

## Contested Meanings of Development and Modernization in Non-Western Contexts

**Veranstalter:** Annika Hartmann; PROUB-Doc-Network „Grenzenlos – Epochen- und Raumübergreifende Geschichtswissenschaften“

**Datum, Ort:** 10.03.2016–11.03.2016, Bremen

**Bericht von:** Verena Kröss, Jacobs University Bremen

Since the last two decades historical analyses of development and modernization projects have been a growing field of inquiry. One of the main inspirations and aims of this growing field has been the demarcation from post-modern critiques of development which analyzed development mainly as a discursive formation, focusing on Western intellectual and political elites and on the time period after 1945.<sup>1</sup> Against this background more recent inquiries into the history of development and modernization can be described with Joseph Hodge as focusing on the „longer“, „deeper“ and „wider“ aspects of this history. They pay more attention to the time period before 1945, to the contradictions and complex implementations of development policies and ideas in specific contexts, and to a global history of development which includes a multiplicity of actors.<sup>2</sup>

This workshop contributed to gaining a better understanding of „deeper“ and „wider“ aspects of the history of development and modernization. It was dedicated to the important question how general global and supposedly Western categories like development and modernization can be understood within the national/local context in which they are discussed, adapted, and implemented. Starting from the observation that these abstract categories and their meaning are often questioned, reshaped and challenged by the different actors involved, the workshop gathered presentations about five different case studies of development and modernization from three different continents. These presentations of the first workshop day were all held by PhD students presenting different stages of their work in progress. The second day was comprised of a comment on the similarities and differences of the presentations and

an open roundtable discussion.

In the first presentation ALIYA TONKOBAYEVA (Bremen) pointed to the important secondary goals and long-term effects of the Virgin Lands Campaign (1954–1964) in Soviet Kazakhstan. She observed that the primary goals of the Virgin Lands Campaign stated in official documents referred exclusively to economic and agricultural efficiency. The production of cheap grain was seen as important to feed people, as animal feed to catch up with the United States in meat and milk production, and as a vital source of foreign currency. She emphasized however that the campaign didn't just involve the ploughing and sowing of millions of hectares of land but also included setting up storage and transport facilities, and relocating hundreds of thousands of temporal and permanent workers which irrevocably changed the semi-nomadic rural areas of northern Kazakhstan. Aliya Tonkobayeva will focus on the secondary goals and effects of the campaign such as the issue of nation-building (e.g. the integration of the peasantry into the Soviet nation), cultural change, and the empowerment of women in her further research. Important questions within this research will address the role of the local population and the adaptation of the Soviet policies on the local level.

MAX TRECKER (Munich) presented his work on East German and Bulgarian cooperation within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance to build a cement industry in Syria at the beginning of the 1970s. He analyzed the very practical difficulties of cooperation and pointed to the intricacy of power relations by comparing power relations from a macro and an on the ground perspective. He argued convincingly that from the outline of the project the German Democratic Republic was clearly assigned the most powerful role within this development project. It was responsible for the funding, technology, building plans and the technical training for the project, while the Bulgarians were responsi-

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Writing the History of Development (Part 1: The First Wave)*, in: *Humanity*, 6, 4 (2015), pp. 429–463.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Writing the History of Development (Part 2: Longer, Deeper, Wider)*, in: *Humanity*, 7, 1 (2016), pp. 125–174.

---

ble for assembling the factories on the ground. Max Trecker showed that on the ground however the power relations between the different countries involved appeared as much more disordered and unexpected. After difficulties with the timely implementation of the factories arose the German Democratic Republic found itself under constant pressure both from the Bulgarian and the Syrian side. Additionally while the project was designed as a show case example of unilateral technical assistance from „first world“ to a „third world“ country, external Indian experts which advised the Syrian government were in practice crucial for the further course of the implementation of the project.

DIENABOU BARRY (Bremen) discussed the shifting political alignments of Malian governments since the independence in 1960 and their consequences for Malian development conceptions in general, and for her specific research topic, the role of women at the Office du Niger, in particular. She observed that in the first period after independence Mali, under the leadership of Modibo Keita, was associated with the Soviet Union and followed its' example in attempts to create „a new Malian man“ and in the promotion of communal farms. She pointed out that women were not an explicit part of the economic policy and communal farms didn't give them access to land titles which were reserved for men as head of the households. During the new military government since 1968 and after serious droughts at the beginning of the 1970s Mali's political alliances shifted towards Western countries and it needed to ask the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for financial assistance. Dienabou Barry noted that the presence of international donors contributed to a more conscious gendered development policy by the Malian government particularly in the 1990s, when it recognized the important complementarity of vegetable cultivation done by women in addition to rice at the Office du Niger, which gained women better access to credits, land, and education.

In the fourth presentation MARTIN BREUER (Bielefeld) analyzed the role and development conception of different actors involved in the Andean Indian Program

from 1952 to 1972, focusing on officials from the International Labor Organization (ILO) at different levels and on the national governments of Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. He showed convincingly that the Andean Indian Program was a complicated entanglement of national policies inspired by the so called *indigenismo* and of ideas firmly rooted within organizations of international development cooperation, like the focus on technical and professional training by the ILO. He also pointed to the constant struggle over development approaches as there was a competing development conception to the technical focus of the Andean Indian Program. This competing view was represented by the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, which was based in Mexico and criticized the Andean Indian Program for its lack of anthropologically inspired work. Martin Breuer indicated that the Program had important unintended consequences: While it was conceptualized by national governments as a conservative program preventing demands for land reform, some of the radical indigenous leaders of the 1980s and 1990s had participated in training courses of the Andean Indian Program.

In her discussion of the development and demographic discourses in Guatemala during the 1960s and 1970s ANNIKA HARTMANN (Gießen) gave an intriguing example for the power of local actors to challenge and adapt the purpose of development and research funds. She argued that while most of the international development community was convinced during the 1960s that there was an actual „(over-)population problem“ which needed to be studied, analyzed, and solved through family planning programs, Guatemalan researchers challenged this popular notion in studies funded by international development agencies and deliberately offered themselves as counter-experts. She explained that many Guatemalan researchers accepted theories of demographic transition but they rejected propositions for development which focused on changing the individual reproductive behavior. Instead they defended the importance of changing the repressive political situation and of solving the agrarian question.

During the second day of the workshop TERESA HUHLE (Bremen) commented on the similarities and differences of the five presentations. Afterwards there was an open roundtable discussion on the problem of terminology, on questions of judgment in historical work and on practical challenges when writing a PhD on the history of modernization and development.

Teresa Huhle observed in her comment that most of the presentations still operated with a somewhat broad understanding of the term development and that the distinction between a „Western“ and a „Soviet“ model of development was too often assumed to be self-evident. She encouraged the participants to use more explicit understandings of development for their case studies and to fill these empty words with more contextualized meanings. She also raised the question whether the different actors involved in the case studies actually had different ideas and concepts of development or if they just had different analyses of the causes for „underdevelopment“. Following up on Teresa Huhle's comments the roundtable discussion mainly centered on issues of terminology. All participants agreed that terminology proves particularly difficult to deal with since nearly all available words are either terms with ideological baggage („traditional“, „modern“, „Third world“, „development“, and „modernization“) or substitutes for these words which are also neither accurate nor neutral expressions. Teresa Huhle made the important point that while we cannot completely avoid the difficult choice between different terms, a first important step would be to distinguish more clearly between our own analytical terms and the terms from our historical sources.

The workshop provided an excellent space for exchange among young scholars working in the field of the history of development and modernization in Germany and brought together very rich historical material from different parts of the world. The general aim of the workshop to advance case studies which pay close attention to the employment, adaptation and struggle over abstract categories like development and modernization within national and local contexts will remain indis-

pensable for future research. One of the challenges for this future research which clearly emerged from the presentations and discussion is that while it is essential to look at „non-Western“ contexts and actors to understand the contested history of development, their difference with regards to „Western“ actors has to be carefully established and should not be assumed to be self-evident.

#### Conference Overview:

Aliya Tonkobayeva (Jacobs University, Bremen): Rural Development in Soviet Kazakhstan: Virgin Lands Campaign.

Max Trecker (Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich): The „Grapes of Cooperation“? Bulgarian and East German Plans to Build a Cement Industry in Syria.

Dienabou Barry (Jacobs University, Bremen): Women and Development: The Case of the Office du Niger in Mali, 1960 to 2006.

Martin Breuer (University of Bielefeld): The Andean Indian Programme and the Nexus of Indigenismo and International Development Cooperation in the Andes, 1952-1972.

Annika Hartmann (Justus Liebig University Gießen): Measuring Modernity – Demographic Knowledge and Discourses of Development in Guatemala in the 1960s and 1970s.

Teresa Huhle (University of Bremen): Comment on the Presentations.

Open Roundtable Discussion.

Tagungsbericht *Contested Meanings of Development and Modernization in Non-Western Contexts*. 10.03.2016–11.03.2016, Bremen, in: H-Soz-Kult 02.09.2016.