

ISAS Public Lecture Series



State Highway 31: A road trip through the heart of modern India

a talk by

Edward Simpson

Social Anthropologist & Director of the South
Asia Institute at SOAS, University of London

Talk Abstract: This talk follows the route of State Highway 31 through western Madhya Pradesh, central India. The research was part of a larger project looking at the ideas behind the production of infrastructure in South Asia. This journey takes us through landscapes of sex work and opium, some of the oldest nationalist networks in the country, and along the fault-lines of long-running tensions between local communities. The road was one of a series built as a public private partnership and, as such, speaks of the reconfiguration of state relations with private capital and business. Toll booths become places of company ethos, education and for the creation of new kinds of citizens. The nexus of government and private enterprise takes us on a dizzying journey through the world's tax havens and onto the decks of luxury yachts. Exploring the broader political economy of the road and the organisation of institutions and travellers that sustain it encourages questions about the nature of governance and power in the country.

Speaker Bio: Edward Simpson is a Social Anthropologist and Director of the South Asia Institute at SOAS University of London. He is currently interested in the relationship between infrastructure, automobility and the global-sustainability agenda. From previous research he wrote: *The Political Biography of an Earthquake: Aftermath and Amnesia in Gujarat, India.* (Hurst 2013). He is the Principal Investigator on a five-year project funded by the European Research Council looking at infrastructure across South Asia. This work is being undertaken in partnership with the Mumbai-based artists CAMP.

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12-2 p.m.

10 Stephens Hall, (For directions look up "Institute for South Asia Studies" on Google Maps)

Cosponsors: Sarah Kailath Chair of India Studies

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