



Universität  
Basel

## Research Project

### The Work of State Imageries: How Imageries of Governance and the State Constitute Everyday Practice in Conflict Affected West Africa. (Extension)

#### Third-party funded project

**Project title** The Work of State Imageries: How Imageries of Governance and the State Constitute Everyday Practice in Conflict Affected West Africa. (Extension)

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**Organisation / Research unit**

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Visuelle und politische Ethnologie (Förster)

**Department**

**Project start** 01.07.2012

**Probable end** 28.02.2014

**Status** Completed

This proposal is an extension of the SNF project on “The Work of State Imageries” from 2009 through 2012. It brings the PhD case studies in Liberia, Guinea and closely related research projects in Côte d’Ivoire and Mali together (SNSF 100012-117766 and submitted project “Politics of Governance”). It will lead to the completion of the two PhD case studies and a more comprehensive understanding of state imageries, governance and everyday social reality in the West African conflict region. The aim of the project remains to understand how imageries of governance and the state emerge and are shaped and how they influence everyday practices of the local population in conflict-affected West Africa. The second phase will build on the findings of the comprehensive fieldwork conducted in the West African countries since 2009 and the extensive conceptual and theoretical work at the Institute of Social Anthropology. The fields of enquiry remain the urban and peri-urban spaces where the two PhD students have worked since 2009/2011: Monrovia, Liberia; and Kankan, Guinea. The project continues to document and analyse the practices through which local actors try to find a way out of the crisis and to shape their relationships with the state – a theme that is still neglected in recent research. First results of the project already led to a conceptual rethinking of governance and imagination in general and of the West African conflict beyond the immediate agenda of the main political actors in particular. The key questions are bound to this promising strand of research and reflection. They are refined with regard to the already existing findings and theoretical work:

- do imageries of the state and governance affect the political articulation?
- does this political articulation shape the formation of social spaces and actors?
- do the imageries of state and governance feed into the societal imaginary?
- do they affect the practice of governance and social practice in general?

Approach: The initial assumption of 2008 that imageries of governance and the state are continuously shaped and reshaped by all social actors in everyday encounters, as, for instance, between government employees and ordinary citizens, has proved true. Because of the often latent, ephemeral or nascent character of such processes, the present extension remains based on the actor-oriented, inductive approach avoiding normative Western concepts. It has already served as a successful methodology since

2009.

**Methodology:** The methodology relies on the Emic Evaluation Approach (EEA) that has already served as the central research tool during the first period of the project. As all researchers are well embedded into local networks, the feasibility is excellent.

Empirical research will develop further on two crosscutting questions about a) how the imagery of the state is shaped by the people in everyday encounters, and b) how this imagery is translated into everyday practices, based on the shaping process in social spaces. The case studies, carried out by two already appointed PhD researchers, will further address the two questions in different but related social and economic settings in the urban and suburban spaces of Guinea and Liberia. One case study will be completed in June 2013, the other needs additional fieldwork and will end in June 2015. Complementary research is conducted by the head of the project in Côte d'Ivoire and by the researchers of closely related projects in Guinea, Mali and other African countries.

**Cooperation:** The project is fully integrated in the Research Group on Political Transformations at the Institute of Social Anthropology, Basel, and closely cooperates with partners in Zürich, Hamburg, Uppsala, Monrovia, Kankan, Bouaké and Bamako. A concluding conference on "State Imageries" is planned with these partners for 2013 at the University of Monrovia. At a more theoretical level, the researchers continuously exchange with colleagues at the universities of Freiburg, Leipzig, Leiden, Stellenbosch and Witwatersrand South Africa, Yale University New Haven CN, Dartmouth College Hanover NH, and CODESRIA, Dakar, Senegal.

#### **Financed by**

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**Follow-up project of 55949** [The Work of the State Imageries: How Imageries of Governance and the State Constitute Everyday Practice in Conflict Affected West Africa.](#)

**Add publication**

**Add documents**

**Specify cooperation partners**

ID	Kreditinhaber	Kooperationspartner	Institution	Laufzeit - von	Laufzeit - bis
1541232	Förster, Till	Utas, Mats, Professor	University of Uppsala	01.07.2012	30.06.2015
1541240	Förster, Till	Sesay, Amadu, Professor	University of Sierra Leone	01.07.2012	30.06.2015
2794931	Förster, Till	Sayndee, Debey, Professor	Kofi Annan Institute of Conflict, University of Liberia	01.07.2012	30.09.2014