



# The Uncertain State

Uncertainty as everyday experience and mode of governmentality in contemporary India

## Guest lecture by Prof. Dr. Geert De Neve (University of Sussex)

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17.00-18.30

KOL-G-212

Karl-Schmid-Strasse 71, 8006 Zürich

In this presentation, we draw on the concept of uncertainty to explore the ways in which poor and predominantly low-caste villagers in India experience the state in their everyday lives. Through a focus on several social protection schemes in contemporary Tamil Nadu, we present ethnography of everyday narratives about localised encounters with bureaucratic processes and actors to illustrate what this uncertainty consists of, how it is produced, and what its effects are on the rural poor.

We examine how uncertainty is articulated through various interrelated modalities of which we consider four here: temporal, material, procedural and those related to classification and eligibility. We unpack each of these ethnographically in order to, firstly, reveal the effects of bureaucratic processes and state (in)action on the rural poor, and to show how uncertainty engenders both agency and paralysis. Secondly, drawing on a growing literature on bureaucratic processes in South Asia, we consider uncertainty as a mode of governmentality through which the state exerts control over its populations and produces variegated forms of citizenship that are marked by a considerable degree of indifference towards its most vulnerable citizens.

We contribute to a conceptualisation of governmentality as a highly indirect and fragmented process that nevertheless results in the production of systemic neglect and in the construction of some citizens as expendable and undeserving of state attention.

To participate in the event online, please register at <https://www.aoi.uzh.ch/en/institut/events/registration.html>

Students, staff and everyone interested is cordially invited.