



Report of the Crossroads Asia
Conference

Transregional Crossroads of Social Interaction: The Shifting Meaning of Social Belonging in South and Central Asia

21st March 2014, Berlin

Zentrum Moderner Orient



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Conference Report

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Introduction and Proceedings

The workshop 'Transregional Crossroads of Social Interaction: The Shifting Meaning of Social Belonging in South and Central Asia' by the BMBF-funded competence network Crossroads Asia convened on March 21st, 2014 at ZMO Berlin. The conference was the fourth of six international conferences by Crossroads Asia after the kick-off conference in April 2011, "Figurations of Mobility" in 2012 and 'Mobilizing Religion: Networks and Mobility' in 2013. Lead organizer of the conference was Crossroads Asia at Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin (ZMO). During the conference, 18 presenters, chairpersons and discussants from the United Kingdom, Germany, India, USA, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan presented and debated their research topics with about 25 participants.

The workshop at ZMO within the Crossroads Asia programme sought to explore the shifting meaning of regional belonging across the neighbouring regions of South and Central Asia. It proposed to read the transregional interaction here in terms of social, economic, cultural and religious interaction. It thereby focused on new forms of clustering of such patterns of interaction which allow for new forms of belonging challenging the political area studies logic of the cold war period based on bounded areas. The workshop connected with similar debates on "cross-cultural interaction" reflecting historical processes that have "worked their effects across the boundary lines that historians and area specialists commonly draw" (Bentley 2005, 2). The interdisciplinary and international environment of the conference particularly enabled lively discussions endorsed by empirical case studies from across the world.



After a welcoming address by Dietrich Reetz, the conference panels forming four thematic blocs – Interventions in Regional Spaces, Transition in Muslim Trans-local Interaction, Historical Transformations across Borders and Changing Configurations in Culture and Communication – convened.

Panel 1: Interventions in Regional Space

Chair: **Just Boedeker** (ZMO/ Crossroads Asia, Berlin)

Discussant: **Conrad Schetter** (BICC/Crossroads Asia, Bonn)

Presenters:

- **Alessandro Rippa** (University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen):
Anthropology of Roads, Ethnography of the State(s): A Study of the Karakoram Highway between Xinjiang (China) and Pakistan
- **Antía Mato Bouzas** (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin):
Spaces 'in Between': Territorialisation and Representation of Space in Gilgit- Baltistan
- **Joe Hill** (ZEF/Crossroads Asia, Bonn):
Local politics, spaces of dependence, spaces of engagement: Irrigation interventions in the Pamir, Karakorum and trans-Himalaya

Alessandro Rippa's paper is based on the field trips along the Karakoram Highway for his PhD. The Karakoram Highway was built jointly by the governments of China and Pakistan and connects Kashgar and Islamabad through the 4,693 meter-high Khunjerab Pass. With the help of an 'anthropology of roads' Rippa resorts to Deleuze's notion of rhizome and examines the road as a rhizome that "brings into play very different regimes of signs", which means, it constantly connects not only distant places, but also narratives, materials, memories, dreams, and so on.

In her paper **Antía Mato Bouzas** examines the production of space in Gilgit-Baltistan — space as socially produced in the Lefebvrian sense — following the (disputed) national boundaries established by the postcolonial states of India and Pakistan. By focusing on the area of Baltistan, Mato Bouzas discusses how Gilgit-Baltistan has been conceptualised as having an ambiguous relationship with the Kashmir dispute, and how this has conditioned the development of representative politics there.

The paper by **Joe Hill** deals with the question how geopolitics and territorialisation processes affect the types of irrigation interventions on offer to and implemented for farming communities in the Tajik Pamir (Gorno-Badakhshan), Pakistani Karakorum (Baltistan), and Indian trans-Himalaya (Ladakh's Kargil) regions. He explores the geopolitical and academic aspects of the irrigation sector, water uses and the need for donor money. Therefore he looked at contributions from NGOs, e.g. the Agha Khan Foundation who entered the Gorno-Badakhshan region in 1993 supplying food aid and induced repairing irrigation channels from 1995.

The presentations in the first panel – Interventions in Regional Space – discussed the formation of new spaces in the border areas of South and Central Asia. These are the result of major geopolitical processes such as the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, or the rise of China and India as major powers, and their effects on the peripheries bordering these states. In this regard, the papers focused on how local social groups in these predominant high-mountain regions are seeking to turn scenarios of insecurity into emerging opportunities. These dynamics are exemplified here by studies of trade opportunities on the mountainous Karakoram highway (Alessandro Rippa), border conflict (Antía Mato

Bouzas) and water management (Joe Hill). The presented papers demonstrated how local groups rely on wider networks, such as NGOs, divided relatives across the border, or carpet traders to follow processes of local and regional transformation. Through the examination of interaction in the border areas and the peripheries, these papers also highlighted the changing nature of states, authority and society.

Panel 2: Transition in Muslim Translocal Interaction

Chair: **Just Boedeker** (ZMO/ Crossroads Asia, Berlin)

Discussant: **Katja Mielke** (ZEF/Crossroads Asia, Bonn)

Presenters:

- **Shireen Mirza** (Indian Institute of Technology, Madras):
Urban Shi'a Geographies: Production of Space in Old Cities and New Slums
- **Dietrich Reetz** (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin):
Mediating Mobile Traditions: the Tablighi Jama'at and the International Islamic University between Pakistan and Central Asia
- **Melissa Kerr Chiovenda** (University of Connecticut, Connecticut):
Hazaras as a Turkic People of Afghanistan - Historical Imaginings

Shireen Mirza focuses on Shia migrants in Mumbai where she did her fieldwork over a period of six months. Her paper centres on social production of Shia spaces through migrants, religious foundations and charities. Therefore she looks at Mumbai as a hub for a Shia world that stretches from Iran/Iraq to East Africa and a Shia world of 'local' Shia spaces across a vast Indian Ocean world. She analyses the local problems in Mumbai due to right-wing parties and asks how the local (in India) interacts with the Shia local or Shia global.

Dietrich Reetz analyses the formats and modes of connectivity that have been created by global agents recently. Therefore Reetz looks at two Muslim networks from South Asia centring on Deobandi/Tablighi activities and institutions. The Tablighi Jama'at was founded in 1926 and is one of the few missionary groups with a global influence. It has since expanded regionally and globally and now has 12-80 million followers. At the same time it can be observed how Central Asian graduates of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) return to their home countries as members of a bourgeoisie. This represents a reversal of the usual flow of South Asian students to (for example) medical institutes in Central Asia.

Melissa Kerr Chiovenda examines the shift in ethnic Hazara identity narrative in Afghanistan and its reshaping to escape marginalisation and to seek political power and agency. Nowadays Hazaras seek to join a Turkic alliance that would include Uzbeks, Turkmen, and others rather than to align with other Persian-speaking groups, for example Tajiks. Therefore the paper addresses a Turkic-Hazara



alliance, considering relationships at the individual and the institutional level that promote to firm these bonds. It takes into account the scholarly, social, and cultural interactions between these groups that seek to form new bonds that can form a third power in Afghan politics, countering what has been seen as a mainly Tajik/Northern group and Pashtun divide.

The presentations in the second panel – Transition in Muslim Trans-local Interaction – discussed the interaction patterns of translocal Muslim networks that connect actors and institutions where the translocal extension of real and imagined shared cultural, religious, but also political and ideological identities and practices come into focus. The extension aspect in turn brings up the dynamics of change and differentiation that transform those networks in their shared values and practices, as well as the range of participating actors and institutions. A third aspect is the tension and dialectics between their translocal reach and their local impact. These processes are illustrated by studies on the production of local space through spatial representations (Shireen Mirza), modes of connectivity and belonging (Dietrich Reetz) and identity politics (Melissa Kerr Chiovenda). The selected studies showed that these aspects produce different types of transition scenarios for the networks which share the translocal reach from which actors and institutions derive diverse forms of benefit to serve as anchors of reference in a shifting environment of social and political upheaval and transformation.

Panel 3: Historical Transformations Across Borders

Chair: **Aksana Ismailbekova** (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin)

Discussant: **Manja Stephan-Emmrich** (Humboldt University of Berlin, Berlin)

Presenters:

- **Jeanine Dağyeli** (ZMO, Berlin):
Shifting Grounds: Trans-border Migration and Local Identity in the Secondary City of Kulob
- **Elena Smolarz** (University of Bonn/Crossroads Asia, Bonn):
Interactions at the Russian-Kazakh Frontier and Strategies for Ransom Russian Slaves in Central Asia in the 18th and 19th Centuries
- **Timothy Nunan** (Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, Massachusetts):
Northern Crossings: Soviet-Afghan Encounters in Afghan Turkestan, 1955-1991

Jeanine Dağyeli looks at the pre-colonial Bukharan Emirate, specifically at the secondary city Kulob, which was situated in today's Khatlon province in southern Tajikistan. She explores how and if people adapted to new border regimes and how the gradual adjustment of social and economic ties to political circumstances altered notions of belonging and identity. She focuses on the interplay between rather marginalised areas – from the point of view of their respective political and economic centres – being regional centres at the same time. Here, it was only after the establishment of Soviet power which finally turned the city from a regional centre into a marginal border region.

Elena Smolarz' paper looks into power figurations providing a deeper understanding of interactions between state, economic and social actors across the frontier. Her research is based on archival research exploring ransom networks and strategies. Therefore she analyses diplomatic documents, institutional correspondence, and slave reports, release practices and reconstructs their change.

Timothy Nunan presented an extract from his book project in progress in which the history of Soviet-Afghan encounters in northern Afghanistan during the Cold War is examined. During the mid- and late-20th century Afghan elites sought to use foreign economic aid to build a territorial state and economy in Afghanistan as well as to pursue the political project of "Pashtunistan" – the recovery of the Pashtun territories of western Pakistan. In his presentation he focused on history of international development in Afghanistan, e.g. Soviet economic



intervention in eastern provinces, situating the Soviet intervention of the 1980s within a broader discussion about borderlands, security, territory, legal order and development.

The presentations in the third panel – Historical Transformations across Borders – discussed the historical dimensions of cross-border interaction. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such mobility and interaction resulted from consequences of deprivation and coercion as much as from fluid and shifting borders, regimes of power and administration. With the cold war and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan the regimes of border interaction transform significantly producing immobilities that accentuated social, cultural and religious cleavages. This is shown by the research on production and perception of centres and peripheries (Jeanine Dağyeli), patterns of cross-border mobility and ransom strategies (Elena Smolarz) and the historiography of imperial borders (Timothy Nunan).

Panel 4: Changing Configurations in Culture and Communication

Chair: **Aksana Ismailbekova** (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin)

Discussants: **Dietrich Reetz** (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin)

Presenters:

- **Jarkyn Shadymanova** (Bishkek Humanities University, Bishkek):
ICT in Everyday Life: Transnational Household Communication Practices of Educational Migrants from Central Asia
- **Umedjon Majidi** (Tajikistan Academy of Sciences, Dushanbe):
South and Central Asian Cross-Cultural Links in the End of XX and Beginning of XXI Century: Case of India and Tajikistan

Jarkyn Shadymanova examines the use and practises of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in everyday life of international migrants by educational attainment. She conducted qualitative research among international students and scholars of Wageningen University, a well-known international University in the Netherland. Here students and scholars from Central Asia and African countries were in the focus. She found out that ICTs empower new possibilities for communicative and every day practices: as a way to maintain transnational household ties, as a mediated tool for parenting, as a way to solve the problem with loneliness and as a part of habitual everyday activity. She argues that these practises created a new way of emotional and functional communication such as an intimacy, trust and habits.

Umedjon Majidi looks at old and new links between India and Tajikistan. Both countries have millennial links of spiritual and people. This creates a basis for modern cross-cultural links connecting regions like Central Asia and South Asia. He considers Tajik and Indian people as representatives of each region who geographically have a close distance between Tajik Badakhshan and Indian Kashmir united by similarity of cultures and beliefs. Thereby Majidi offers to open new discussions on what are new opportunities for people-to-people links between India and Tajikistan and about possible mechanism of implementation.

The presentations in the fourth panel – Changing Configurations in Culture and Communication – discussed modes of cultural, educational and communication interaction that transcend national and regional borders reaching beyond the former temporary divisions of the Cold War. For Post-Soviet societies and nation states the means of global technological communication and transregional cultural bonding present healing ways of transformation to redefine their societies through new forms of interaction. They link up with the creation of opportunity networks both for citizens through labour and education migration (Jarkyn Shadymanova) as for nation-states building cooperation patterns beyond political compulsions (Umedjon Majidi) thus reconstituting identities in the wider Central and South Asian region.

Conclusion

The main objective of the conference documented here was to provide a platform for the discussion of empirical findings on political, social, cultural, and religious processes that are mutually dependent and form dense interrelations or figurations of interaction leading to a rethinking of identity and social belonging. The aim was to bring empirical research of network members and external researchers together in an interdisciplinary and open minded manner and to advance understanding and scope of Crossroads Asia's area studies concept.

Content wise, the main objective of the conference was to look into factors of identity building and transformations and constructions of social belonging across and over borders and frontiers in South and Central Asia and beyond, in matters of spatial and social mobility as well as organization and function of networks.

The next conference will be held at ZEF in Bonn on November 27-28 titled: "Crossroads Studies: Mobilities, Immobilities and the Issue of Positionality for Rethinking Area Studies".

ANNEX 1: Workshop Programme

Workshop

**Transregional Crossroads of Social
Interaction:**

**The Shifting Meaning of Regional
Belonging in South and Central Asia**

Crossroads Asia Workshop at
Zentrum Moderner Orient

21st March 2014



Programme

		01.00 pm - 02.00 pm	Lunch
8.45 am - 9.15 am	Coffee and refreshments	2.00 pm - 3.30 pm	3rd Round: Historical Transformations across Borders
9.20 am - 9.30 am	Welcome note		Chairing: Aksana Ismailbekova (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin) Discussant: Manja Stephan-Emmrich (Humboldt University of Berlin, Berlin)
9.30 am - 11.00 am	1st Round: Interventions in Regional Spaces		Discussion of the papers: Jeanine Dagyesi (ZMO, Berlin): <i>Shifting Grounds: Trans-border Migration and Local Identity in the Secondary City of Kulob</i> Elena Smolarz (University of Bonn/Crossroads Asia, Bonn): <i>Interactions at the Russian-Kazakh Frontier and Strategies for Ransom Russian Slaves in Central Asia in the 18th and 19th Centuries</i> Timothy Nunan (Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, Massachusetts): <i>Northern Crossings: Soviet-Afghan Encounters in Afghan Turkestan, 1955-1991</i>
	Chairing: Just Boedeker (ZMO/ Crossroads Asia, Berlin) Discussant: Conrad Schetter (BICC/Crossroads Asia, Bonn)		
	Discussion of the papers:		
	Alessandro Rippa (University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen): <i>Anthropology of Roads, Ethnography of the State(s): A Study of the Karakoram Highway between Xinjiang (China) and Pakistan</i>		
	Antía Mato Bouzas (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin): <i>Spaces 'in Between': Territorialisation and Representation of Space in Gilgit-Baltistan</i>		
	Joe Hill (ZEF/Crossroads Asia, Bonn): <i>Local politics, spaces of dependence, spaces of engagement: Irrigation interventions in the Pamir, Karakorum and trans-Himalaya</i>	3.30 pm - 4.00 pm	Coffee break
		4.00 - 5.00 pm	4th Round: Changing Configurations in Culture and Communication
11.00 am - 11.30 am	Coffee break		Chairing: Aksana Ismailbekova (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin) Discussants: Dietrich Reetz (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin) & Anna-Katharina Hornidge (ZEF/Crossroads Asia, Bonn)
11.30 am - 01.00 pm	2nd Round: Transition in Muslim Translocal Interaction		Discussion of the papers: Jarkyn Shadymanova (Bishkek Humanities University, Bishkek): <i>ICT in Everyday Life: Transnational Household Communication Practices of Educational Migrants from Central Asia.</i> Umedjon Majidi (Tajikistan Academy of Sciences, Dushanbe): <i>South and Central Asian Cross-Cultural Links in the End of XX and Beginning of XXI Century: Case of India and Tajikistan</i>
	Chairing: Just Boedeker (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin) Discussant: Katja Mielke (ZEF/Crossroads Asia, Bonn)		
	Discussion of the papers:		
	Shireen Mirza (Indian Institute of Technology, Madras): <i>Urban Shi'a Geographies: Production of Space in Old Cities and New Slums</i>		
	Dietrich Reetz (ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin): <i>Mediating Mobile Traditions: the Tablighi Jama'at and the International Islamic University between Pakistan and Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan)</i>	5.00 pm - 5.30 pm	Final discussion
	Melissa Kerr Chioyenda (University of Connecticut, Connecticut): <i>Hazaras as a Turkic People of Afghanistan - Historical Imaginings</i>	6.30 pm	Dinner

ANNEX 2: List of Participants

Crossroads Asia Workshop at ZMO, 21.03.2014

Presenting

Name	Affiliation
Rippa, Alessandro	University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen
Mato Bouzas, Antía	ZMO/Crossroads Asia, Berlin
Hill, Joe	ZEF/ Crossroads Asia, Bonn
Mirza, Shireen	Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Reetz, Dietrich	ZMO/ Crossroads Asia, Berlin
Chiovenda, Melissa Kerr	University of Connecticut, Connecticut
Dağyeli, Jeanine	ZMO, Berlin
Smolarz, Elena	University of Bonn; Crossroads Asia, Bonn
Nunan, Timothy	Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, Massachusetts
Shadymanova, Jarkyn	Bishkek Humanities University, Bishkek
Majidi, Umedjon	Tajik Academy of Sciences, Dushanbe

Chairing

Name	Affiliation
Boedeker, Just	ZMO/ Crossroads Asia, Berlin
Ismailbekova, Aksana	ZMO/ Crossroads Asia, Berlin

Discussants

Name	Affiliation
Schetter, Conrad	BICC/ Crossroads Asia, Bonn
Mielke, Katja	ZEF/ Crossroads Asia, Bonn
Stephan-Emmrich, Manja	IAAW (HU), Berlin
Reetz, Dietrich	ZMO/ Crossroads Asia, Berlin)
Hornidge, Anna-Katharina	ZEF/ Crossroads Asia, Bonn

Student Assistants/SHK

- Meehan, Daniel
- Schultz, Iris
- Strohmeyer, Dana

Visitors

Name	Affiliation
Dr. Amoo-Adare, Epifania A.	Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung (ZEF), Bonn
Findeis, Hagen	ZMO
Biczuk, Malgorzata	PhD Candidate; MPI for Social Anthropology
Osmonova, Kishimjan	PhD Candidate; IAAW HU Berlin

ANNEX 3: Information on the Competence Network Crossroads Asia

The competence network Crossroads Asia derives its name from the geographical area extending from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to Northern India. The scholars collaborating in the competence network pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach, making thematic figurations and mobility the overarching perspectives of their research in Crossroads Asia. The concept of figuration implies that changes, minor or major, within one element of a constellation always affect the constellation as a whole; the network will test the value of this concept for understanding the complex structures framed by the cultural, political and socio-economic contexts in Crossroads Asia. Mobility is the other key concept for studying Crossroads Asia, which has always been a space of entangled interaction and communication, with human beings, ideas and commodities on the move across and beyond cultural, social and political borders. Figurations and mobility thus form the analytical frame of all three main thematic foci of our research: conflict, migration, and development.

Five sub-projects in the working group **"Conflict"** will focus upon specific localized conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood, and globalization effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena of diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in Crossroads Asia, the sub-projects aim to analyse the logics of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.

Six sub-projects in the working group **"Migration"** aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within Crossroads Asia as well as figurations extending into both neighbouring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organizational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualizing empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans- local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.

In the **"Development"**-working group four sub-projects are focusing on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, and with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents; secondly, on forms of social mobility, which may create new opportunities, but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

The competence network aims to mediate between the academic study of Crossroads Asia and efforts to meet the high demand for information on this area in politics and the public. Findings of the project will feed back into academic teaching, research outside the limits of the competence network, and public relations efforts. Further information on Crossroads Asia is available at www.crossroads-asia.de.