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Abstracts from the panel

Preparing for future crises:  
Temporal possibilities and their materialisations



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# When invasiveness manifests: the zebra mussel and its implications for conflict management and planning practices

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In this paper, I will reflect on the transformative possibilities of non-human entities and species for infrastructures, planning practices and conflict management. In 2006, the species Zebra mussel was introduced into the largest Danish river infrastructure, Gudenåen. Sitting at the bottom of canoes and other human induced- mobilities and disturbances, the Zebra mussel has today spread throughout the entire river infrastructure. Upon meeting the river infrastructure the mussel became invasive and destabilised the system; essentially transforming and altering it. I explore how these ecological transformations created a crisis moment through the extensive flooding it produced, which led to political and local mobilisation, new social practices, local conflicts and altered temporal possibilities. Drawing on field observations, interviews, workshops, historical material and text analysis, I trace the species through its knots and nodes in the infrastructural system to reveal its visibilities and invisibilities through its materialisations, consequences and the narratives surrounding it.

I argue that current planning practices and conflict management are inefficient as non-human actors, such as the Zebra mussel, have the potential to destabilise and transform physical surroundings, essentially creating new preconditions and foundations for planners. I show this through a focus on the current cross-municipal flood protection plan developed for the Danish river infrastructure, Gudenåen, which takes its starting point in the status quo maintenance of the infrastructure. I argue that the flood protection plan is devised through the interaction and practices between both human and non-human actors. The preparations for crises in the midst of the nonplanned consequences of non-human actors within infrastructures therefore deem it impossible to plan without the inclusion of non-human actors and their capacity to alter and change systems. Social imaginaries in the form of plans and future scenarios must therefore be grounded in multispecies relationships between both human and non-human actors.

# Decolonizing Disaster Preparedness in the Caribbean: The Role of Non-Sovereign Territories and Efforts at Regional Cooperation

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The Caribbean has the largest concentration of “Partially Independent Territories” (PIT’s) in the world. These islands, most of which have histories defined by colonial settlement and plantation slavery, have opted to maintain political ties with larger metropolitan states thousands of miles away, creating what Malcom Ferdinand et al have called a “last, never-ending phase of colonialism”. As Ferdinand and his co-authors argue, an awareness of the vulnerabilities produced by both the islands’ geography and history inform the continued acceptance of these fraught, often deeply unsatisfactory arrangements. While inclusion in European markets and social welfare systems alleviate vulnerability in these territories, it also alienates PIT’s from neighboring islands, which undermines regional efforts to coordinate and improve disaster preparedness. In this paper, I consider the examples of Martinique and Guadeloupe, which have been full overseas French departments (DOM’s) since 1946. Using a transhistorical approach, I argue that the French Antilles’ experience with multiple, large disasters in the years leading up to WWII, including the eruption of Mount Pelée in Martinique in 1902, conditioned support for full integration. Antilleans realized the urgent need for disaster relief following these events, and that access to aid was contingent upon achieving administrative parity with metropolitan French departments.

Today, however, national and EU oversight of risk reduction is often out of step with local realities. Government structures responsible for developing and implementing preparedness plans bear a striking resemblance to hierarchies of response that existed when the Antilles were still colonies. National administration of risk reduction precludes participation in pan-Caribbean efforts to prepare for disasters while reducing the pool of resources available to regional organizations such as CARICOM (The Caribbean Community) to respond to disasters that often impact the entire region, negatively affecting poorer and less-developed countries in the region. While the pressures of climate change today reaffirm certain advantages of non-sovereignty; nevertheless partial independence also reinforces a form of colonial fragmentation of the region along cultural, political and economic lines. I argue that this impedes the articulation of a more geographically-situated, cooperative, and regional response to disaster planning.

# Counting on Crisis: planning and preparing disaster relief interventions in Malawi

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Malawi, a land-locked country in Southern Africa, is heavily impacted by climate change. Disasters such as flooding and drought are increasing in frequency and intensity, giving relief interventions an almost seasonal character. Apart from being disaster-prone, the country is also dependent on donor aid, a condition that becomes more pronounced when disaster strikes. Efforts to connect development and relief interventions, referred to as strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus, have been a central concern of the international community for several years but solving the clash between projects grounded in developmental ideas of progress versus projects based on humanitarian ideals of relief and recovery, is difficult in practice.

In line with international agreements like the Sendai framework, countries like Malawi are entitled to additional assistance to cope with the effects of climate change but the responsibility to do so primarily lies with the state. Malawi's underfunded Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DODMA) is tasked with both disaster response and disaster risk reduction. Activities related to the former are present-oriented and often executed with great urgency in a context of immediate need whereas activities related to the latter tend to be future-oriented and have to be integrated into the ordinary, everyday way of doing things. In a context of aid-dependency, the interconnections between development, disasters and disaster risk reduction make DODMA's work of preventing and planning or preparing for disasters a complex task.

In this paper I explore the humanitarian-development nexus in Malawi ethnographically by focusing on the clashing and converging timelines that structure disaster relief interventions in the present as well as planned responses to anticipated disasters in imagined futures. Based on twelve months of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork with district-based civil servants of the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DODMA), I suggest that in Malawi both state and non-state actors count on crisis in order to obtain much needed resources. I claim that this de-politicizes and obscures the ordinariness of disasters as well as parallel processes that are of pivotal importance to the cycles of planning, preparation and implementation of disaster relief interventions, ultimately hampering our understating of effective ways to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus.

# Rebuilding the Future: Disaster Anticipation and Recovery Planning in Vancouver, Canada

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In November 2019, my partner and I attended a lively workshop on art and earthquake resilience in Vancouver, Canada. We were there, alongside artists, organizers, and concerned residents, because all of us knew, at some level, that Vancouver could face 'The Big One' at any moment. Using hot-glue and found objects, organizers asked us to imagine a post-earthquake future, materialising our vision as a commentary on how society would or could respond to a seismic disaster. Participants worked alone or in groups to produce small sculptures: a community garden of bottlecaps lined with bits of driftwood; a futuristic house with tin-can walls and cardboard solar panels; or a lighthouse of sticks and wire mesh that would serve as a beacon to bring people together. Though the aesthetics resembled the dystopic world of *Mad Max*, the stories of these sculptures told of an aftermath where society practiced sustainable living, neighbourliness, and mutual aid. Kirsten Hastrup asserts that "the most valuable general insight produced by anthropologists studying the effects of climate change on particular societies is that people never see themselves as without some kind of future, somewhere"(2016, 51). What that future looks like can vary drastically from person to person. In this ethnographic project, I ask, how do people draw on their values to imagine a post-disaster future for their neighbourhood, and what implications do those imagined futures have for disaster recovery planning?

Large earthquakes are simultaneously knowable and unknowable in the Pacific Northwest. While Indigenous oral histories and geological analyses confirm that earthquakes have shaped life and landscapes across the region for millennia, at the same time, no one alive today has experienced a destructive earthquake in Vancouver and its environs. Given the unpredictability of major earthquakes, plans for reducing seismic vulnerabilities must vie for political capital alongside the many present crises facing the city, which are also entangled with contested histories and contemporary urban imaginaries. By placing a pre-disaster society in the temporal space of long-term post-disaster recovery, I draw out lessons for recovery planning in an unpredictable present.

## Works Cited

Hastrup, Kirsten. 2016. "Climate Knowledge: Assemblage, Anticipation, Action." In *Anthropology and Climate Change: From Actions to Transformations*, edited by Susan A. Crate and Mark Nuttall, 35–57. New York: Routledge.

# Planning for multiple disasters along West African borders: between standardisation and localisation

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This article homes in on projects geared towards the involvement of 'local and rural populations' as a new strategy to prepare for crises in West African borders. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Senegal and Mali in 2019, and an internship at an UN Agency, this article homes in on the design, preparation and implementation of awareness-raising campaigns and a crisis simulation exercise along the borders between Senegal and its neighbouring countries. Drawing on border and security studies (Frowd 2014; Frowd and Sandor 2018) and on the literature on crises preparedness and simulations (Collier 2008; Elie et al. 2014; Enria 2019, 2020; Lakoff 2017; Revet 2020), it engages in the everyday operations of actors dealing with securitisation practices exploring how the latter test local and international security forces' responses, as well as prepare inhabitants to various disaster scenarios. The article is thus an ethnographic engagement with both the notion of preparedness (in the form of a simulation exercise) and of risk and prevention (through awareness-raising campaigns), exploring how multiple crises and disasters are 'practiced' and 'imagined' together: from terrorist attacks to mass displacement and environmental catastrophes. I argue that what is at the core of the planning of these speculative dangers is a contradictory tendency. On the one hand, crises imaginaries are adapted "to the ground" (drawing on regional and national knowledge and information with the help of 'local communities') and on the other, these potential scenarios are standardized, by being increasingly replicated across the continent and beyond.