cultures on the one hand, and the emergence of activist groups and aspirations on the other. The project group plans to analyze these comparative empirical insights in the form of a condensed conceptual framework that lends itself to application to other regions of the world.

### Case studies in South Africa (two PhD positions, presently vacant):

The case studies will explore selected activist groups in Cape Town (case study A) and Johannesburg (case study B) that engage in protests concerned with public service delivery. The case study in Johannesburg (B) explores activist organizations in the field of electricity, especially the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee; the case study in Cape Town (A) will deal with activist engagements in the field of sanitation, water and sewage (e.g. the Social Justice Coalition, the Housing Assembly and the Western Cape Water Caucus).

### Case studies in Myanmar (two PhD positions, already filled)

The two case studies (C and D) deal with activist groups in urban Yangon whose work highlights the neglected provision of access to public services in Myanmar. Research on (C) disability activist organizations will focus on material infrastructural improvements and legal frameworks to guarantee equal access to public life. (D) Research on the Food Not Bombs movement will explore the 'tactical urbanism' (Spartaro 2015) of the movement to 'create infrastructure outside of money through which abundance can be shared' (Food Not Bombs manifesto).