



Conflict Research on Crossroads Asia
- A Conceptual Approach
[with Postscript to the Concept Paper
of the Conflict Research Group]

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Conflict Research on Crossroads Asia: A Conceptual Approach [with Postscript to the Concept Paper of the Conflict Research Group]

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Preface

The competence network Crossroads Asia aims to contribute to the re-conceptualization of Area Studies in general. For this purpose we are focusing on the role of social as well as spatial mobility in human interactions, which can academically be captured in figurations. Our research, which is carried out in 15 sub-projects, intends precisely to understand, the impact of mobility in the fields of 'conflict', 'migration' and 'development'. While the competence network Crossroads Asia is still in its first year of existence, the Crossroads Asia Working Papers on 'conflict' (No. 4), 'migration' (No. 5) and 'development' (No. 6) should document the first step of our conceptual thoughts. Thus the aim of these three working papers is to design a conceptual framework of our research and to show how the sub-projects contribute to a better understanding of our idea of Crossroads Asia as a fluid space of social interactions. However, we would like to underscore that we understand our debates on Crossroads Asia, as well as the inter-linkage of the particular sub-projects to the main ideas of the network of competences, as an ongoing process. In this regard, the three working papers should be seen only as a snapshot that reflects our thoughts in the beginning of a longer process and not as the final result of our work.

1. Introduction

The network of competence *Crossroads Asia* focuses on the region stretching from Eastern Iran to Western China and from Central Asia to Northern India.¹ This vast area is one of the most conflict-ridden areas in the world, e.g. most prominent among such conflicts are the Kashmir issue, the Pashtunistan question, the Balochistan conflict or the civil wars in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. These protracted and longstanding violent conflicts are characterized by alternating phases of escalation and de-escalation, by mass migration and a high degree of violence. They revolve around questions of ethnic or national self-determination, religious differences as well as boundary issues and are mainly rooted in the colonial penetration of the region by Great Britain and Russia – the so-called *Great Game*. Thus, since the end of the 19th century, *Crossroads Asia* was consecutively divided into nation states and the drawing of nation state boundaries in the 20th century led to the emergence of hotbeds of intensive conflict which continue to exist until today.

Yet, such international conflicts that are defined through ‘classical’ Westphalian assumptions of statehood and sovereignty are at the same time linked with other multiple forms of conflict present in the region under investigation. In a global perspective, for example, the (potentially interlinking) issues of nuclear proliferation and terrorism stand out: with India, Pakistan, China, Iran and Kazakhstan, the vast area under *Crossroads Asia* has the highest concentration of (potential) nuclear powers in the world. Moreover, since 9/11 *Crossroads Asia* has become the hot spot of the ‘War on Terror’, defining Afghanistan and its borderlands in Pakistan (FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan) as ‘safe havens’ of Islamist terrorist networks and a menace for global peace and security. Another obvious dimension of conflict is constituted by the high relevance attributed to this region in geopolitical and geo-economic terms. Competition over mining rights for mineral and carbon resources goes hand in hand with the contested control over new markets as well as international disputes about water as resource for energy generation and agricultural production. This is why some authors (Kleveman 2004; Canfield & Rasuly-Paleczek 2010) argue that a *New Great Game* has already started.

However, it would be short-sighted to focus only on such macro-level conflicts, which are more a reflection of ‘a’ concern with international politics and security in regard to *Crossroads Asia*, than a contribution to the understanding of local societies and the socio-economic and cultural underpinnings that underlie the particular social dynamics in the region. Thus the point of departure for the conflict research in the framework of the competence network is the assumption that political macro-conflicts coexist and intersect with structural conflicts and contestations between social groups at meso- and micro-levels. This becomes clear when one looks at border disputes such as the *Durand Line*, the *Line of Control* in Kashmir or the criss-crossing of international borders in Ferghana valley. Such disputes are often directly related to contestations over material resources, such as water or land, or immaterial goods, such as political or spiritual power, values or legitimacy at local level and at intrastate level. At the same time gender, class, religious and ethnic differences are characteristic features of the local structure in *Crossroads Asia* that can also create conflict potential which must be taken into consideration. Such conflict potential can, e.g., be found in educational institutions and religious discourses as sites of ideological contestations, or in the ambivalence in subnational development efforts directed by government holders who – being guided by bureaucratic attitudes acquired through education – usually deny socioeconomic realities and needs ‘on the

¹ *Crossroads Asia* represents a sphere of action with complex interdependencies which is constituted by the interactions of its inhabitants across spatial, cultural and social boundaries. However, the aim of the competence network is not to construct a new ‘region’ on the dividing line between the areas covered by classic South Asian and Central Asian Studies and areas which have hitherto been the domain of regionally-focussed Iranian studies. It is, rather, to look at specific causal and functional connections – figurations – which are localized in *Crossroads Asia*, but can stretch beyond the bounds of the geographical region sketched out above or be confined to smaller areas within this region.

ground'. Against this background, our intention is to reveal how conflicts, which are perceived as existing political conflicts at macro- and meso-levels, are strongly interlinked with contestations of interests, values, beliefs, and practices of social groups at the micro-level.

In this working paper, we will first explain our conceptual understanding of conflict. Then, we will clarify how our understanding of conflict is interrelated to the ideas of mobility and figurations that are key issues for our conceptualization of *Crossroads Asia*. Third, we will show how our empirical research in the sub-projects is guided by our theoretical approach to conflict and the mobility/figuration nexus. Finally, we will explain how we intend to contribute to a deeper understanding of the *Crossroads Asia* research framework.

2. Our Understanding of Conflict

Our understanding of conflict in the research agenda of the project is based on a broad definition. We see conflict as a universal aspect of human social existence and not as a form of deviation from a static, harmonious state of normed normalcy, as it is understood in policy-making and transmitted and reproduced by the media. The existence of conflicts and the process of dealing with specific conflict situations constitute an everyday reality of intersubjective relationships (Coser 1956). While manifest conflicts are usually expressed in political contestations or violence, latent conflicts are assumed to come into being as soon as actors become aware of their differences over interests, resources, values and beliefs, social status or practices (Imbusch 2006). Thus, the macro perspective of international political conflict (see below) ought to be qualified and complemented with conflicts between social actors at every societal scale. We define social conflicts in terms of their integrative or confining function for social groups at the level of societies (Coser 1956, Simmel 1992, Dahrendorf 1979, 1994). Common attributes that distinguish what is usually perceived as 'political conflict' from the broader understanding of social conflict manifest itself merely in reference frameworks such as the 'state', 'power' or 'security' (Croissant & Trinn 2009). However, such conflicts coined as 'political' constitute only a subtype of social conflict with the same potentially integrative or destructive features. Since we assume power to be an attribute of every social relationship and thus to be omnipresent, every social conflict can also be interpreted as political.

This rather sociological definition of conflict goes hand in hand with an understanding of societies not necessarily framed by the nation-state. Thus we define societies not as 'national' societies, but as consisting of multiple overlapping networks of interaction which share manifold linkages and which are never fully or even sufficiently institutionalized (Mann 1990).² This means a modification of the unitary understanding of 'society' in the sociological mainstream as viewed and analyzed from a system perspective and is conceptualized as self-sufficient closed entity (Mann 1990: 32-34, 58). Following Mann's criticism, it is heuristically more fruitful to think of societies in the plural and to break up the conventional construct of the nation-state society into smaller entities which more closely resemble networks ('figurations') of interaction at different socio-spatial scales and which run across territorial boundaries of nation-states. This means that, following the formulation of a specific research question, any social or socio-spatial entity could constitute 'a society' and can be analyzed as such. For example, rural/urban society would include people adhering to a certain lifestyle or means of existence who inhabit a defined rural/urban territory. In addition to that, it will also be possible to consider entire virtual social interactions (with the participating members constituting the society to be analyzed), which can hardly be traced back to a certain location. By addressing multiple networks instead of assuming a container-like constitution of society, we emphasize the highly dynamic and mobile character of the social. Against this understanding of conflict, our research

² Despite of the view of societies as nets of multi-dimensionally overlapping social networks Mann assigned such 'figurations' (actually he suggested abandoning the term 'society' altogether) relatively fixed spatial boundaries and spoke of 'interaction ditches' with regard to the periphery and border zones of societies marking the space of transition from one society to another (Mann 1990: 33).

intends to shed light on several challenging aspects of conflict research from an empirical perspective of *Crossroads Asia* and this approach assumes conceptual consequences.

First, using a 'medium-range' approach to conflict that draws on theoretical discussions of recent decades (Bonacker 2005, Elwert 2004, Schlee 2006) and acknowledges that conflicts are neither fundamentally disintegrative nor automatically likely to lend impetus to social change, we focus particularly on the *processes* involved in conflicts. Doing so allows the object of a given conflict to be distinguished from both its original causes and the forms the conflict takes (Giegel 1998) as the supposed causes but also the attempts to regulate the conflict can themselves become contested, depending on the definition of the situation by the actors involved. In this way, ramifications of conflicts can emerge. The heuristic usefulness of this approach becomes, for example, visible in studies on conflict induced displacement, which are limited neither to the analysis of the escalation of violence that caused the displacement nor to the investigation of the dynamics of the consequent displacement crisis (Lischer 2007). Knowing that in some of the world's war-zones, e.g. in Darfur/Sudan, forced displacement is a purposefully used strategy of the combatants, implies – among other things – the idea that humanitarian intervention in the regularly ensuing displacement crisis must be accompanied by additional measures, not least by concomitant advocacy work for increased peacekeeping (ibid.: 144). However, if this information is lacking, any intervention will fall short of its aims to mitigate a crisis and local needs. Similarly, disaster-induced displacement, as in the wake of the 2010 flood in Pakistan, often results from 'man-made' political decisions. For the affected persons, however, the emergency invokes fierce competition over material resources in the direct aftermath when aid agencies try to bring relief by distributing food and non-food items. In this case, the aid agency with its particular project measures might become the cause of additional conflict through unjust distribution or ignorance of local traditions. Often, subsequent conflicts manifest in social differences of the aggrieved population because kinship and the affiliation to a caste determine the extent of access to resources given that the severity of the local disaster does not allow an analysis of vulnerabilities and needs in the immediate emergency situation. Against the background of these examples, we assume that an analytical separation of causes and consequences vs. the process dimensions and possibly a cyclic continuation of the cause-effect-loop contribute to a differentiated understanding of conflict. In addition, questions about processes of mobilization specific to *Crossroads Asia* are being put forward in political sociology. In our view, the process perspective is conducive to exploring the connections between conflict and mobility (see below).

Second, the *emic perspective* is often ignored in conflict analyses. Especially in *Crossroads Asia*-specific security discourses, which are dominated by interests of governments and international actors, the views of the people are hardly taken into consideration (Thompson/Heathershaw 2005, Khattak 1996). This becomes particularly clear in academic research on macro-conflicts on the local level such as border disputes or the 'War on Terror'. Here, parties competing in local conflicts (e.g. on water or honor) become categorized and are assumed to be mobilized along the dominant distinctions of the macro conflict, e.g. 'Taliban' vs. civilians in Afghanistan. Apparently, such an enforcement of the logic of the macro-conflict onto the local level makes such a conflict much easier to be governed from the outside-perspective. But often local conflict figurations do not match issues contested at the macro-level. Therefore, we are particularly interested in analyzing tensions between micro- and macro-level conflicts by concentrating especially on what is seen as being contested from the emic perspectives of the people.

Third, we aim not only at addressing the political and social dimensions of conflict but at the *communicative dimension* as well. Thus, latent conflicts manifest themselves at the very moment the core of a conflict is articulated through language or other symbolic action (e.g. rituals) (Gluckman 1963, Gurr 1970, Aspinall 2007). Against this background, a major task of the network is the linguistic and

anthropological exploration of contextualized and verbalized expressions of conflicts, the processing, negotiation and tabooing of disputes.

Our broad conceptualization of 'conflict' allows for the connection with 'migration' and 'development', the two other core notions of the *Crossroads Asia* project: A dialectical relationship and the mutual interdependence between 'conflict' and 'development' (Simmel 1992) are established by the proposition that conflict can operate both as 'glue' that might generate social change, and as 'solvent' (Hirschmann 1994) inasmuch as development processes always result in the contestation of already existing social conditions. Regarding migration, we argue that spatial mobility can lead to processes of change in local social orders which also result in contestation and potentially new constellations of conflict. In short, our research on conflict considers the impacts of 'development' and 'migration' processes on local societies, the question if and how these manifest in conflicts and the ways societies are then dealing with these figurations and their effects with regard to 'development' and spatial movement.

3. Conflict as Figuration

Our understanding of conflict is linked to Norbert Elias' concept of *figurations*. Elias developed this concept in order to overcome the deadlock of the opposition or even antagonism of the individual and society. Rejecting both methodological individualism and methodological holism, Elias saw figurations generically as webs of interdependences which are formed among human beings and which connect them (Elias 1997: 51-52). For Elias, human beings are never outside such interdependences and society is nothing beyond them. Thus, the concept of figuration highlights the importance of both individual agency and social interconnections which in some contexts might limit the scope of agency. Drawing on metaphors of team games like football or societal dances, Elias conceives of figurations as ever-changing patterns that are formed by humans through their interdependent social (inter)action. Consequently, any kind of change in a particular set up in a figuration leads to a re-positioning of the whole and of its members' relationship and linkages within other figurations.

The concept of figurations facilitates a process-related understanding of the social. Being seen as networks of relationships, figurations are pervaded by fluctuating power imbalances. Figurations are open-ended and unbounded, meaning that they cannot be defined and specified by boundaries but rather by the core issues around which they are formed. Human actors participate in more than one figuration, consecutively but also simultaneously. Different figurations overlap and may themselves form interdependences. Thus, we can conceive of 'figurations of figurations.' The concept of figurations enables the theoretical underpinning of the idea of 'crossroads' as an unbounded space of mobility, of connections and disconnections: This space is structured by dynamic interrelations of figurations which often impact upon one another, opening up some avenues of mobility and narrowing or closing others.

In Elias' conceptualisation, figurations are limited to human actors only. Yet drawing on Bruno Latour (1987, 1988) and others (e.g. Law 1992), material objects and conditions could also be added. One does not have to go as far as the proponents of Actor Network Theory (ANT) who consider objects as *actors* ('actants') in the full sense of the word, but objects certainly have decisive effects on human social actions. A road, a dam, or a water-channel enable certain actions and hinder or prevent others, and by setting off cooperation or protest they contribute to the formation of networks of relationships. In relation to conflicts, objects cannot only be objects of contention but significant elements of larger and extending formations.

The concept of figuration enables us to understand the complexity of conflicts and to grasp their interconnections. Conflicts can be regarded as nodes or agglomerations of figurations, as sites where multiple and antagonistic social action and relations coincide. That is, particular figurations may form

conflictual issues at their core. Through figurations, or networks of figurations, particular conflicts can be related to other issues elsewhere. They branch out and, through connections drawn by interaction, discourse or imagination, they become relevant in other contexts. The relations and interdependences of figurations enable avenues of social mobilisation in conflicts. At the same time, the concept of figurations helps to disentangle conflicts which often consist of several conflictual issues. A land conflict may comprise a conflict about water or other resources, or also a dispute about power between adjacent neighbourhoods or kinship groups. These disputes can be understood as a configuration of conflictual issues in which individual or collective actors struggle and pursue their different interests or form alliances.

4. The Conflict-Mobility Nexus

Conflict is closely connected with dimensions of mobility if change is understood as something ordinary that is constantly taking place. The research network defines mobility as the interaction of social and spatial movement (flows) of people and things (material and immaterial resources, ideas, knowledge, and values) through reciprocal exchanges within and between networks (Castells 2001: 467; Hannerz 1996, Appadurai 1993). To view social phenomena not as static, but 'moving', complies with the mobile dynamics that are characteristic of Crossroads Asia as socio-geographical terrain (movement of people, goods, ideas etc.). Following the mobility paradigm (Urry 2007) implies also to consider its complement, the concept of immobility and subsequently the multiple relationships of (im)mobility and conflict. The link between violent conflict and displacement depicted above is the most obvious of such a figuration of mobility (with conflict at its core). A further branching out might take place through the emergence of additional conflicts as a result of the type of remedy employed to mitigate the 'original' conflict. We have defined conflict as having potentially both a disintegrative and/or integrative effect on societies. In a figurational setting, conflict is closely connected with social mobility which can be experienced either as having a positive or negative impact on an individual's or social group's situation (social upward or downward mobility) or even as a temporary preservation of the status quo (of immobility).³ In this perspective, it seems useful for the analysis to consider the complementing concept of motility⁴ capital – defined as resource that enables individuals to deal with the many spatial constraints that bind them (Kaufmann 2002 cited after Urry 2007: 38f) – because it grasps the aspirational moment of movement that might not be realized, but blocked due to personal constraints or political conflict ('red' traffic light mode, e.g. the full closure of national borders).

Conversely mobility potentially produces or enhances social inequality (and thus brings about latent conflict) at one branch of a figurational setting, while it might qualify social differences at another end. For example, the presence of Afghan migrant workers in Iranian cities might be used by local authorities and media to stir hostility towards Afghans by arguing that they take ordinary Iranian workers' jobs, despite the fact that they predominantly occupy niche positions in the labor market. However, even if merely perceived as competition for jobs, images of growing social inequality become popular and common. On the contrary, the earnings from this low-paid, unskilled labor enable the preservation or even improvement of a certain living standard of the Afghan workers' family back home and – complemented by further side effects (e.g.

³ Consider the notion of 'frozen conflicts' applied to a number of (latent) territorial disputes in the former Soviet Union (e.g. Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Ferghana Valley) due to the *uti possidetis*-principle of the non-alterability of international borders. Though the notion is connected with the idea that the conflict in question might escalate any time depending on the constellation of context factors, its temporary deadlock-status is held functional by ruling policy makers (as stakeholders who make up a political figuration in the overall figuration around the conflict) because they are likely to perceive it as ensuring the power balance of the status quo and as preventing incalculable consequences of both, escalation and modes of resolution. For a discussion of the illusiveness of so-called frozen conflicts see Morar (2010).

⁴ Following Kaufmann (2002) motility can be understood as "...the way in which an individual appropriates what is possible in the domain of mobility and puts the potential to use for his or her activities" (Kaufmann 2002: 37). In this regard, 'motility' addresses the potential of mobility (see also Urry 2007).

affording access to education)— also mitigate existing social differences in the medium- and long-term. This example shows the complexity of the meshing of different figurational settings: the attempt of some families to generate an income abroad does not only narrow their span of wealth status from the ‘rich’, but also increases it compared to the ‘poor’. Thus social differences endure and might even grow in complexity. This shows that conflict is usually being reduced and amplified at the same time and can be neutralized only in few cases and to a limited degree, because effects are constantly being created anew and consolidate novel (potentially conflict-laden) situations.

5. Borderlands of *Crossroads Asia*

The relationship between conflict and mobility for Crossroads Asia is particularly evident in the boundaries which define the expanse under research. They are contested in various ways, namely by states, as well as by social groups on the meso- and micro-levels. The presence or absence of spatial mobility across international boundaries produces specific changes in local social orders which also disclose forms of contestations that give rise to alternative figurations of conflict. The research network considers borderlands, that is, the territories affected by the proximity to a boundary (as a line but also as an institution), as specific arenas for transaction and negotiation of multiple aspects (items, ideas, relations, identities, etc.) in a context pervaded by ambiguity and uncertainty. Borderlands are bounded and historically regarded in relation to the state formation (Newman 2006a). This is counter to experiences of border groups that take into account multiple referential places and legacies over centuries (*longue durée*) as part of their own ethos and are thus central to them. These experiences are categorised as crossroads because they are unbounded and intersect social, political and cultural spaces. The borderland perspective implies to engage with the ‘national’, taking also into account aspects of security, culture and local governance that might enable or prevent porosity across the border (Brunet-Jailly 2007). Furthermore, the Crossroads Asia perspective emphasises interconnectivity and flows that are no recent phenomena induced by globalization but as shared and continued experiences of the past that need to be re-negotiated under current major political, economic and cultural transformations.

Although the general trend follows the idea that territorial integrity of a state is to be preserved and the sacrosanct character of established boundaries to be maintained (Elden 2009), there is significant interaction attempting to redefine the peripheral areas of states. The latter becomes especially manifest for Crossroads Asia with the existence and the formation of figurations that do not conform to the idea of the ‘national’ as established by the postcolonial states. Therefore, they challenge the marginal position that borderlands have in relation to a ‘core’ centre of authority which is represented by the state. On the one hand, the presence of a boundary in the proximity (a border area) always implies the maintaining of some sort of differentiation (Brown 2001). On the other hand, the boundary also represents the site of contact, not only between the national and the international but as a crossroads of numerous influences. These apparently opposed functions create tensions that largely depend on the boundary’s permeability but they shape local social orders in a very dynamic way.

As the research network focuses on the processes that denote conflict, we are in a position to better grasp these dynamics resulting in the emergence of new alternative (re-)figurations. For example, the Kashmir dispute, as it has been framed around ideas of statehood, entails a boundary perspective which is that of preventing movement across the Line of Control (hereafter the LoC). This ‘imposed’ spatial immobility has been contested from below in multiple ways, not only violently but also peacefully. An example and outcome of this conflict situation can be the emergence of a Balti form of ‘self-identification’ among cultural groups in Baltistan (in Pakistan controlled Gilgit-Baltistan) linked to ‘Tibetanness’ (MacDonald 2006). This can be understood as a response by these groups to being continuously linked to Kashmir and Pakistan and the conflictive character implicit in both ties. However, it can also be related to a re-positioning of these

social groups regarding the prospects for cross-border exchange as part of the improvement of India-Pakistan relations. In this case, the existence or absence of mobility across borderlands generates different potentials for the formation of networks of relationships.

The conflicts in and about Balochistan and Kashmir (including Gilgit-Baltistan) have emerged as the consequence of the establishment of boundaries dividing previous territorial, administrative units and social groups with shared affinities of varying degrees. These divisions have not only been visible in the prevention or control of movement and contact ('red' traffic light mode) but also in a conflicting repositioning of the social groups living in the new border areas as part of larger states that have marginalized them. As a result, these social groups have developed different strategies to cope with new constraints and therefore making the 'lights turn'. Sometimes immobility has been challenged by ramifications of conflict (such as the emergence of Kashmir militancy) in order to alter the status quo. At other times, the pervasiveness of ambiguity in the new situation has represented an advantage to maintain previous group's ties in a new context (for example, smuggling by Baluch across the Iran-Afghanistan border).

5.1 Belonging in the Kashmir Borderlands

This sub-project focuses on the processes of group formation and belonging involved in the Kashmir conflict by emphasizing emic perspectives of those social groups living on either side of the Line of Control (LoC). The Line of Control represents Kashmir symbolically and materially as a territorial dispute inextricably intertwined with national, religious and linguistic aspects. Local groups living in the proximity of the LoC tend to have views on the dispute that are largely shaped by their local histories and everyday life and experiences. The LoC gives rise to figurations that are manifested in the individuals and groups' interactions exercised not only through claims (of 'being part of Kashmir') on both sides of the border but also through counterclaims implying a reframing of the issue. For more than six decades, the main function of the LoC as a provisional boundary (a de facto boundary as opposed to de jure boundaries) was to prevent movement across and generated ambiguity of belonging. However, the prevailing spatial immobility across the LoC has been formally challenged by political groups like Kashmiri nationalists, while others have followed different avenues of spatial mobility and thus impacted on other figurations. Hence, when traders and businessmen in Gilgit urge to develop ties with China (Xinjiang), or Tajikistan and Afghanistan (through the Wakhan corridor), they are repositioning themselves as part of larger figurations.

Conflict, understood both as content and context, revolves around the interdependencies and antagonisms created around the idea of Kashmir (Zutshi 2010). The conceptualization of the Kashmiri related territories as a borderland presupposes to study the interconnections of social groups inhabiting these territories in relation to the proximity of the LoC, and the implications that the latter has in their everyday lives. This approach considers that the Kashmir borderland lies at the crossroads of many influences (Aggarwal 2004) which are constantly being reshaped and made explicit both by people living in the area and other social and political actors in their spatial representations and practices (Lefebvre [1991] 2001). It requires viewing this area as a distinct transitional space that produces dynamics of inclusion and differentiation. The adoption of a borderland perspective also implies underlining inward and outward dimensions that take into account what represents the 'national' in these territories; thus it explores territorialization and senses of belonging (Newman 2006b). In this respect, the project examines how people in these territories are locked on one or the other side of the LoC. In doing so, it looks at the "bordering processes" and "spatial socialization" (Paasi 1996).

5.2 The Baloch Borderlands

While boundaries of states – whether post-colonial (Pakistan), ethnic (Afghanistan) or centralised (Iran) – tend to be territorially fixed with more or less limited permeability, social boundaries like tribal or ethnic boundaries are flexible and maintained despite mobility, contact and changing participation and membership (Barth 1969). This sub-project is aimed at highlighting the impacts of the separating spatial boundaries on social mobility and affiliation. It focuses on the specific impacts of this “permeation of stateness into everyday” (Painter 2006: 753) conflicting and interfering with a diversity of tribal organizations. The main research question is therefore: How do national boundaries and border regimes influence regional mobility and political structures on a local level?

Historically, the territory inhabited by Baloch people has been at the crossroads of the powers of Iran, India and Afghanistan. Mostly, the Baloch settlement areas are considered as a strategic arena of transnational conflicts (‘Great Game’, ‘warm sea’ ‘Quetta Shura’). Apart from the discussions on the political macro-level, the emic perspectives of the people living in the immediate proximity of the borders were hardly examined. Therefore, the processes on the ground originating from the tensions between micro- and macro-level shall be explored. Conflicts in the Baloch borderlands arise in diverse settings reaching from a variety of political, militant and separatist movements to the fact that people are hindered to generate their income by (illicit) transborder trade or to visit their relatives on the other side of the national boundaries. These settings, which create the core issues of figurations in the Baloch borderlands, are framed by transnational conflicts on the macro-level through, e.g., the permanent influx of work migrants, refugees and combatants from Afghanistan or the closing of the Iranian borders. Thus, they are in a constant process of change.

In exercising political power between supra-nationalism from above and ethno-nationalism from below (see Donnan/Wilson 1999), two different images of borders and the surrounding borderlands are struggling for dominance in the Baloch settlement areas: on the one hand, three different states with more or less pronounced international boundaries underlining territorial integrity; on the other hand, Baloch people living in the borderlands with a high degree of mobility in the framework of transnational kinship networks. Most Baloch who are living at the crossroads of these countries do not experience the space they inhabit as being separated by national boundaries, as many of them use to traverse them on a regular base. They often identify primarily with lineage networks that might reach to places as far as Muscat, Nairobi or London. Consequently, the state authority and rule, located in centres at vast distances in space and culture, are perceived as a threat from outside. Probably the hostility towards the representations of the bordering states is one of the most uniting factors of the heterogeneous Baloch tribal identities.

Conflicts in the border area are articulated through different symbolic actions. For example, many legends stylise Baloch who are conflicting with state institutions as cultural heroes. Accordingly, rebellions and conflicts with representations of nation states are seen in positive terms as part of the Baloch way of life. Against this background, unofficial trade can also be perceived as an uprising against customs, laws and the determinations of the bordering states. The smugglers' impetus is comparable to the ‘social banditry’ described by Eric Hobsbawm (1972: 13) as a rebellion against forces that are considered a threat to the traditional social order. Since this traditional social order implies social and spatial mobility, almost any territorial boundary is perceived as a threat to this order.

Spatial mobility, in particular, plays a dominant role in the border region and has often served as a social outlet for political conflicts and environmental constraints. However, the influx of foreign Afghan, especially Pashtun groups, is often perceived as a threat by Baloch groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan because they feel marginalized in their settlement areas. Forced immobility, as it is partly the case for the Baloch living at the Afghan-Iranian border, fuelled tribal conflicts inside of Afghanistan. Many Baloch associate themselves with a number of locations corresponding to their pluri-local (see Schindler 2008) figurations. In former

times, Baloch nomads accomplished judiciary and executive functions in an area perceived as a 'security circle' (see Scholz 1974: 40-59), and today this concept is expanded on the border regions of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mobility mainly takes place within this area and the Baloch way of life is predominant here. By cultivating cross-border lineage-ties, often maintained through strategic marriage alliances (waslat), Baloch individuals and groups put themselves in the position to gain both social and economic resources.

6. Mobilization in Crossroads Asia

Besides the significance of the spatial and social dimensions of mobility on the one hand and the generic attributes of resulting figurations on the other hand, we propose to view mobilization as a constitutive link of the conflict-mobility nexus. Mobilization shall be defined as the process, as a result of which an individual or social group gains significantly the control over assets it previously did not dispose of (Etzioni 1968 cited after Henig 1982: 9).⁵ Such assets include for example material and immaterial resources, like material and moral support or network capital etc. However, given the omnipresence of social conflicts and inequalities in actors' everyday life,⁶ two interesting questions awaiting clarification are: in the first place, why does mobilization take place in some cases and not in others and, second, how does it proceed?

The appearance of collective action organized by like-minded individuals with shared interests and based on newly achieved asset control can be conceptualized as distinguishing feature between mobilization and non-mobilization.⁷ However, as Etzioni (1968) points out, the capacity to utilize types of resources that are already available is of capital importance for the mobilization to happen as a process:

"A mere increase in resources of members or sub-units or even of the unit does not make for mobilization, though it increases the mobilization potential [emphasis in original]; only mobilization is the process through which resources, old or new, are made available for collective action, by changing their control. An affluent unit might be thus less mobilized and less able to act than one poor in resources." (Etzioni 1968: 243)

There are always different modes of mobilization to be distinguished. However, the different stages are rather difficult to grasp and their scale largely depends on the research perspective. In one view, for example, mobilization can be evaluated according to its success in achieving the actors' interests, which the performance of collective action was meant to represent and enforce (Henig 1982: 56). In another view, it can be assessed according to the amount of counter-mobilization the initial mobilization/movement triggers (Etzioni 1968: 246). As a matter of appearance, mobilization finds quiet or audible expression (Bayat 1997). Quiet (or 'silent') mobilization rests on the everyday operation of passive networks constituted by groups of individuals who potentially engage in collective action. As such, these networks are not

⁵ Social mobilization (as defined in short to encompass a variety of change processes which influence and potentially transform political behaviour) was prominently introduced into the academic discussion by Karl Deutsch (1961) in connection with the then-dominant concept of modernization. Etzioni (1968: 243) mirrors mobilization and demobilization as processes in which resource control by a social unit is gained or reduced relatively rapidly. Accordingly, mobilization processes entail a transformation of the social unit involved and increases its ability to act collectively (ibid.). In the last decades, the concept seems to have remained under-theorized and is featured most prominently in social movement research. Within its framework several mechanisms of mobilization can be identified: coalition-building, resource pooling/mobilization, framing, and opportunity structures (Kern 2008).

⁶ The assumption of omnipresent social conflict and subsequent contestations forms the core of the 'political' nature of everyday life at different scales of interaction, including macro-level politics.

⁷ In this view mobilization is not restricted to the study of protest and social movements, but can be applied in many social settings where collective action plays a role (especially in group formation and the evolving of organizations). Accordingly, mobilization cannot be reduced to relate to the notions of social mobility or conflict alone.

institutionalized because, on the one hand, they are not visible and almost closed for outsiders and, on the other hand, individuals who form the network do this through their daily practices and routines without necessarily being conscious of its existence and its generic (asset) properties. In contrast, institutionalized actions, social groups and actor networks form the social infrastructure of audible mobilization processes. Presumably mobilization processes are not only a result of certain contestations but also have the power to affect the mode of conflict transformation in given circumstances (connecting again with different forms of social and spatial mobility in multi-causal relations, besides other effects).

6.1 Dam-Building

This sub-project will analyze the figuration evolving around a multi-purpose mega-dam and the mobilization processes that are induced by it. Pakistan plans this scheme with the concrete dam at its border and the reservoir outside its territory in District Diamir of the disputed area Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). Projects such as this dam are part of larger debates about “development” – in this case attending to “national interests” concerning food, water and power security as well as security from floods such as the devastating one of summer 2010. This scheme of “development of rivers” (D’Souza 2008) was allegedly designed to benefit foremost the down-country population, while the detriments would fall to the local population of Diamir. At the same time this district seems to be only marginally considered for other development projects that would benefit the local population itself. Hardly any development projects are implemented in Diamir on issues such as health care, education, and infrastructure – neither by the Pakistani state, the GB government, nor by other non-governmental organizations like the Aga Khan Development Network, which is the largest development network operating in GB and adjacent Chitral. But while the dam was initially planned with national benefits in mind, the Diamir population managed to secure a share in the royalties and now uses the building of the dam as stimulus to mobilize further development projects, attending to the needs of the local population.

Considering the processes of mobilization and counter-mobilization which take place on-site as well as in the area of GB, initial fieldwork indicates firstly the importance of loyalties (cf. Etzioni 1968: 250f) derived from personal, kinship, religious or political networks to mobilize resources and secondly the use of stereotypes representing the people of Diamir as being uneducated “tribals”. It seems that such loyalties and stereotypes are significant factors in directing or hindering the flow of people and resources to and from the region.

Drawing on Elias’ concept of figuration, the project aims at identifying and analysing the various stakeholders as well as the processes of mobilization and counter-mobilization that are interconnected through the dam. The study will then focus on conflicts that are constituted by the different interests, focusing on those which arise in consequence of the implementation or negligence of development projects in the area of Diamir. This will allow exploring further the role of development induced conflicts and their ramifications.

6.2 Sub-urban Movements: Dynamics of Micro-mobilization

The large metropolises of the region that constitutes the starting point for investigations under the Crossroads Asia research paradigm (Lahore, Almaty, Teheran, Karachi, Kabul)⁸ constitute *the* economic centers of otherwise low-income countries and attract rural migrants; conflict induced refugees and displaced persons, migrant laborers, and generally marginalized groups (based on gender, wealth, ethnicity, faith, political representation etc.). The current population structure of Lahore and Karachi is largely a result of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The social fabric of Karachi and Kabul has been heavily influenced by the war in Afghanistan: Karachi accommodates millions of refugees and labor migrants from within Pakistan and, with the abundance of all kinds of guns, weapons, and money, potential exists for

⁸ The working package will not deal with all cases mentioned, but a maximum of two to three.

resource conflicts to emerge and lead to violence. The Afghan capital was first depopulated, later the war brought large-scale destruction and only recently the inflow of returnees and economic migrants from rural and often insecure areas has led to a surge of demographic growth (UN Habitat 2010: 53). Teheran alone represents 11% of Iran's population today due to massive rural-urban migration and the immigration of refugees and working migrants from neighboring Afghanistan over the last decades. Almaty, despite its comparable small population size ranked in 'liveability' below Karachi (on rank 184 out of 215 cities worldwide) according to a survey conducted in 2007 (ibid: 179). Rural-urban migration causes heightened pressure as all five cities attract people who seek economic opportunities and survival for themselves and their families and kin because of a perceived lack of other alternatives. Large sections of these migrants live in so-called informal settlements of various types⁹ from those lacking good quality facilities to those without any infrastructure and services. Against this background, the main research questions of this sub-project are: How do dwellers of low-income unplanned settlements in these metropolises organize their daily lives, experience, perceive and negotiate social exclusion? Which strategies do they employ in trying to improve their socio-economic living conditions on a day-to-day basis?

The inhabitants of so-called 'informal' and (formal) low-income settlements are embedded in a (meta-) figuration of conflict that includes the entire population of these cities and the distinct groups' specific access to resources (jobs, housing, services, knowledge, etc.). Conflict flares up occasionally and in a seemingly ad-hoc manner as open protests that sometimes turn partially violent. The topics around which conflicts erupt are fragmented and relate more to crisis perceptions of a middle class than to general feelings of deprivation by the poorest. Recent occasions included protests against load shedding, against price rises for food items (flour and vegetable oil) and rising public transport costs. Against the backdrop of people's increasing movements into the larger cities and the expansion of the informal housing and informal economic sector, it is assumed that the lowest stratum of urban dwellers is largely excluded from access to resources. The research aims to investigate the politics of the urban poor, that is, how the 'informal people' (Bayat 1997) manage their everyday lives and interact with other social groups. Sub-questions thus focus on self-organization and mobilization according to the definition given above.

Cities provide spaces where different forms of mobility potentially concentrate and intersect: spatial mobility with social mobility and mobilization. Innovation and new forms of mobility are likely to develop in cities because of their multiple networks ('figurations') between very different actors (Beall 2004) and their distinct motivations. The proposed research adopts a political sociology-perspective by focusing on the political factors of marginality¹⁰ (Wacquant 2008a) with an attempt to investigate the politics of the urban poor¹¹, i.e. the social practices they strategically employ in everyday life to survive, organize and possibly improve their lives, but which might also result in further marginalization. Such practices can include conscious and unconscious strategies and forms of social mobilization (self-initiated, externally initiated,

⁹ Ranging from non-permanent settlements consisting of shacks made of non-durable materials, often located in a crowded settlement within or on the outskirts of a city, e.g. in Pakistan known as a *katchi abadi*, to settlement types established irregularly but of concrete materials, e.g. areas in Kabul known as *zur abad*, in Tehran as *sukunatgahaye ghaire rasmi*.

¹⁰ Marginality will be conceptualized as a relational phenomenon. Thus, the marginalized are not viewed from a victim-perspective, .e.g., as passive, fatalistic masses, excluded and disoriented, but as comprising agency, i.e. actively engaging to survive and striving to improve their living conditions. The question to what extent this implies a strive for de-marginalization and broad-based social 'inclusion' in urban mainstream society or whether it is exactly the status of marginalization that provides the framework for coping in the so-called 'informal' sector, will be seen.

¹¹ The term 'urban poor' is used synonymously with 'marginalized', meaning all persons who derive their subsistence income from simple, mostly precarious, low-income, irreverent activities, and who are obliged to live at the margins of slums and illegal-spontaneous settlements (Beall 2000). It will be subject of the investigation if they are actually excluded from 'the city', and if so, to which degree and which role they play in urban society.

and unconscious), including protest and forms of violence when social conflict escalates. Likewise, the strategies might reach out of the local realm of low-income or shanty town settlements towards the 'formal' part of the city by establishing links with its administrators, normal residents, and even government or non-government actors like (religious and secular) welfare and charity organizations.

Satterthwaite (2008: 309) distinguishes three types of interaction or positioning of the marginalized towards other elements ('people and things') of the figurational context they are embedded in: claim-making (towards), autonomy (from), and co-production (with). As a rule, public claim-making and co-production rely on institutionalized forms of protest. Non-institutionalized protest is expressed in actively seeking or preserving autonomy from the larger figurational context ('figurations of figuration') that goes beyond the marginalized (though they are likely socially differentiated as well and should not be seen as homogeneous social group). Understanding the politics of the urban poor requires navigating in this semi-autonomous realm the locus of which is not captured by any of the usual political institutions but is confined to 'the street' (Wacquant 1998: 12). Against the assumption that daily practices for survival and the improvement of residents' lives find empirical expression in the dynamics of grassroots mobilization constituted by mostly un-institutionalized and hybrid social activities, the research attempts an ethnography of local bottom-up mobilization to produce evidence for mobilization patterns within and possibly across different cities.

7. Language and Conflicts

Language and social life are inextricably linked. Language is deeply implicated in all social activity, and of all social variables that are involved in a conflict, language is, probably, the most diffuse and the most difficult to define. Generally speaking, the goal of this sub-project is to elaborate on the relationship of language and conflict in the regional and methodological perspectives of the Crossroads Asia competence network. It goes without saying that conflict is sometimes linked with dysfunctions of human communication, on the one hand, and that communicative strategies are involved in the repair of conflict, on the other hand (Chilton 1998:2). The project tries to move beyond intuitively plausible notions of that kind. It focuses on the complicated ways in which linguistic practice is caught up in the forms of power and inequality which are pervasive features of social conflict. For this purpose an approach is chosen which is both theoretically informed and sensitive to empirical detail. The theory that informs this approach is based upon the idea that every linguistic interaction, even if it does not seem to be consciously coordinated, bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce. The key concept to be employed in developing this approach is that of *habitus* as understood by Bourdieu (1982). The *habitus* governs individuals' way of acting and provides guiding principles showing what is appropriate in certain circumstances and what is not. The dispositions of the linguistic *habitus* are socially constructed. They always imply both an expressive interest and linguistic competence, which includes the knowledge of how to use the linguistic capacity adequately in a determinate situation. At the same time, society provides a 'linguistic market' as Bourdieu (1982:37) metaphorically describes the structures which impose themselves as a system of specific sanctions and censorship. What is offered on the linguistic market is not language as a self-sufficient system of signs (*langue* as defined by de Saussure), but rather speech as the situated realization of the system by particular speakers (*parole* as defined by de Saussure) and discourses in so far as each recipient helps to produce the message according to individual and collective experience.

For the study, a conflict was chosen in which language is involved not only in the conflict discourse but in which it creates the contentious point, i.e. the cause of the conflict. The outbreak of the conflict to be studied can be seen in events of 2008 when students revolted in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif demanding that the word *pōhantūn* 'university' should be replaced by the word *dānešgāh* in the official Dari names of their universities. The students objected that *pōhantūn* was a 'Pashto word' which had been introduced into Dari-Persian by force whereas *dānešgāh* was offered as a 'pure Persian word'. Though even cases of death were

reported during these events, no final decision has been taken up to now. Since then the Faculty of languages and literature of Kabul University has no name plate at the entrance and the new Higher Education Act cannot pass the parliament because it is unclear which words should be used to denote the educational institutions.

Linguistic behavior of that kind can be described as politically intended linguistic divergence which is deemed a tactic of intergroup distinctiveness of individuals in search of a positive social identity. Members of an in-group accentuate linguistic differences between themselves and a relevant out-group on a highly valued dimension of their group identity (Giles 2001: 195). Thus, the students' revolts reflect a new ethnic consciousness and a new language awareness of Persian speaking groups in Afghanistan which some speakers of Pashto do not lack either. In the recent past, numerous neologisms were introduced into Pashto to replace words which previously had been borrowed from or via Dari-Persian and belonged to the common Afghan vocabulary of Dari and Pashto.

However, divergence and convergence may simultaneously operate on different linguistic dimensions. As for Pashto, divergence in the rather formal register runs counter to linguistic convergence in more vernacular registers. In the spoken language, many speakers of Pashto tend to replace well-established Pashto words by their Dari-Persian equivalents and one can observe increasing Dari-Persian influence on the level of morphology and syntax as well. Moreover, processes of linguistic divergence inside Afghanistan go hand in hand with cross-border processes of linguistic convergence in which Dari-Persian is rather the 'taking' partner with regard to Iranian Persian whereas Pashto of Afghanistan is deemed to be the rather 'giving' partner with regard to Pashto of Pakistan.

Thus, highly politicized debates on the word *pōhantūn* in Afghanistan bundle processes of linguistic divergence and convergence which are running simultaneously on various social levels in and outside Afghanistan. They reflect and help to reproduce changing relations of power and inequality both inside Afghanistan and in a Crossroads Asia perspective.

8. Methodology

Several methodological implications derive from what has been said in the previous chapters. Our broad definition of conflict comprises any kind of contestation in everyday life. It may be expressed in very different forms, ranging from verbally expressed difference in opinion to violent confrontation. Since our focus is on conflict as process, we propose to study conflicts through a hermeneutically oriented bottom-up approach. Instead of assuming beforehand, from the perspective of an external observer, what a conflict is and what it is about, we first need to elucidate whether a given phenomenon is regarded as a conflict from the point of view of the involved actors.

Consequently, all sub-projects acknowledge that the actors' perceptions play a significant role in shaping how conflict emerges and how it is dealt with, including aspects of mobilization and discursive strategies used. The appropriate methods to research perceptions of conflict and subsequent social action intended to deal with conflict situations are qualitative in nature; they focus on case studies and rely to a large extent on ethnographic fieldwork, including 'thick description' through triangulated information derived from participant observation and narrative/biographical/semi-structured interviews. Hereby, the focus on and tracing of everyday individual and collective experiences as well as mental maps of individuals play an important role, especially in studies on borderlands. Likewise, the personal networks are crucial for all studies, whether they focus on cross-border interaction or study aspects of mobilization. Consequently, qualitative approaches to network analysis form one main analytical tool.

Second, against the backdrop of the mobility paradigm which guides the overall idea of Crossroads Asia and each individual sub-project, the methods employed oftentimes become 'mobile methods' (Urry 2007: 40)

as they are adopted to trace spatial and social mobility or forms of mobilization. Research has to become mobile itself. This means that researchers 'move' along with their subjects of research while collecting data. Fieldwork almost necessarily becomes multi-sited (Marcus 1995) and employs the strategy of 'following the (figuration of) conflict'. On the other hand, mobility is sometimes severely restricted. Movement of our subjects may be only imaginary, e.g. when interlocutors are locked in a state of immobility on one side of a border but desire and imagine movement across, or real – within territorially bounded sites like city neighborhoods or across borders. Sometimes, the involuntary immobility of our research subjects coincides with the researcher's immobility in consequence of visa and other travel constraints, or the researcher has to remain fixed in a place while the interlocutors are able to move. The multi-sited approach is corroborated further by the figural perspective to the study of conflict. Since figurations are by definition open-ended and unbounded, fields and sites of research cannot be determined beforehand. We consider conflicts as nodes of figurations that may branch out and extend over a considerable geographical and social space. Conflict dynamics in one locality may, via the mobility of people or ideas, trigger dynamics in quite distant places. Field sites have to shift and extend along such dynamics, in line with the progress of research. In many cases, research will follow an approach of extended case studies (Gluckman 1958, Buorawoy 1998)

The methods mentioned here can also be used to trace the dynamics of mobilization. For instance, the formation of alliances can be traced through social network analysis, perceptions of deprivation and exclusion can be researched with narrative interviewing, public discourse analysis enables the elucidation of framing. Similarly, for the investigation of the relationship between language and conflict linguistic discourse analysis of actors' interpretations of everyday events is used.

It goes without saying that all empirical investigations are linked with secondary data analyses based on reviews of the relevant literature and/or archival work where appropriate. Historical path dependencies are assumed to be highly relevant for a local understanding of conflict as well. Moreover, the studies do not solely focus on actors, their networks and figurations (of figurations), but also take into account current context conditions.

In short, from a Crossroads (mobility)-perspective, the study of conflict relies on adopted tools of qualitative research. Since we are only at the starting point of venturing into conflict analysis in Crossroads Asia and this working paper is supposed to mark the conceptual state of the art, it remains open how mobility-specific the methods will turn out to be in practical application. It is subject to a later revisiting of the studies in progress and, once results are available, to assessing the degree of innovation and qualitative difference of the methods tool box employed. Only then can statements regarding possible specific epistemological consequences of the mobility paradigm against the background of conflict studies in Crossroads Asia be made.

9. Resume

The aim of this paper was to make clear how the single sub-projects are contributing to our main understanding of Crossroads Asia. All sub-projects have in common that they are concentrating on the question what role mobility does play in conflicts. Despite the diversity of our academic backgrounds (political sciences, geography, sociology, anthropology, linguistics) we follow a common understanding of conflict as social conflict. Thus, we see conflict as a universal aspect of human social existence that manifests when actors perceive to dispose of insurmountable differences in regard to their interests, resources, values, belief systems, or practices.

For our future research we identified three themes that revolve around the interplay of mobility and conflict. First, we intend to focus on borderlands, which are in many ways sites of conflicts in Crossroads Asia. Thus, we find several borderlands which are not only subject to political conflicts and political perceptions, but also permeable and contested by spatial mobility (Balochistan; Kashmir). For this reason the question is brought into focus how local people perceive and act in respect of these borders. Second, we intend to focus on processes of mobilization which arise around conflicting issues such as dam-building or access to resources and collective action in urban environments. This issue is of high importance due to the fact that it addresses the nexus between conflict and social mobility in Crossroads Asia. Finally, we will deal with divergence and convergence in language, taking into account that language is deeply implicated in all social variables that are involved in a conflict. To carry out research on the impact of mobility in conflict situation, particularly Norbert Elias' concept of figurations is valuable because it helps us better understand the complexity that leads to (im)mobility. Moreover, our intended research on mobility and conflict has an impact on our ethnographic field research methods, which will become multi-sited.

By following this approach, we hope to lay the ground for a modified understanding of conflicts in Crossroads Asia, which are too often seen only through the lens of security interests of nation states and international actors. Moreover, our research intends to show that conflicts in Crossroads Asia are strongly influenced by spatial and social mobility.

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Postscript to the Concept Paper of the Conflict Research Group

This postscript provides reflections on the concept paper by the members of the Conflict Working Group, taking into consideration the field research carried out during 2012 and 2013 and its implications for our initial ideas. The main aim of this postscript is to identify the key aspects of our work that have an impact on our basic understanding of conflict in the geographical study region of our network, both with respect to content as well as thematic fields and methodology.

1. Methodological reflections

The conflict follows us

In contrast with George Marcus' (Marcus 1995) formulation of a strategy for multi-sited research ("follow the conflict"), we made the observation that conflicts followed us. Due to the strong intensity of overlapping conflicts, which are typical for the geographical region covered by the research paradigm Crossroads Asia, the local setting of conflicts in the field had a strong impact on our research. Although the five research projects of the Conflict Group only indirectly aimed to investigate conflicts, our research activities encountered conflicts during the implementation stage. Several projects faced limitations on research opportunities by the concrete local conflict setting to different degrees. In one case ("Water and Social mobility – An Analysis of Hydrosapes at the High Mountain Regions of Pakistan", Anna Grieser) we had to change the subject of research as well as the research site completely due to government interference and the volatile situation at the original location. In another case ("The Baloch Crossroads: The Conflicts of Tribes and States in a Globalised World", Just Boedeker) we had to stop our research activities immediately and leave the location within 24 hours due to the intervention of the German Federal Foreign Office. The work package on urban mobilization ("Sub-urban Movements: Social Inequality and Dynamics of Micro-Mobilization", Katja Mielke) opted for taking Kabul as a second in-depth field site instead of Karachi due to security considerations. In yet another case ("Language and Conflict", Lutz Rzehak) the decision to focus research on linguistic issues that affect the people in an emotional way – instead of talking directly about conflict – proved to be an effective adaptation. Such experiences led to an intensive discussion within the Working Group, but also in the entire Crossroads Asia network, about the political limitations of research opportunities. In addition, fruitful discussions arose as to how we should best present ourselves and our objectives during field research, as well as the degree to which our publications should be guided by self-censorship, in order not to endanger ourselves or others or jeopardize contacts at our research sites or even the possibility to visit again. The discussion concluded that we have to balance our self-understanding as independent researchers with security concerns and future interests.

Conflict – a term to hide?

As elaborated in this paper, our understanding of conflict was not limited to violent conflict, but sought to trace everyday practices of and perspectives on broader social conflicts. In encounters with interviewees with whom 'conflict' was discussed directly, the term was constantly associated in a negative way, thus pointing out how our academic understanding of conflict differed from that of people in the field. In this regard, we found that attempts to deconstruct the concept are highly problematic.

During fieldwork carried out in diverse conflict settings, we conceptualized conflict implicitly or more explicitly from different viewpoints and on different scales. Thematic links between conflict and other research fields, especially development, but also migration/mobility became evident. Every work package in the Conflict Group could have been integrated into the other working groups. Particularly in relation to

the theme of 'borderlands', or contested spaces, the two working packages "The Baloch Crossroads: The Conflicts of Tribes and the State in a Globalised World" and "Plural Affinities in Contested Borderlands" proved highly relevant to working packages such as D1 ("Development Potentials and Risks of Transformed Exchange Processes in the Border Area of Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-Xinjiang", Henryk Alff) or D2 ("Resource Exploration, Migration and Developmental Dynamics along the North-South Corridor in the Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan border region", Shahnaz R. Nadjmabadi) of the Development Group.

The idea of the state

Despite the openness of how the conflict theme was conceptualized, the 'idea of the state' as one of the main norm-setting institutions emerged as a crosscutting theme that was of high interest to all five working packages of the Conflict Group. Although the Crossroads Asia network takes the approach of focusing its analysis on people, leaving the state in the background, during our field research it became obvious that the state – including both the notion of the state as well as the direct interference of state agencies – matters both for the people as well as for the researchers. In local discourse, the 'state' is a constant reference point, even if people relate to the state in different and often contradicting ways. Imaginations of the state are often strongly linked with conflicts. Specific ideas of the state, however, varied a lot depending on the conflict context as well as from place to place. The research in urban Pakistan, for example, showed that local residents view the state both as a source of resource extraction, accessible via the 'right' networks and relationships, and as a force executing power/punishment in cases of deviance or non-obedience with rules, especially if relationships/networks are not cultivated effectively enough. In contrast, similar research in Kabul showed that rural dwellers have to rely more on their own initiatives, as a lack of capacities and finances on the part of the municipal administration either does not afford urban development or restricts measures to a few selected areas defined as belonging to planned schemes. Interestingly, notions of the 'state' as an abstract welfare provider seem to be much more prevalent in Kabul than in Lahore.

2. Thematic reflections

Figurations

Along with the entire network of Crossroads Asia, the Conflict Group made use of Norbert Elias' concept of figurations (Elias 2006), in particular to investigate and conceptualize the dynamics of mobility within conflict settings. The figurational approach turned out to be particularly fruitful in moving us beyond static understandings of societies, during field research as well as later data analysis. The figuration concept resonated with the findings of our research, during which we could observe how a minor issue can have major impacts on aspects not directly linked to an observed process or interaction. For example, the enforcement of a political border can result in the amelioration of social positions for persons or groups with exclusive access to border facilities and can even change their social practices. By this means, the accentuation or relaxation of a political border can produce individual advancement or descent and change social structures and group boundaries. To that effect Just Boedeker observed how a Baloch group with exclusive access to the Afghan-Iranian border gained importance in cross-border trade and hence practiced endogamous marital alliances in order to maintain the exclusivity of this advantage (Alff, Boedeker, and Hornidge 2014). Moreover, the figurational approach fit nicely into the methodology of multi-sited ethnography, which was highly relevant for all working packages.

Borders and boundaries

As mentioned above, two of the working packages had an explicit focus on boundaries and border areas characterised by various degrees of conflict. A third one, although it did not focus explicitly on border issues, was situated within a sensitive border area. In this regard, the research undertaken in these areas has made us aware of the importance of location/place, a spatial aspect that had been largely underestimated at the beginning of the project. In order to study the process dimension of social practices by 'following' the people, we found that we could not 'cross' boundaries directly but had to travel through international airports to conduct field research in locations on opposite sides of borders. These experiences have made us aware of how sensitive border areas are in these territories, despite the relaxation of the border regimes in some cases and high border porosity in others. Sometimes border crossings are even completely restricted to foreigners. In any case, such border areas are under heightened surveillance by state agencies and this has a strong limiting impact on research. Thus, on one hand, border locations appear to be appropriate contexts to examine ongoing struggles for spatial transformations that have the potential to inflict changes in social figurations. On the other hand, however, research in border areas is often particularly difficult given researchers' limited access to both places and people.

While studying conflicts in different border locations, we became aware of the various conceptions of the state emerging at these specific sites. It became apparent how in the border contexts different historic and political circumstances produce different ways of the "permeation of stateness into everyday life" (Painter 2006: 753). In border areas, concepts of the state are very present, and therefore conflicts often revolved around questions such as: How do groups and individuals refer and relate to the state in the respective context? Is the state perceived as a colonial intrusion or a resource, as a threat or a protection? Do groups and individuals rebel against or adapt to what they perceive as institutions and representations of the states?

Mobilization

Social mobilization as underlying the mediation and negotiation of conflict but also as pre-condition of social change has been studied through tracing social practices of space making of low-income dwellers in urban settings in Lahore and Kabul (work package K4). Similarly to the direct discussion of conflict, the direct inquiry into practices of protest and contestation of other powers' legitimacy may be delicate, difficult or outright impossible. That is why the focus of the research was directed towards non-institutionalized mobilization without the interference of third parties like (I)NGOs. The research found that political and social mobilization as claim-making towards 'the state' was inhibited by local dwellers' limited means and connections (which can be understood as resources) necessary for organizing both among themselves and with respect to the state. Mobilization for collective action as a precondition for transforming larger societal conflict issues (spatial marginalization, deprivation of property rights for low-income dwellers, statelessness/non-registration etc.) did not take place. Individual mobilization sought to generate resources for daily survival, but would not afford collective organizing, which would always require resources. One consequence of this situation is the relative social immobility of a large section of society, i.e. those who struggle on a daily level to make a living. However, the aspirations of low income-dwellers were regularly exploited by middlemen and local leaders, who usually play an ambivalent role. It was observed that due to their practices, which often involved criminal acts and served selfish goals of profit-making for themselves alone, new conflicts arose at community level over contested access to resources.

Language

The study of language and conflict was realized took a 'soft' approach, avoiding direct conversations about conflict. The main focus was on linguistic issues in the field of dialect studies, and research aimed to collect as much linguistic material as possible that would provide a deeper insight into those aspects of language that can be related to conflicts. The research made clear that language, while not the main cause of conflicts, expresses and transmits social and/or political conflicts and can be used to fuel existing conflicts. Today in Afghanistan the relationship between Dari and Pashto as the two official and main languages has critical potential for leading to political conflicts. Tendencies towards linguistic divergence between Dari and Pashto reflect ethnic dynamics and a strengthened ethnic consciousness of the groups involved. Politically intended linguistic divergence can be observed in the more formal registers of language both by speakers of Dari and by speakers of Pashto. The less formal registers of language are characterized by simultaneous processes of linguistic convergence in which Dari proved to be the more dominant language as compared to Pashto. The asymmetry of the linguistic setting inside Afghanistan is strengthened by intensified processes of language contact with the unequal language partners of Persian in Iran and Pashto in Pakistan. Mass migration of Afghans to these neighbouring countries caused a better command of the language varieties spoken there. Especially but not only female Afghan migrants learned to perceive the Persian language of Iran as being more fashionable and more modern as compared to Dari of Afghanistan. This shapes their linguistic behaviour after their return to Afghanistan and has given rise to new conflicts in the form of discrimination against Afghans who had migrated to Iran – on the basis of their linguistic behaviour only. The fact that language can fuel conflicts was also studied using the example of Internet publications of the so-called Taliban. Here a very schematic and morphologically-syntactically clichéd language is used to express political and ideological ideas. This language offers little room for individualized statements and it expresses the absence of any willingness to compromise.

Conclusion

During research in the field it became apparent in different ways that in contexts where violent and life-threatening conflicts prevail, it is problematic to explore conflict as an integrative or productive dimension of everyday life. In these contexts conflict and topics that are perceived as conflictive tend to be avoided because they have exclusively negative and forbidding connotations. Therefore research on conflict has to be conducted indirectly by focusing on thematic issues like certain figurations, borders and boundaries, mobilization or language, without primarily focusing on the conflictive aspects of these themes.

In addition, notions of the 'state' and their impacts on the livelihoods of the interlocutors and the fieldwork of the researchers turned out to be far more dominant than we expected them to be. Although the states where our research took place are often perceived as 'weak states', at least the *idea* "sustains its history as an arbiter of control, violence, order and organisation for those whose identities are being transformed by world forces" (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 2) even beyond its political borders.

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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 analyze 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 neighboring 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.

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