

Report on the 4<sup>th</sup> International Crossroads Asia Conference:  
“Crossroads Studies: Mobilities, Immobilities and the Issue  
of Positionality for Rethinking Area Studies”  
27-28 November 2014, in Bonn

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*by Catherine Reynolds*

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Closing Remarks), and thanks to Lea Willeke.*

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## About the 4th International Crossroads Asia Conference

### **About Crossroads Asia**

The competence network Crossroads Asia, funded by the Area Studies Initiative of the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), started off in March 2011. Comprised of half a dozen research institutions with regional expertise covering Afghanistan, Iran, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Northern India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Xinjiang, the network aims to further understanding of the geographic area stretching from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. At the same time, the network challenges the validity of the traditional approach to Area Studies still found at many German universities: dividing the world into territorially fixed areas and investigating the specific set of traits that allegedly characterize them. The network's counter approach aspires to identify concepts of area that take into account key dynamics like the constant mobility of people, goods and ideas across borders. The research within the network has centered on figurations, defined as specific causal and functional connections making up a constellation (e.g. a familial, religious, or economic network), which can begin in a given location and stretch to far-flung corners of the world, perhaps then returning to where they began or taking off in a new direction. These figurations, collectively forming a perpetual crossroads, can be altered or stabilized based on minor changes to small parts. The Crossroads Asia network investigates figurations and their dynamics using methods from the disciplines geography, political science, sociology, linguistics and social anthropology, among others.

### **About "Crossroads Studies"**

Four years into the study of everyday interactions among people with a connection to the geographic area bounded by Eastern Iran, Northern India, the Aral Sea and Western China, the network organized a conference to reflect on the lessons learned thus far. The conference asked: How do categories of spatial organization emerge? How can these findings be useful for rethinking Area Studies in general?

The Network's empirical research had shown that different mobilities, as well as immobilities, and thus different types of borders and boundaries, are negotiated, take on shape, come into being or are deconstructed again as a consequence of human communication and interaction processes. The conference, with nearly 100 participants, aimed to generate discussion on mobilities/immobilities and borders/boundaries, in order to identify key lines of empirically based thought on how socio-cultural and physical spaces are defined.

Furthermore, the conference aimed to further an understanding of and promote knowledge production at the crossroads between fields of study like social sciences and Area Studies. Finally, the conference worked to create an edifice for reflecting on a researcher's own position in conducting Area Studies research. Taken together, the findings from the conference will feed into a "Crossroads Studies" research program, or a "Crossroads Perspective", which can help structure empirical, conceptual and methodological debates on the rethinking of Area Studies. Contributions to the conference hailed from Asia, Australia, Europe and the Americas; the scholarship presented dealt not only with Asia, but also with other parts of the world.

## Welcome Note by Anna-Katharina Hornidge



Anna-Katharina Hornidge (ZEF, Crossroads Asia Scientific Coordinator 2012 - 2014) opened the conference with a few examples highlighting the relevance of studying (im)mobility and border patterns for understanding current events, such as the Ebola outbreak, the activities of the ‘Islamic State’ in Iraq and Syria, and the renegotiation of the political border between Russia and the Ukraine. In all cases, the meaning given to relevant borders and boundaries (whether geographic, ethnic or political) is in flux and can only be understood as being a product of social interaction, influenced by changing patterns of (im)mobility.

The fact that changes in the meaning of borders and boundaries brought about by new (im)mobilities increasingly affect so many aspects of our lives has been elaborated upon by the preeminent sociologists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, Hornidge pointed out. Rapid mobility and shifting borders/boundaries can be seen, according to Beck and Giddens, as consequences of the first modernity, consequences that we are underprepared to handle. To illustrate this, Hornidge read a short excerpt from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s poem *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, in which the poem’s protagonist is overwhelmed by the power of the magic spirits that he evokes. She encouraged the conference’s participants to confront the forces of modernity that we have evoked and are facing. To do so, she said, we should seek dialogue in “in-between” spaces, that is, unexplored spaces, spaces of innovation, spaces between what Knorr-Cetina (1999: 12) calls “the diversity of the manufacturing systems from which truth effects arise”.

Finally, Hornidge also shared the news that Crossroads Asia had received two further years of funding from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and would be taking a step from the mainly empirical research oriented first phase of the project to a more analysis, synthesizing and transfer oriented second phase, starting in January 2015. She explained that the focus of the research will shift to a more in-depth analysis of (a) the dynamics of different types of mobility and immobility and (b) the negotiation of boundaries and borders in processes of boundary-drawing and -weakening.

[To watch Anna-Katharina Hornidge’s entire welcome note, please follow this link to the online video.](#)

## Keynote: “21st Century Legacies of Area Studies: Theoretical and Strategic Responses to Multiplying Hegemonies and the Neoliberal University” by Peter Jackson

*Peter Jackson is a professor in the department of Gender, Media & Cultural Studies at Australian National University (ANU), a part of the largest Area Studies department in Australia, i.e., the College of Asia and the Pacific. Jackson has been rethinking Area Studies from the perspective of critical*



*theory and critical humanities since the 1990s.*

Jackson began his talk with an anecdote illustrating that the issue of *areas versus disciplines* is literally “divided down the middle” at ANU. During a restructuring in which 80 scholars of history, archeology, anthropology, linguistics, etc. were brought into a single Area Studies faculty, it was debated extensively whether to have departments based on areas/regions or instead based on disciplines. After the debate repeatedly came to an impasse, they established both types of departments, with each scholar required to align his or herself with a discipline and an area.

**Jackson’s talk responded to three central critiques of Area Studies:**

- 1. Area Studies reflect imperialist and Cold War era political agendas.**
- 2. Area Studies are overly empirical and resistant to theory.**
- 3. Area Studies are outdated, given that globalization has erased the relevance of containers/areas.**

In response to the first critique, Jackson agreed with e.g. Winichakul (2014) that **imperialist thinking and the Cold War era priorities** have unduly shaped the forms of knowledge that we now see, even those of scholars who tried to remain critical of knowledge pathways. He also supported the criticism of Mielke & Hornidge (2014) that even **the current discourse on “rethinking Area Studies” is very Eurocentric**, as it has for example not engaged with how scholars in Southeast Asia imagine spatialities.

Jackson expanded upon this critique to show that even the increase in Southeast Asian Studies departments in Southeast Asia has not necessarily led to **resistance against imperialism**. In both Japan and China, for example, Southeast Asian Studies is pursued in line with geostrategic interests. Jackson concluded that there is too little scholarship on “new and emerging hegemonies”, e.g. China, and their forms of imperialism.

With regard to the second critique point, Jackson takes very seriously Naoki Sakai’s (2002) argument that **disciplines can be seen as Western Area Studies in disguise**; their knowledge is a geographically limited form of knowledge (e.g. sociology is based to a large degree on societal theories based on the analysis of Western societies), which has been used to make generalizations. He called upon **academia to remain flexible enough to produce original knowledge forms, including by allowing for new fields** (e.g. Gender, Ethnic, Queer and Transgender studies) **to emerge** and become established fields of study, in journals, networks, etc..

Jackson outlined two approaches to confronting Eurocentrism: 1) take existing (Western) theories, critically engage with them and expand upon them, or 2) look for new ideas/perspectives emerging out of other study regions and begin to generalize them into wide-ranging theories. In this context he cautioned against conflating the spread of Western ideas coming from Asian sites, e.g. Geertz’s notion of “theatre state”, Anderson’s “imagined communities”, James C. Scott’s “weapons of the weak” etc., with the diffusion of truly Asian scholarship.

Jackson concluded his response to the second critique of Area Studies by supporting Allen Chun’s

(2008) conclusion that there is an unequal “division of labor” in global knowledge production. At the top of a **“caste-like” hierarchy** are privileged global scholars (in renowned Western academic institutions) with a monopoly on theory production; they dominate over local scholars who are eternally relegated to remain empiricists. Jackson encouraged his listeners to work against the “institutional regimes that bind us” (quoting Chun), to critically assess and reform the institutions that perpetuate these hierarchies and divisions.

**In response to the question of what effect globalization has had on Area Studies**, Jackson asserted that predictions made in the 90s – about homogenization resulting from globalization referring to Ritzer’s famous thesis – have not come to bear. Globalization has altered but not erased spatiality, as spatiality is necessary to understand the various types of (im)mobility. He cited Spivak’s (2003) observation that borders are selectively permeable (easier or more difficult to cross), depending on where one is starting from. Therefore, spatial and other forms of power have not been erased. Jackson indeed asserted that **“forms of knowledge are reflections of and formed out of the intersection of spatiality and power.”**

Returning to an analysis of where power is situated, Jackson critically evaluated the “performance-indicator-oriented academic model” that leads to an over-valuation of American and British universities and related scholarship. He points out furthermore that Western academic practices strongly disincentivize the publication of research within the country where that research was carried out. That is, one gets more credit for publishing with an American journal/publisher than a Thai one, even one’s research is on Thailand.

Jackson summarized his strategic responses to the various dilemmas of Area Studies with three necessary actions:

- “Border thinking”, i.e., reversing the flow of knowledge; theories should be emerging from a much wider empirical base; areas of knowledge production seen as peripheral need to be brought into the mainstream.
- Collaborative cross-border research.
- Academic activism in the form of publishing beyond Euro-America in the regions in which we work (this is especially relevant for those with “safer” academic careers), so that local colleagues can more easily access it.

[To watch the full conference keynote, please follow this link to the online video.](#)

## Panel 1: To Be or Not to Be is Not the Question: Rethinking Area Studies in its Own Right



The first panel, chaired by **Claudia Derichs** (University of Marburg/University of Duisburg-Essen), started with the paper of **Cynthia Chou** (University of Copenhagen): **“The Case for Reconceptualising Southeast Asian Studies”**. Cynthia Chou showed that many Area Studies are losing support at many higher institutions of learning in Europe. She also pointed out that there are vastly different conceptualizations of “Southeast Asias” among existing Area Studies programs. Chou argued that the complexity and differentiation within the region necessitates a broader “heuristic approach”, an approach which engages not only in dialogue and debate within the academic world and in different disciplines but also with the very people who are of and in Southeast Asia itself. At the end of her paper she comes to the conclusion that, although some Southeast Asian studies programs have been challenged by globalist thinkers, they have forged ahead into a new phase, expanding their spheres of knowledge production. Southeast Asian studies programs have become a crucial platform for communication across barriers and have made crucial contributions, such as to the analytical categories “thick description”, “imagined communities” and “moral economy”.

The second paper, presented by **Ali Fathollah-Nejad** (German Orient Institute & Free University of Berlin), **“Rethinking ‘Middle Eastern Studies’: Analytical and Conceptual Queries and Propositions”**, offered a summary of critiques put forward by scholars working in the field on the ways in which the Middle East has been researched after the “Arab Spring”, particularly in relation to Islam and the geopolitical role of Middle Eastern countries. Fathollah-Nejad argued that the production of knowledge in this domain has been foremost linked to imperial interests rather than to academic concerns (as witnessed in studies on authoritarianism). He criticized what he sees as an “over-Islamization” in academic research as well as policy analysis, the tendency of researchers to consider any event taking place in the Middle East in relation to “Islam.” He urged researchers to deculturalize/ethnize Middle Eastern Studies and to focus instead on topics such as political economy, socio-economic dynamics, neoliberalism, power inequalities, and social movements, while taking into consideration the entire spectrum of the region’s political cultures beyond Islamism(s).

The last paper was presented by **Deepra Dandekar** (University of Heidelberg): **“Margins of Center? Konkani Sufi Muslims between India and Arabastan”**. In her paper Dandekar explored the special case of Konkani Sufi shrines in Maharashtra (India) as public spheres that were influenced by Sufi saints from Arabastan (loosely, the Arabian Peninsula). Through ethnographic field research she discovered how the discourse of the Sufi saint and his shrine is viewed as a continuation of the Arabian Peninsula via the sea route. Konkani Sufi Muslims demarcate themselves as unique and dissociate themselves from North and Indian Sufi Muslim traditions. They consider themselves to be an older and a more original Islamic counterpart than adherents to North Indian Islamic traditions that are predominantly Christi and Hanafi. The Konkans construct a region wherein their migrant Sufi saints are encompassed with many other local beliefs in ways that renders Konkana a borderland between Maharashtra, North India and Arabastan simultaneously, even as they evade vernacular politics, minoritization politics and both the Islamic and Indic discourse. According to Dandekar’s ethnographic enquiry, the rural Konkana hinterland has become increasingly depopulated of Muslims since the beginning of the 21st century; people report significant migrations to Pakistan or the Gulf countries, where they can live closely with the larger Umma. At the end of her paper Dandekar points out the failure of syncretism discourses in Maharashtra; here, attempts to integrate Hindu shared



practices in Sufi shrines have not led to adoption and protection of Konkana Sufi Muslim tradition, but rather further contributed to its decline.

The presentations were followed by a general discussion pointing to the fact that research in Area Studies in Western countries tends toward homogenizing, making

entities and following political interests. The need to give more consideration to the different ways of producing knowledge was stressed. With specific regard to Middle Eastern Studies, it was suggested that academic studies place greater emphasis on social and economic developments and cultural politics, providing a counterpart to the focus on Islam. The non-centrality of Islam and the absence of Islamic parties in the revolutionary movement during the Arab spring were pointed out as an example of the tangentially relevant nature of Islam to Middle Eastern Studies.

## Panel 2: The Nexus Mobility/Immobility in Rethinking Area Studies

The second panel, chaired by **Dietrich Reetz** (ZMO, Berlin), illuminated the mobility/immobility nexus from distinct perspectives.

The contribution of **Seonyoung Seo** (National University of Singapore), **“Transnational Spaces and Governmentality in Nepal - South Korea Labour Migration”**, focused on the effects of geographic mobility on (a) spatialities in the country of origin, in this case the landscapes in Nepali cities, and (b)

how the produced transnational space between South Korea and Nepal influences the subjecthood of prospective migrants, in particular their adoption of the neoliberal ideology and a related self-identification as 'backward' while preparing and training to become 'appropriate workers'. The paper is based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork with a strong reliance on visual ethnographic methods and participant observation, for example in Korean language institutions in Nepal.

In his discussion on gift exchange practices among poor household members of two *biraderis* (kinship groups) in rural Punjab, **Aftab Nasir** (ZEF) highlighted how social immobility is perpetuated by institutions which are commonly perceived to be enabling, because they provide some type of social security, protection and belonging. However, as he showed, the performance of *vartan bhanji* is dependent on motility factors or dispositions of poor households' members and social (im-)mobility manifests as a function of these assets and is at the same time bounded by one's place in a *biraderi* and the network relations it provides. Interestingly, by contrasting poor with rich *biraderi* members' abilities to perform and enact *vartan bhanji*, the paper, entitled **"Boon or Burden: The Obligations of Vartan Bhanji and Coping Strategies of Poor Households of Different Biraderis Living in Rural Punjab"**, pointed to the relational and situationally negotiated meaning of social mobility.

The presentation by **Anastasia Christou** (Middlesex University) treated the mobility/immobility nexus by researching women's stories and life trajectories that originated in Eastern Europe, but were struggling to belong in crisis-ridden Greece at the time of fieldwork. Conceptually, the study, **"Gendered Histories of Resilience and Resistance: Eastern European Women's Narratives of Mobility and Survival"**, explored the relationship between migrancy and place-making, homing and belonging/non-belongingness, related processes of boundary-drawing, boundary-weakening, and fixity. Methodologically, her insights shed light on the 'emotional labor' involved in this kind of oral history research, where both, the positionalities of researcher and researched are constantly challenged to unpack meanings and threads of mobilities through personal experiences.

**Henryk Alff** (ZELF, FU Berlin) presented on Almaty's Barakholka bazaar, illustrating how the mobile practices of trade entrepreneurs (re-)negotiated the meanings of centrality and periphery/remoteness. In his talk, **"Red Lines for Uncivilised Trade? Fixity, Mobility and Position on Almaty's Changing Bazaars"**, he traced discursive practices to reveal how fixity is subject to negotiation and that seemingly fixed modes of binary positions are influenced by different levels/degrees of social relations and exchange. Thus, again, the position one has as bazaar trader or entrepreneur, as well as the relations and alliances one might be able to enter, determine one's mobility and alter seeming fixity. Particularly interesting in this regard is the notion that social mobility – conventionally we are inclined to speak of "upward" social mobility – has to be acknowledged to be termed as such. This again – reinforcing the findings of Nasir's presentation – points to fact that social mobility has different meanings and significance, and these transgress the traditional binary of upward vs. downward social mobility.

All presentations in this panel indicated that apparent (geographic or social) fixity is negotiable rather than fixed; it depends on position(alitie)s and social motility factors. The social mobility terminology and concepts require further careful investigation and differentiation.

### Panel 3: Re-Imagining Communities: Borderlands, Nation States and Power of Epistemological Ordering

Chair **Hermann Kreutzmann** (ZELF, FU Berlin) opened the panel by explaining that borders should be understood as physical structures as well as social constructions. He asked, What can we learn about the creation of borders? Are there any commonalities in the case studies?

In her presentation **“Immigrants to the Land. On the Borders between the Water World and the Land World”**, **Linh Nguyen** (Syracuse University) investigated the border between land and sea by using the example of fishermen in rural Vietnam, who are physically very mobile and have accumulated considerable material wealth through their mobility, as expressed e.g. in large and representative houses. In spite of their richness they are (still) positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Contrary to what is often assumed by the mainstream mobility discourse, a high level of mobility in their case has not translated into social advancement and liberation. This is due to the specific nature of the movement of fishermen, which exclusively takes place in the sea space and involves long periods of absence from land. Fishermen perceive their mobility in terms of fixity and ‘imprisonment’ (being caught for long periods on very small boats) and loss (of youth, of life, of knowledge about the life on land). The fishermen, experts in the water world, lack education and orientation in the land world, since their maritime skills are not transferable and useless there. Furthermore, due to their long absences from land, they cannot lose touch with what is occurring on land. This has resulted in their ‘terrestrial exclusion’, i.e. social exclusion in the land world, in which they lack social capital, cultural capital and even mobility capital.

With her example, **Linh Nguyen** pointed to a ‘land bias’ prevalent in Area Studies which excludes or at least marginalizes maritime areas and maritime mobility. She recommended investigating just as much ‘water worlds’, i.e. the space of the sea, from which new ideas about crossing borders can be drawn. The study of the border between the terrestrial and the maritime world and of the people crossing it can reveal the nexus between power, politics and border. Identities are constructed and contested through the sea and its connection or disconnection to the land.

**Radikha Gupta** (University of Göttingen), presenting on **“Acts of Imagination. Sustaining Kargil as a Crossroads on the India-Pakistan Border”**, focused on the ‘long partition’ of the Balti people, who have been divided by the Line of Control (LOC) since the partition of the Kashmir region between India and Pakistan in 1947. The Balti of Kargil, who are in the center of her case study, did not move across borders but were “displaced” and “replaced” because of the delimitation of the LOC and a constantly shifting border line, and thus involuntarily left on “the wrong side of the border”. These cross-border dwellers are neither trans-migrants nor refugees in exile. Despite the impermeability of the LOC, Gupta observed the continued existence of strong emotional and cultural links across the impassable border. This finds expression, e.g., in narrations of (imagined) travels to the other side, and in the exchange of poetry, books and music, objects and cultural artefacts. In an act of ‘post amnesias’ imagination, the border dwellers try to recreate the other side and transgress the boundaries through stories, artefacts, as well as psychological imaginations and political visions, such



as a 'trans-Himalayan identity' and a 'Greater Ladakh'. Based on their specific historical experience, which pushed them into an 'existential situation' of 'structural betweenness', their sense of belonging, kinship, national identity and citizenship, their longing for the other side, and many of their stories became political categories. Gupta pointed to the existence of a tension between the geo-body of the nation state and the affective body of the citizens.

Places are of central importance for sustaining cross-border ties. These can be virtual places like the internet, third places (e.g. Balti from different sides of the LOC meeting during hajj), or cultural places, like poetry and music, i.e. maintaining ties through the circulation of culture. Despite the Baltis' limited physical mobility they cultivate a strong trans-Himalayan regional identity, drawing from perceived common history, landscape, material culture, language, and food. This enables us to reconstruct the region in a different way, in contrast to the reductionist conception of Kargil as a militarized frontier zone in the geo-political paradigm. Gupta argues for regarding allegedly 'remote' mountain regions as central for the sociology and anthropology of the state.

**Jagannath Panda** (Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis, New Delhi) spoke on **"The borderless BCIM: Between the Politics of Sub-Regional Cooperation and Coexistence"**. Using the example of the BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar) economic corridor, he discussed the opportunities for



making South Asia's borders more permeable in a framework of regional economic and political cooperation, aiming at facilitating cross-border trade, promoting peaceful conflict resolution and building mutual confidence. The issues of conflict, migration and development, which were central points of reference during the Crossroad Asia competence network's first phase, are all linked to BCIM. In the context of BCIM process, launched in 1999 on Chinese initiative, the four involved countries search for

viable mechanisms for sub-regional co-operation to peacefully negotiate conflicts, to find compromises on opposing interests, and to tap the immense economic trade potential in the region in order to enhance peace, stability, employment, economic growth and investments. The debates are about economic possibilities, boundaries but no borders, cooperation and coexistence.

In his talk, Panda provided a critical evaluation of the hitherto achieved outcomes and future prospects of the BCIM initiative from an economic and geo-political perspective. One of the central questions is, whether economic cooperation holds the promise of reducing conflicts in the border regions of the four member countries, whose populations and economies taken together make up a significant global share. Panda evaluated the BCIM initiative as not moving forward much and doubted whether its intended outcomes would prevail. Panda identifies as the main reasons for the initiative's failure geo-political fears and considerations of the two key actors involved: China and India. Particularly India's perception of the Chinese initiative as being part of China's outward-directed policy and strive for stronger influence in the South Asian region has created security concerns and political restraint in India. Hence, the BCIM initiative is perceived by India as a Chinese expansionist project and evokes fears of Chinese dominance. China's recent success in improving its bilateral relations with Myanmar and Bangladesh has added to the Indian concerns and objections, and has further cooled down the Indo-Chinese relations. Panda concludes that the BCIM process has

failed to achieve its objectives, and he recommends consideration of alternative forms of cross-border trade cooperation with a stronger role for local governmental bodies in the respective border region.

**Emrah Yildiz** (Harvard University) focused in his presentation **“Golden Shoes and Tobacco Seats: Currencies of Transaction across the Iran/Turkey border”** on Shiite Pilgrimage movements from Iran to the Sayyida Zainab shrine near Damascus. These pilgrimages are utilized for small scale-smuggling, or, ‘contraband’. While in the past up to 50 busloads of pilgrims arrived at the shrine daily, pilgrimage travels have strongly decreased since the outbreak of civil war in Syria and nearly come to a complete halt. People who had been combining (alleged) pilgrimage travels with this ‘irregular trade’ thus had to find alternative incomes. Some, for example, started smuggling gold in their shoes across the border of Iran and Turkey to the city of Antalya. Travel to this part of Turkey is more expensive but offers some advantages like visa-free border crossings and a higher return on smuggled commodities. On this trade route, tobacco and gold, as well as tea, sugar and oil, have become important ‘currencies’ of exchange in light of a devaluating Iranian Rial under the regime of international sanctions on the Iranian economy. The smuggling of these commodities to Turkey has become a means of livelihood under the current economic sanctions.

This conceptualization of borders can be understood as focusing on cross-border informalities, such as the utilization of international differences to bypass regulations and sanctions. It also has to be seen in the context of the eroding middle class in Iran. In addition to the small-scale ‘traders’ portrayed in the example, government officials are also exploiting the possibilities of illicit cross-border trade in large-scale gold deals.

## Panel 4: Positionality: Situating Knowledge(s) between Multiple Verges

Chair **Christoph Antweiler** (University of Bonn) opened the panel with a brief introduction to the panel themes to be addressed by the speakers, in particular:

- How should we as researchers position ourselves in relation to the worlds that we study, especially in the overarching process of rethinking Area Studies and disciplines?
- How can we bridge the epistemological gap between the local and empirical, on the one hand, and a West marked as universal and theoretical, on the other?

Antweiler stressed the interdisciplinarity of the panelists and pointed out that the presenters would address mainly the local discourses among actors in their specific cases, but also encouraged them to address their own situatedness/positionality as researchers.

The first paper, **“Configurations of Positioning and Dialogue in the Dynamics of European-Asian Encounters in the 17th/18th Century”**, by **Ulrike Kollodzeiski & Karsten Schmidt** (University of Frankfurt), focused on 17th and 18th century travel accounts by European travelers to Asia. In particular, the presenters analyzed accounts by Ippolito Desideri (who visited Persia, India and Tibet) and Pietro della Valle (on Mesopotamia, Persia and India). These travel accounts depict early forms of ethnographic research. Broadly, it was asked whether and how these travelers, on account of their mobility, questioned their identity and their own positioning in terms of religion and gender.

Kollodzeiski and Schmidt identified various approaches to how the authors of the travelogues viewed the relationship between their “own world” and the “other world”:

- Exclusivistic (the other world is described as the negation of the own world) and inclusivistic approach (the other world is described as an addition to the own world)
- Universalistic approach (both worlds have the same origin)
- Pluralistic approach: both worlds are seen as radically different

Religious meaning is given to many encounters, often with an exclusivistic approach and a missionary interpretation. Kollodzeiski and Schmidt pointed out the parallel processes of positioning taking place, both by the traveler in his time and by the contemporary researchers interpreting the travelogues. These processes of positioning include questioning the validity and universality of one’s own knowledge and putting that knowledge into context. Schmidt stressed the incommensurability of own with “foreign” knowledge in interpreting the travelogues, given that the normative value of language changes.

**Bianca Boteva-Richter** (University of Vienna), an intercultural philosopher, considered migration processes from a philosophical rather than a social science perspective. In her talk, **“The Society of Betweenness – Migration and Identities of Migrants”**, she emphasized the use of a temporal rather than a geographic lens for the analysis of migration. She began by exploring the notion of culture as a dynamic phenomenon and introduced migration as “culture in motion”. Migration, Boteva-Richter asserted, encompasses a variety of cultural experiences and entails the transfer of cultures and cultural artefacts in an intersubjective space. Boteva-Richter identified five stages of migration:

- Beginning to Wander or “Falling from the nest” (implying both a painful experience and the unleashing of a productive force)
- In the Middle of Wandering: Betweenness of the moving identity (re-linking of human connections at the target destination; re-classification and re-structuring of life)
- Betweenness as “Bringing into relation/re-connecting” (re-orientation, reconnection or rather re-connecting of human relations)
- Betweenness as Vacuum (retrospective orientation, which can threaten to hinder progress toward a new beginning)
- Betweenness as Creation (amalgamation of the exchange of perspectives triggered in the first stage)

Boteva-Richter drew on the work of the Japanese philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji, who coined the concept of “Man-between” (identity in migration) and the “Society of Betweenness”. She explained that “betweenness” is a Buddhist term that is very prominent in new Japanese philosophy.



[Bianca Boteva-Richter’s presentation can be viewed here.](#)

In the paper **“Positionality at the Crossroads – Gendered Lifeworlds, Social Situatedness**

**and the Relational Production of Place in the Context of Student Migration to Gilgit, Pakistan**", **Andreas Benz** (ZELF, FU Berlin) looked empirically at migration to the regional center from villages of Gilgit-Baltistan to Gilgit, regional hub providing higher education. Conceptually, Benz drew on the interplay of Doreen Massey's notion of the local as a "meeting place", a place of interaction, and Eric Sheppard's concept of socio-spatial positionality within a translocal configuration. Based on multi-sited interviews, Benz drew on four different places in the figuration of student migration from Ismaili areas of Gojal to Gilgit:

- The home place ("village place") where education often can only be accessed on the primary to high school level, is perceived as a comparatively liberal place, in particular, in particular for female students
- The city place (Gilgit) comes in the narratives as a segregated/violent and insecure place along the lines of religious sectarianism, especially for women (as above)
- The female student dormitory is posited against this insecurity as a safe place, but also one that is restricted
- The campus place (at the Karakorum International University) is seen as a meeting or as a pluralistic place, where students of all religious denominations come together despite segregation elsewhere

Benz stressed as the major insight the simultaneous effect of place-making through the relations of actors on their positioning and of positioning on the character of places. The female students simultaneously position themselves and are positioned in a multi-local formation. In regard to his own positionality, Benz explained that the accounts of his interlocutors must be seen



from an Ismaili perspective, as he was unable to approach Sunni or Shia students. This demonstrates that the researcher is necessarily an actor affecting research.

## Panel 5: Mid-Range Concepts

Chair **Conrad Schetter** (BICC) opened the panel by stressing the necessity of tackling how Area Studies position themselves in regard to theory construction. Given that theories can become outdated or just simply not match the realities found in the field(s), he welcomed three specific lines of inquiry:

- What is the added value of mid-range concepts (as opposed to the grand theories),
- Where is the intersection between Area Studies and disciplines and
- How can we create dialogue across the Area Studies and across the disciplines?



The first contribution was from **Gudrun Lachenmann** (University of Bielefeld) on **“Developing Mid-Range Concepts in “Global Ethnography”: From Researching Knowledge Systems of Ignorance to Translocal Structuration of (Gendered) Fields and Spaces”**. Lachenmann gave a short overview of different mid-range concepts which were developed in Area Studies in opposition to, for example, sociological theories. Yet, she identified the management of knowledge as one methodological issue, as Hobart argued, there is the danger of a “growth of ignorance”. Lachenmann argued that mid-range concepts may help to empirically ground global theories. Through mid-range concepts, regional knowledge can be re-legitimized and can be linked e.g. to grand theories of transnationalism, globalization, migration, transnational spaces and to link them to methodologies. For this we need a systematic conceptualization with a careful methodology and dense methods. One example, in her eyes, is the interface approach of Norman Long which is helpful and workable e.g. to understand the interface of knowledge systems. Concepts have to be localized through local and translocal engagement with them. This means to engage in “grounded” theorizing and might, in her eyes, help to overcome regional and disciplinary debates and boundaries.



The contribution of **Antía Mato Bouzas** (ZMO, Berlin) focused on **“Re-Bordering: Some Reflections on the Kashmir Space”**. Bouzas proposes to conceptualize the undefined political space of Kashmir as a midrange concept and for example to focus on the symbolic meaning of cross-border movement that takes place despite restrictions. Despite its preliminary character, through practices of bordering, such as fencing, the Line of Control has been fixated as a border, but local understanding and practices may transcend this border. With Lefebvre, Bouzas argues to understand the state as contested and as political. Bouzas speaks of midrange theories that are empirically grounded. For example, space may be claimed and states challenged through assertions of “belonging” – this, however, is a matter of positionality of the speaker, referring to position, identity and the encompassing system etc.



**Andreas Wilde** (University of Bamberg) and **Katja Mielke** (ZEF) contributed to the panel with a presentation titled **“The Social Order Concept: An Invitation to Non-Normative Ordering in Research Approaches to Past and Contemporary Local Politics”**. The social order concept, they argue, helps to make sense of processes and phenomena related to politics, governance, authority, power and statehood, both in historical and contemporary

perspective, and particularly based on emic perceptions and categories. Thus, for example, the international community’s current interpretation of the political situation in South Sudan as ‘state-failure’ could be rendered invalid if recourse would have made to earlier anthropological studies. The social order approach as analytical framework must be understood distinct from the (normative) status description of a particular setting as orderly or disorderly – thus, there is no contrasting of “good” or “bad” social order/s. By avoiding the dominance of a state-centric view and connected categorizations, the social order approach instead allows emic normativities to be investigated and assigned conceptual space. This way it enables seeing authority without power and power without authority. In relation to the mid-range concept discussion inspired by Robert Merton, Wilde and Mielke mention that what mid-range concepts actually are or – put differently – what their potential is, still requires discussion. If the least common denominator is their potential to underlie theorizing, the social order perspective could pass for a mid-range concept given its possible contribution to an epistemological shift in studying politics, power, authority, governance and the like.

Last, **Anna-Katharina Hornidge** (ZEF) offered insights on **“Variants of Differentiation in Resources Governance Khorezm, Uzbekistan: What are ‘Mid-Range Concepts?’”** Hornidge takes mid-range concepts as a “tool box” for Area Studies, i.e. as minor but necessary working hypotheses to explain uniformities and changes. As such, they are empirical, contextual and testable. Along the example of water management in Khorezm she discusses boundaries and boundary work of mid-range concepts and calls the distinction between “mid-range concepts” and “middle-range theories” into question. She also asserts the need to look at micro- and macro-level values.

## Panel 6: Deschooling (Academic) Society: Pedagogy, Practice & Policy

Chair **Ines Stolpe** (University of Bonn) explained that rethinking Area Studies requires transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and even post-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production. The success of such an endeavor thus depends on “deschooling”, which the panel aimed to investigate. Stolpe put forward the following questions to consider when translating rethinking processes into academic teaching:

- What kind of academic knowledge and competences can be expected from students who graduate from Area Studies? How can systematic reflexivity be included into curricula?
- How can we ensure that emic positions and concepts take up more space, without sacrificing the heuristic advantages of etic vantage points? How can we deal with the challenge that knowledge developed in the region is often dismissed as “nativist“?

- Teaching often takes second priority to research. What can be done in order to change such questionable ways of treating our academic future?

**Jeanine Dağyeli** (ZMO, Berlin) took recent theoretical and methodological considerations in Western Area Studies as a starting point for her talk **“Fluid or Perpetual? Conceptions of the Central Asian Region and its Study in Local Textbooks”**. Contributions to new conceptualisations of the research region in Area Studies are often not reflected in scholarly publications from Central Asia, Dağyeli argued, be it due to problems of language and access to literature or because of different academic traditions. Discussions about research methodologies and objectives on an equal level are still not a matter of course, she said, pointing to the lack of recognition of Western researchers who publish within Central Asia and a disregard for Central Asian publications, especially those not written in English. She also maintained that the intra-Central-Asian knowledge exchange was affected negatively in the post-independence era. Giving some examples from historical and anthropological works published in Central Asia during the last two decades, Dağyeli showed the main outlines of research published in different Central Asian countries and how these objectives are shaped by previous and recent political requirements. In her conclusion, she underlined the importance of fostering cooperation and sharing experiences had in different academic environments for a collaborative strengthening of Central Asia-related studies.



Teaching about the Asia-Pacific region is an equally challenging feat, asserted **Philip Michael I. Paje** (University of the Philippines-Diliman and University of Asia and the Pacific), given the disjunction of distinct parts of Asia and the Americas touching the Pacific Ocean. Nevertheless, Paje contended in his talk **“Positioning Civilization Blocs in the Teaching of Area Studies Courses”** that the Asia-Pacific region is an area demonstrating considerable linkages among individual entities. These ties can take the form of migration, trade contacts, technology transfers, and replication or experimentation of foreign political and economic institutions. Paje spoke about the approach taken to “Asia-Pacific studies” at the Philippine University of Asia and the Pacific. There, Asia-Pacific Studies focuses on “civilization blocs” (Southeast Asia, East Asia, Australia, Latin America, North America, etc.) that have been shaped by and influenced the Philippines as a nation-state historically and in the contemporary era. Studying civilization blocs goes beyond the mere identification of countries and ethnicities to an investigation of the push and pull of civilizing processes; seeing what makes identities converge rather than diverge; understanding how historical experiences join or collide; and harmonizing divergent perspectives on intersections in the Asia-Pacific region. Paje stressed that it is crucial to have courses in the Philippines that illustrate historical and contemporary aspects of neighboring regions but at the same to show the distinctiveness of the Philippines as a nation-state. Border issues and realities of island nation-states particularly influence scholarly discourse on the Philippines, while the post-colonial lens is often applied in the production of new texts on East and Southeast Asia.

**Epifania Amoo-Adare** (ZEF) concluded panel 6 with her talk **“Teaching to Transgress: Crossroads Studies and Adventures in Disciplinarity”**. Amoo-Adare asserted that there is a high demand for scholars to engage more with the interdisciplinary studies in order to better understand the complexity of today’s world (which has to take into account social, economic, cultural, and political

dynamics). Interdisciplinarity best captures the fluid dynamism of people's everyday lives. This all-embracing approach to research requires new forms of teaching, referred to as 'teaching to transgress' in the literature. 'Teaching to transgress' implies the crossing of boundaries and within and beyond academia. One of the examples of multidisciplinary is the Crossroads Asia network itself with its diverse members and different research agendas. The competence network is also in a fluid state of in-betweenness. It has spatially oriented concepts such as space, place, mobility, networks, and positionality. Crossroads Asia is an example of paradigmatic borderlands.



## Panel 7: Area Studies as the Building Blocks for Science Policy: Making Sense of Interdisciplinary Complexities



**Detlef Müller-Mahn** introduced the panel by recalling Peter Jackson's praise of the BMBF (German Federal Ministry of Research and Education) Area Studies initiative, which has increased the visibility of German Area Studies programs worldwide and resulted in an improved profile-building at German universities. Müller-Mahn then downplayed the perceived gap between Area Studies and systematic disciplines, which he sees as an outdated dichotomy. He pointed out what he views as a greater concern, namely the neo-liberalization of universities and research funding, which leads to 1) competition for funds, as well as competition for partnerships with respected partner organizations in "the Global South" (who can increase project "fundability"); 2) the mainstreaming of new areas of research, which add to the strain on budgets; and 3) the increasing power of those who act as "gatekeepers", deciding which research endeavors/directions become mainstreamed and receive funding.

Müller-Mahn posed the following questions to the speakers:

- How do you assess the BMBF Area Studies funding line? Where is there room for improvement?
- What lessons have we learned concerning the nexus between Area Studies and systematic disciplines?

- How can epistemological and geographic boundary dissolution (interdisciplinarity and internationalization) of research and teaching be realized? What are the means Area Studies scholars have to influence the science policy agenda in their interest?

As a member of two different projects funded by the BMBF Area Studies initiative (AFRASO – Africa’s Asian Options & Governance in China), **Heike Holbig** (University of Frankfurt) focused her contribution on what the BMBF initiative has achieved, namely:

- Internationalization: Research is increasingly permeating geographic boundaries (i.e. Chinese publications are cited in German research journals and vice versa).
- Interdisciplinary: Articles are increasingly co-authored across disciplines. However, she recommended working toward greater interdisciplinary, i.e. through specific training of younger scholars and new Area Studies professorships.

She expressed one criticism regarding what she sees as an inordinate focus on fluidity in the rethinking of Area Studies and pointed out that ‘trans’, ‘cross’ and ‘inter’ do not have dialectic opposites. She introduced the concept of plasticity, arguing that everything that is dynamic is also static, due to inertia.

**Olaf Kaltmeier** (University of Bielefeld) also spoke on behalf of two Area Studies projects focusing on Latin America (Entangled Americas). Regarding the second question, he stated that systematic disciplines have benefitted from the methodologies of Area Studies. Power relations and different forms of knowledge like transcultural knowledge and intercultural knowledge, he said, have become more important, replacing the formerly universal approach of the disciplines.

Kaltmeier also stressed that the emphasis should not be on nailing down definitions of terms, but on showing the terms’ different constructions and usages in different frameworks. He referred to this as a dialogue about differences, pointing out that, without differences, there would be no dialogue. Transdisciplinarity is easy in likeminded circles, he said, for example in coming to a common understanding of culture or space. A greater challenge, he stated, is in collaboration between social and natural sciences.

**Vincent Houben** (Dorisea/HU Berlin) commented on the state of Area Studies in Germany as an outsider from Holland. He pointed out that it is positive to see that Area Studies research in Germany is not as bound by its history and therefore can take more liberties than in other countries. He sees as positive that the debate on Area Studies did not emerge out of necessity but out of intellectual desire. He stated that he does not detect a dichotomy between Area Studies and systematic disciplines. The BMBF initiative in his opinion has engendered networks that work well. These are often content-specific, he said, but this is necessary in the face of universities that tend to neglect Area Studies. Houben asked about the sustainability and future of Area Studies. He said that it is obvious other issues are more important to universities and that mobilizing university leaders to support Area Studies seems unrealistic to him. What can be done, he stated, is to improve contact among different Area Studies programs.

**Matthias Middell** (Center for Area Studies in Leipzig) highlighted as a success of the BMBF initiative with regard to his university that 10 post-docs were qualified in the field of trans-regional studies. Of these, four have already received professorships (three outside of Germany and one within

Germany). Regarding sustainability, he mentioned that there is a demand for more coordination among universities, as well as for using research funds for the creation of more permanent funding of teaching. It is a dilemma, he said, that the ministry can only fund projects for a limited time and that sustainability can only be reached by the transformation into new teaching programs. Middell confirmed that the idea of a divide between Area Studies and so-called systematic disciplines is an outdated interpretation. From a university's perspective, success is measured in student numbers. New students and more interest are needed for a better standing of Area Studies at the universities, he said, and concluded that Area Studies should seriously consider whether teaching fits student needs. Another possibility he suggested on the basis of his own experience in Ethiopia would be that German universities offer study programs based upon knowledge produced in the Area Studies in other countries where such disciplines are less developed.

Closing Panel 7, **Sabine Eilers** (BMBF) summarized that Area Studies are a central part of the ministry's funding programs, and that funding is essential for Area Studies to gain better standing at German universities. The BMBF Area Studies initiative was introduced based upon a recommendation by the German Research Council. Many problems today have to be solved on international level, she stated, which is why research needs to be international and multidisciplinary. Competence networks and centers are key to strengthening global links. Finally, Eilers pointed out that, while many other countries are cutting down Area Studies funding, Germany has strengthened its research in this domain in recent years.

[The full panel discussion is available on video here.](#)

## Closing Remarks by Ingebord Baldauf

**Ingebord Baldauf** (FU Berlin) began by recalling Peter Jackson's observation that areas are not blocks, but that everything can be cut like a cake. With regard to the overlap of Area Studies and disciplines, she questioned which is better: a double structure (a separation of Area Studies and disciplines), or their synthesis, with the frequent introduction of new fields like migration studies, gender studies, development studies, etc. We have to ask ourselves what is the most practical, she said. Interfaces like Crossroads Asia, which join related topics and focus on common interests, could be a way forward. However, she stated that the network needed a new term to replace the word "area". What the network refers to are not areas, she said, but *entities* of reference.

Baldauf also recalled the conference's many interesting presentations; these, she said, revealed paradoxes like that material capital may not translate into status, or that power can exist without authority and vice versa; they also showed surprising relationships between discourses and actions. Finally, Baldauf commended participants for making progress on investigating cross-cutting modes of viewing research.

[The full closing remarks can be viewed here.](#)

For reflections on the conference as a whole, please also see the video interviews with the following conference participants: [Andreas Benz \(FU Berlin\)](#); [Jeanine Dagyelí \(ZMO, Berlin\)](#); [Gudrun Lachenmann \(Uni Bielefeld\)](#); and [Dietrich Reetz \(ZMO, Berlin\)](#).

## Call for Papers – Crossroads Asia Conference at Center for Development Research, Bonn, Germany, November 27-28, 2014

# Crossroads Studies: Mobilities, Immobilities and the Issue of Positionality for Rethinking Area Studies

**Deadline for Paper Submissions: April 30, 2014**

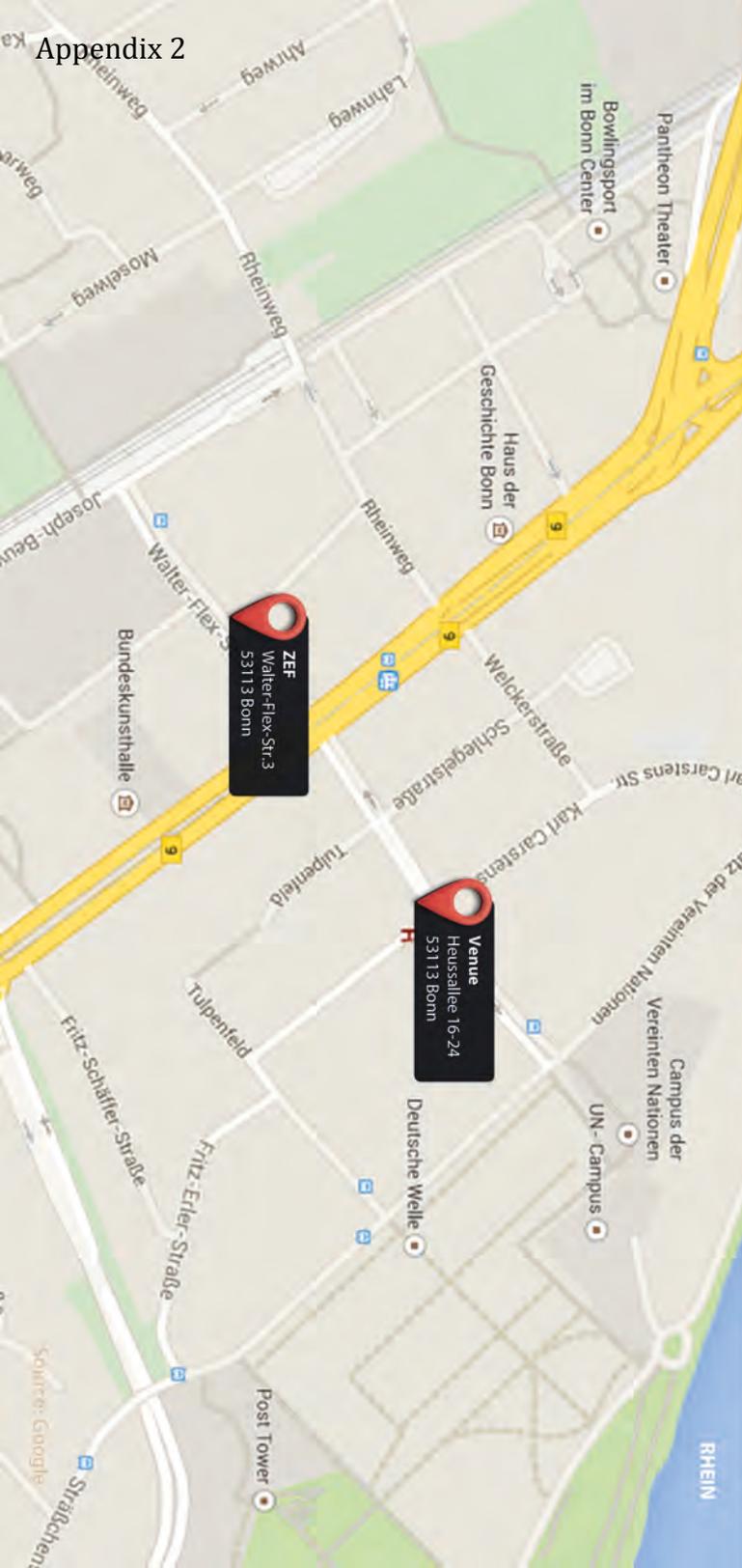
The research network Crossroads Asia: Conflict, Migration, Development, funded by the Area Studies Initiative of the German Ministry of Education and Research since March 2011 questions the validity of the conventional ‘world regions’ of Central and South Asia as defining bases for Area Studies as conceptualized, organized and taught at German universities. The increasing mobility of people, goods and ideas along Asia’s crossroads – so the networks assumption – does not justify a division of the world in territorially fixed ‘areas’, defined by certain character traits to be found on the ‘inside’, but instead demands for concepts that take these dynamisms into account. The network chose Norbert Elias’ concept of figurations to generate knowledge transgressing conventional areas and brought together researchers trained in Central, South Asian and Iranian Studies with geographers, political scientists, sociologists, linguists and social anthropologists.

The here proposed conference on ‘Crossroads Studies’ as research programme aims to bring together the empirical research conducted by the network members with empirical, conceptual and methodological debates on the rethinking of Area Studies – from Asia just as much as from other parts of the world. It is the explicit aim to identify several empirically-based common lines of thought and emic patterns of defining socio-cultural and physical spaces relevant for the rethinking of disciplinary constructs of those, namely for Area Studies.

Our research into the everyday lives of people living between Eastern Iran and Northern India, as well as the Aral Sea and Western China strongly indicates that different mobilities, just as much as immobilities, and thus different types of borders and boundaries are negotiated, take on shape, come into being or are deconstructed again in and as a consequence of human communication and interaction processes.

The notion of ‘Crossroads Studies’ therefore refers not only to the study of different types of mobility and immobility along some of Asia’s crossroads and the reflection of the researcher’s own position in this. But in addition it refers to the conscious reflection of these border/boundary negotiations as processes of the communicative construction of socio-cultural and physical spaces at the crossroads of Area Studies and ‘systematic’ disciplines. We thus locate ourselves, ‘Crossroads Studies’, in the centre of what Knorr-Cetina (1999: 12) calls “the disunity of science” and “the diversity of the manufacturing systems from which truth effects arise”. It is this diversity – with reference to ‘systematic’ disciplines, Area Studies and geographic regions of the world that we hope to nurture in this conference on rethinking of Area Studies, by studying the dynamisms and the blockades of today’s world.

We thus would like to encourage the submission of innovative papers related to the rethinking of Area Studies from any disciplinary or Area Studies perspective as well as of empirical and/or conceptual nature. For submission please send a max. 2 page long abstract and a short CV to Dr. Anna-Katharina Hornidge (Mail: [crossroads@uni-bonn.de](mailto:crossroads@uni-bonn.de)) by latest April 30<sup>th</sup>. Selected speakers will be expected to submit a full draft of the conference paper by October 15, 2014. The conference organisers will cover the travel expenses of all invited speakers.



**Venue: Heussallee 18-24, 53113 Bonn**

**Directions from Central Station:**

**Underground to: "Heussallee-Museumsmeile"**

**U 16/63** (Direction: Bad Godesberg)

**U 66/68** (Direction: Bad Honnef - Ramersdorf)

**Network Coordination**

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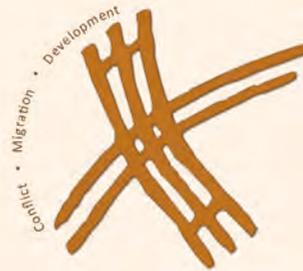
nelly.nokkala@uni-bonn.de

**Please register until 20.11.2014 under:**

**crossroads@uni-bonn.de**

For general Information on Crossroads Asia:

**www.crossroads-asia.de**



**4th Crossroads Asia Conference**

27 - 28 November 2014

Crossroads Studies: Mobilities, Immobilities and the Issue of Positionality for Rethinking Area Studies

University of Bonn, Heussallee 18-24

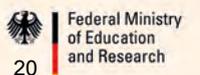


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08:00-09:30 Arrival and Registration

09:30-11:00 **WELCOME NOTE**

Crossroads Studies: Mobilities, Immobilities and the Issue of Positionality for Rethinking Area Studies

**Anna-Katharina Hornidge (ZEF Bonn)**

**KEYNOTE**

The Role of the Neoliberal University in Entrenching the Global Immobility of Theory Production

**Peter Jackson (Australian National University)**

11:00-11:30 Coffee break

11:30-13:00 **PANEL 1**

To Be or Not to Be is Not the Question: Rethinking Area Studies in its Own Right

**Chair: Claudia Derichs (University of Marburg/CGCR)**

**Cynthia Chou (University of Copenhagen)**

*The Case for Reconceptualising Southeast Asian Studies*

**Ali Fathollah-Nejad (German Orient Institute & Free University of Berlin)**

*Rethinking "Middle Eastern Studies": Analytical and Conceptual Queries and Propositions*

**Dandekar Deepra (University of Heidelberg)**

*Margins of Center? Kokani Sufi Muslims between India and 'Arabistan'*

13:00-14:30 Lunch break

14:30-16:00 **PANEL 2**

The Nexus Mobility/Immobility in Rethinking Area Studies

**Chair: Dietrich Reetz (Crossroads Asia/ZMO Berlin)**

**Seo Seonyoung (NU Singapore)**

*Transnational Spaces and Governmentality in Nepal - South Korea Labour Migration*

**Aftab Nasir (ZEF Bonn)**

*Boon or Burden: The Obligations of Vartan Bhanji and Coping Strategies of Poor Households of Different Biraderis Living in Rural Punjab*

**Anastasia Christou (Middlesex University)**

*Gendered Histories of Resilience and Resistance: Eastern European Women's Narratives of Mobility and Survival*

**Henryk Alff (Crossroads Asia/ZELF Berlin)**

*Red Lines for Uncivilised Trade? Fixity, Mobility and Position on Almaty's Changing Bazaars*

16:00-16:15 Coffee break

16:15-18:00 **PANEL 3**

Re-Imagining Communities: Borderlands, Nation States and Power of Epistemological Ordering

**Chair: Tobias Debiel (University of Duisburg-Essen)**

**Linh Nguyen (Syracuse University)**

*Immigrants to the Land: On the Borders between the Water World and the Land World*

**Radikha Gupta (University of Göttingen)**

*Acts of Imagination: Sustaining Kargil as a Crossroads on the India-Pakistan 'Border'*

**Jagannath Panda (IDSA New Delhi)**

*The Borderless BCIM: Between the Politics of Sub-Regional Cooperation and Coexistence*

**Emrah Yildiz (Harvard University)**

*Golden Shoes and Tobacco Seats: Sanctions and Transactions across the Iran/Turkey Border*

19:00 Dinner

Friday, 28 November

09:00-10:30 **PANEL 4**

Positionality: Situating Knowledge(s) between Multiple Verges

**Chair: Christoph Antweiler (University of Bonn)**

**Catherina Wenzel, Ulrike Kollodzeiski & Karsten Schmidt (University of Frankfurt)**

*Configurations of Positioning and Dialogue in the Dynamics of European-Asian Encounters in the 17th/18th Century*

**Bianca Boteva-Richter (University of Vienna)**

*The Society of Betweenness - Migration and Identities of Migrants*

**Andreas Benz (Crossroads Asia/ZELF Berlin)**

*Positionality at the Crossroads: Gendered Lifeworlds, Social Situatedness and the Relational Production of Place in the Context of Student Migration to Gilgit, Pakistan*

10:30-12:15 **PANEL 5**

'Mid-Range Concepts' as Tools for Emic-Etic Practice

**Chair: Conrad Schetter (Crossroads Asia/BICC)**

**Gudrun Lachenmann (University of Bielefeld)**

*Developing Mid-Range Concepts in 'Global Ethnography': From Researching Knowledge Systems and Systems of Ignorance to Translocal Structuration of (Gendered) Fields and Spaces*

**Antia Mato Bouzas (Crossroads Asia/ZMO Berlin)**

*Re-Bordering: Some Reflections on the Kashmir Space*

**Andreas Wilde & Katja Mielke (Crossroads Asia/University of Bamberg & ZEF Bonn)**

*The Social Order Concept: An Invitation to Non-Normative Ordering in Research Approaches to Past and Contemporary Local Politics*

**Anna-Katharina Hornidge (Crossroads Asia/ZEF Bonn)**

*Variants of Differentiation in Resources Governance Khorezm, Uzbekistan: What are 'Mid-Range Concepts'?*

12:15-13:30 Lunch break

13:30-15:00 **PANEL 6**

Deschooling (Academic) Society: Pedagogy, Practice and Policy

**Chair: Ines Stolpe (University of Bonn)**

**Jeanine Daygeli (ZMO Berlin)**

*Fluid or Perpetual? Conceptions of the Central Asian Region and its Study in Local Textbooks*

**Philip Paje (University of the Philippines)**

*Positioning 'Civilization Blocs' in the Teaching of Area Studies Courses*

**Annika Fuhrmann (Cornell University)**

*"This Area is [NOT] Under Quarantine": Rethinking Southeast Asian Studies With (New) Media*

**Epifania Amoo-Adare (Crossroads Asia/ZEF Bonn)**

*Teaching to Transgress: Crossroads Studies and Adventures in [?]-Disciplinary*

15:00-15:30 Coffee break

15:30-17:00 **PANEL DISCUSSION**

Area Studies as a Building Block for Science Policy:

Making Sense of Interdisciplinary Complexities

**Chair: Detlef Müller-Mahn (University of Bonn)**

**Heike Holbig (University of Frankfurt)**

*The Fluidity of Regions - Rethinking (East and Southeast) Asian Area Studies at the Intersections of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences*

**Olaf Kaltmeier (University of Bielefeld)**

*The Americas as Space of Entanglement: An outline for a New Approach to Area Studies*

**Vincent Houben (Dorisea/Humboldt Universität Berlin)**

*New Area Studies at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin*

**Matthias Middell (CrossArea/University of Leipzig)**

*CrossArea: Interest Group Formation in Research and Education*

**Sabine Eilers (BMBF)**

*Purpose and Content of the BMBF Funding Priority 'Strengthening and Advancing Area Studies'*

17:00-17:30 **CLOSING REMARKS**

**Ingeborg Baldauf (Crossroads Asia/Humboldt Universität Berlin)**



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## **Crossroads Studies: Mobilities, Immobilities and the Issue of Positionality for Rethinking Area Studies**

Crossroads Asia Conference  
November 27-28, 2014 at Bonner Universitätsforum  
Heussallee 18-24, Bonn

Dear Conference Chairs, dear Speakers,

With the aim to achieve continuity among all presentations of our upcoming 'Crossroads Studies'-Conference later this year, the below briefly outlines the core thematic focus and conceptualization of each panel and states some of the questions to be discussed. The conference organizing team would like to kindly invite all panel chairs to use these thoughts and questions as basis for organizing their respective panel and discussing the presented papers along them. All speakers we would like to urge to reserve a small part of their papers for addressing at least two of the cross-cutting questions indicated below for the respective panels. This will help us establish linkages throughout the conference and ensure that specific concepts key to Crossroads Asia's research are covered.

In addition, we hope to facilitate discussion between all panelists of different sessions and, last but not least, to simplify the development/structuring of an edited volume foreseen to be published as a result of the conference.

The invited speakers have been asked to submit a full draft of their conference paper by October 15, 2014. Once received, we will circulate the papers of each panel to the respective chair and panel members in advance of the conference.

With kind regards,

Anna-Katharina Hornidge, Epifania Amoo-Adare & Katja Mielke,  
in the name of the Conference Organizing Team

**Panels**

I. To Be or Not to Be is not the Question: Rethinking Area Studies in its own Right..... 1

II. The Mobility/Immobility Nexus in Rethinking Area Studies ..... 2

III. Re-imagining Communities: Borderlands, Nation States and the Power of Epistemological  
Ordering ..... 3

IV. Postionality: Situating Knowledge(s) between Multiple Verges..... 4

V. ‘Mid-range concepts’ as Tools for Emic-Etic Praxis ..... 5

VI. Deschooling (Academic) Society: Pedagogy, Practice & Policy ..... 6

VII. Panel discussion: Area Studies as a Building Block for Science Policy: Making Sense of Interdisciplinary  
Complexities..... 7

## **I. To Be or Not to Be is not the Question: Rethinking Area Studies in its own Right**

Chair: Claudia Derichs, University of Marburg

Area Studies has been critiqued for being a form of knowledge emerging from and reflecting Cold War era political agendas of American hegemony. It is agreed that there is value in conducting Area Studies in its own right; thus, we are not interested in panel contributions justifying Area Studies vs. disciplines. It is further agreed that the spatial, performative, post-structural, cultural and other turns have affected knowledge generation (in terms of perspective, valid methodologies etc.) in the social sciences, incl. the Area Studies. Therefore, we are interested in moving beyond one-dimensional spatiality, i.e., away from explanations of what a region, area or the meaning of locality is.

Panelists are requested to address at least two of the following questions:

- How great is the need to develop new or alternative epistemologies for Area Studies? On what building blocks should epistemologies for Area Studies be based?
- To what extent would your research benefit from intensified exchange between Area Studies and disciplinary conceptual debates? How would that look in practice?
- In what ways are current models of how geopolitical power intersects with forms of knowledge (in)sufficient for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## **II. The Mobility/Immobility Nexus in Rethinking Area Studies**

Chair: Dietrich Reetz, Crossroads Asia/ZMO Berlin (tbc)

The mobility paradigm (Urry 2007) has become very prominent recently and is said to represent another 'turn' in the social sciences. The research within the Crossroads Asia network emerged in part through the observation that spatial mobility has been a constant feature in the geographic region between eastern Iran and western India, the Central Asian steppes and the Arabian Sea. Current research explores the relationship between forms of mobility (social and geographical), as well as the significance of immobility.

Panelists are requested to address at least two of the following questions:

- Based on your research experience, what is the surplus value of the mobility lens?
- How do different types of mobilities and immobilities take shape, come into being and become deconstructed again – in and as a consequence of human communication and interaction processes? (Please consider preconditions for and interrelation/dependence of different forms of mobility.)
- What is the relationship between (im)mobility and spatiality? For example, is a location required for mobility or immobility? Is spatiality (always) established through (im)mobility and, if so, what kinds of space are constructed?
- What is the role of a locale/locality/place when (im)mobility is the object of study?
- What best practices have you identified in your research for investigating and tracing different types of mobility?

### **III. Re-imagining Communities: Borderlands, Nation States and the Power of Epistemological Ordering**

Chair: Tobias Debiel, University of Duisburg-Essen

It is argued that borders —just like the nations they encompass— are a kind of cultural imaginary (Anderson 1991) that is socially constructed by human practices of boundary work, conducted through and with the materiality of things, as well as by shifting discourses promoted by different competing groups within a specific location and historical moment. Borders are also seen as enacted through the formation and articulation of boundaries (e.g., physical, political, sociocultural, etc.), resulting in the simultaneous and continuous production of structures, processes, relationships, things, events and histories (Jansen 2013).

Panelists are requested to address at least two of the following questions:

- How do different types of boundary-drawing (e.g., physical, social, cultural, political, epistemological, etc.) manifest, take on forms of expression, transform, and/or dissipate, especially as a consequence of human communication and interaction processes?
- How are borders, the meaning ascribed to their making, and their carrying boundaries negotiated?
- What are the various aspects of (re)ordering that take place in border-making and what role do they have in shaping our perspectives?
- Is global capitalism producing new spatialities of difference? Or is it rather leading to deterritorialization (albeit with existing forms of domination and centre-periphery divides reinforced in the process)?

#### **IV. Positionality: Situating Knowledge(s) between Multiple Verges**

Chair: Christoph Antweiler, University of Bonn

Positionality — although ever present — has long been treated as invisible in the quest for neutrality and objectivity, as well as given the desire for the universality of knowledge and its production. Additionally, Area Studies has been critiqued for being overly empirical, for “fetishising facts”, and for being disinterested in or even resistant to critical theoretical approaches. In contrast, currently, positionality is increasingly viewed as critical to scholarship due to the understanding that all knowledge is specific, limited, partial and situated, i.e., produced in particular circumstances that shape it (as well as the researcher and the researched) in discrete and certain ways (Rose 1997; England 2010). Furthermore, awareness is growing for the sensitivity of the intersection between power and academic knowledge and the very concrete implications thereof, as manifested, for example, in national policy making, international interventions, military actions, the formation of popular ideologies of people and places, and so on.

Panelists are requested to address at least two of the following questions:

- How should we as researchers position ourselves in relation to the worlds that we study, especially in the overarching process of rethinking Area Studies and disciplines?
- What are the various scales at which positionality has bearing on the production of knowledge (e.g., for individual researchers, academic institutions, whole communities, specific places, etc.)?
- Should our academic gaze be on the new hegemonies emerging on the eastern, or other geographic, horizons rather than on the old hegemonies in the process of falling below the western horizon?
- How can we bridge the epistemological gap between the local and empirical, on the one hand, and a West marked as universal and theoretical, on the other?
- What could new models of knowledge — and esp. knowledge production — emphasizing the in-between character of the research process (e.g., between emic and etic knowledge, between policy and practice, between Western canon and local knowledge, etc.) offer?

## V. **'Mid-range concepts' as Tools for Emic-Etic Praxis**

Chair: Conrad Schetter, Crossroads Asia/Bonn International Center for Conversion

Given the situatedness of knowledge and the consequent difficulties in the establishment of universal social theories, scholars researching non-Western societies have come to seek “mid-range concepts” (Houben 2013 based on Merton 1949), understood as observations about patterned relationships between certain objects, derived from close involvement with local societies, ideally based on long-term field research and immersion of the researcher into local society and its ‘culture’. By reviewing various empirical insights, the panel seeks to identify potential building blocks for establishing mid-range concepts of analytical value for the understanding of (trans-)locality-based social processes related to the core region under investigation by Crossroads Asia network members.

Panelists are requested to address at least two of the following questions:

- What are the added value, role and function of mid-range concepts in general and in particular for Area Studies?
- What role should theory and theory construction at the intersection of Area Studies and systematic disciplines play in the future?
- How can interactive dialogue between Area Studies and systematic disciplines beyond the scope of the global North be achieved?

## **VI. Deschooling (Academic) Society: Pedagogy, Practice & Policy**

Chair: Ines Stolpe, University of Bonn

The complex and dynamic world we live in requires transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and even post-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production. The rethinking of Area Studies begins from this premise. Crossroads Asia network's intention is to promote a reflexive praxis for transforming knowledge through epistemological critique and the conscious co-constructions of evidence-based "truth claims" that are simultaneously about emic and etic viewpoints. The Network believes that the success of such an endeavor requires a form of academic deschooling, which is a process that is already in progress in various academic institutions focused on issues of complexity and overcoming of disciplinary boundaries.

Panelists are requested to address at least two of the following questions:

- What are the epistemological, ontological, and related pedagogical implications of rethinking Area Studies?
- How does the debate on rethinking Area Studies affect teaching in Area Studies and systematic disciplines?
- How can concepts derived from the multidimensionality of space (e.g., place, territory, mobility, scale, networks, etc.) enrich curricula dealing with rethinking of Area Studies and the disciplines?
- What role does positionality (i.e., as both a concept and a mode of practice) play in the process of academic deschooling, particularly in the context of tertiary education?

## **VII. Panel discussion: Area Studies as a Building Block for Science Policy: Making Sense of Interdisciplinary Complexities**

Chair: Detlef Müller-Mahn, University of Bonn (tbc)

The Crossroads Asia research network has addressed the challenge of re-thinking Area Studies by proposing to forge what is tentatively called a Crossroads perspective. The idea is to establish a research (and Area Studies) study program based on three pillars: 1) a conceptual framework (figurations of spatiality), 2) a methodological approach ('follow the figuration'), and 3) reflexivity. The assumption underlying the study program, that social mobilities, boundary drawing and figurative interactions (Elias 1970) are shaped by flexible and highly dynamic processes, implicates that the research process itself has to be adapted, too. Both the institutional funding and facilitation of research need to be adjusted in order for meaningful contemporary Area Studies research to be conducted. The panel explores the role of Area Studies and how they can be adequately supported with science policy.

Panelists are requested to address at least two of the following questions:

- What conclusions can be drawn after three years of research supported by the BMBF's Area Studies funding line concerning current/future science funding and related policies in Germany (beyond the scope of BMBF)?
- How can future study programs utilize the insights gained at the nexus of Area Studies and systematic disciplines?
- How can epistemological and geographic boundary dissolution (interdisciplinarity and internationalization) of research and teaching be realized?
- What are the means Area Studies scholars have to influence the science policy agenda in their interest?

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