

The Collaborative Research Centre “Dynamics of Security” (SFB/TRR 138) and the Anthropology of Peace, Conflict, and Security (APeCS) network of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) are organizing the joint, interdisciplinary conference:

**Peace, conflict, and security in times of existential crises:
Critical, interdisciplinary, and public engagements**

21–22 March 2024, Marburg, Germany

Call for papers

Panel 12. Infrastructural (dis-)integration in complex crises: Legacies of a Westphalian imaginary

Convenors:

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Functioning infrastructure of particular types is an often assumed characteristic of what can be conceived of as a Westphalian imaginary, that is, the taken for granted nature of an idealised Northern notion of a nation-state centuries after the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. This treaty ended the 30 Years War in Europe and ushered in the state as the default political unit, largely and continuously defined by the global North. In western/northern modernity, this idealised state became the ultimate point of reference for grand infrastructural projects, like industrial production, transportation, energy provision, and the catering for the basic needs of the national populations.

It is against this imaginary that failing or absent infrastructure as a sign of ‘decay’ and insecurity, and as a justification for intervention, has become commonplace, notwithstanding the presence of transnational, international and global infrastructures, in particularly biased ways. For instance, there is a tension between the real need for improvements in failing infrastructure, where a territory has come to rely on such infrastructures, and instances where this is not necessarily the case. Similarly, the trope of decay has often been de-historicised and rendered a failure of particular

element(s) within an unevenly integrated global system. Different (state) territories are not only infrastructurally (dis)integrated and (dis-)integrating to different extents but also in different ways. Moreover, the (dis-)integration of infrastructures, including seemingly non-adjacent ones, is often characterized by interdependencies. This is the case when the perception of infrastructural failure uses the, mostly illusory, yardstick of full functionality and operability of infrastructures; or when the decline of one infrastructure is conditioned by the build-up, extension, and intensification of other infrastructures.

Against this backdrop we invite interpretations of diverse topologies and scenes of infrastructural (dis-)integration in a world facing diverse, overlapping and regionally specific, yet often interrelated, challenges. The outright failure of the electricity grid in South Africa, the complex conflict in the Sahel region and the war in the Ukraine are but three examples that may be viewed as sites of 'decay', infrastructural failure/inadequacy, and the outright destruction of infrastructure. The question, then, is how these processes of disintegration hang together with processes of integration. The case of the Sahel is instructive as a complex overlap of crises, including identity politics, the war on terror, geopolitics, climate change and livelihoods, and where both security provision and developmental solutions are framed in terms of a Westphalian imaginary that might not be universally applicable.

In South Africa those who espouse the trope of state failure have in a sense been longing for examples to justify their narrative, while a longer historical view would reveal that infrastructure has never been a universal reality. In the war in Ukraine, national military and civil infrastructures, including vital ones, have become the regular target of attacks by Russia – which in turn has given Western governments reason to further support Ukraine's military defence, including the access to weapon systems that require an integration into the military infrastructures of NATO countries (like complex multi-component military technology, training of staff in that technology, and plans of western companies like Rheinmetall to produce military equipment in the country).

These are just some examples of the tensions and interdependencies within infrastructural (dis-)integration, rearticulating a Westphalian imaginary. We invite papers that further explore such tensions using various case studies. The conceptual goal is to elaborate on the role of infrastructures that are interdependent in terms of their respective state or process of (dis-)integration in complex and multiplied crisis constellations, and on the consequences this interdependence has for conflict regulation.

Abstract proposals of up to 300 words, accompanied by titles, names, bios of up to 100 words, and affiliation and contact details of authors should be sent to the convenors by **the 2nd of October 2023**. We expect to notify the selected participants by the 16th of October.

We also remind you that (limited) funding will be available to precarious scholars on a reimbursement of real costs basis. Also, for scholars from the Global South in need of a visa, the organisers can issue letters of invitation.