



Crossroads Asia through the Lens of Mobility and Migration - A Conceptual Approach [with Postscript]

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1. Introduction

Every single study conducted as part of our research network sets out from somewhere in the area between northern Iran and Sinkiang, and the Kazakh Steppe to the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent. However, Crossroads Asia according to our understanding is not a geographically defined area, but a multiply interconnected space which is created and reshaped through human action and interaction that crosses and transcends spatial, social and cultural boundaries. Mobilities of all sorts constitute that space of (inter-)action: Physical movement of individuals and groups; social mobility along horizontal and vertical lines that is, between social positions and within hierarchies; and mental mobility that manifests in the 'movement' and transmission of ideas and images.

Although mobility has always and everywhere been an intrinsic element of human life and development (de Haas 2009: 1-2), particular regions such as, for example, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean appear to have been 'hot spots' of mobility. The region north and south of the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs and the adjacent areas have often been described as "Highway of Conquest" or "Crossroads of Asia" (Howorth 1880, Gregorian 1968), invoking images of a distant past characterized by mobile conquerors and nomadic invaders (Bregel 1991: 66). Due to the mobility of its inhabitants these heartlands of Asia throughout history have been a connecting space rather than a barrier creating impediments for movement. Even in periods of disintegration of larger empires and fragmentation of authority networks of commercial, religious, and cultural exchange warranted the continuation of transfer. Steppe and oasis on one hand, and sparsely populated highlands and densely populated plains on the other, were connected by symbiotic, and at times antagonistic relations. Seasonal migration regularly brought highlanders and plain dwellers into mutually beneficial contact (Cariou 2003: 186) and people from the barren lands would meet city dwellers for exchange of produce. All encounters, however, bore the potential of conflict about power and resources (Nabiev 1973).

Along with these relatively short-distance perpendicular moves which affected large parts of the population in a very immediate manner, networks of commercial and cultural exchange that would stretch over thousands of miles were more loosely knitted. Until the end of the 19th century overland caravan trade between Kabul, Ghazni and the Ganges Valley, run by the *powindas*, Pashtun intermediate traders, connected Haidarabad in the Dekhan, Bukhara, and Orenburg in southern Russia on a predictable and more or less regular basis (Ferdinand 1962, Burton 1993, Levi 2002); Jewish traders in their turn would link that route up to Mashhad and further into Iran (Loy 2011) while Bukharan merchants traveled as far as southern and western Siberia (Noack 2000). Men in search of knowledge and spiritual guidance would tread narrower paths yet establish far-reaching and reliable individualized networks (von Kügelgen 2000).

Population pressure not only on a large scale swept mobilized steppe people into the fertile lands, following the rhythms of seasonal changes (Grousset 1952), but also drove minor numbers of mountain and village dwellers into areas that promised to support more inhabitants. The Hazara of central Afghanistan in the 19th century started migrating to urban centers such as Mashhad, Quetta and Kabul in search of opportunities (Bindemann 1987, Monsutti 2005) while Turkic Moghol farmers left their villages along the upper Amu Darya for the hitherto unpopulated foothills of the Takhti

Sulayman (Baldauf 2010). For centuries, extensive flows of surplus workers have swept from the drylands in western colonial Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province and eastern Afghanistan into the wetlands of the Gangetic plains (Nichols 2009).

Today, in a dialectic relation with development and globalization, migration is attaining new quantitative and qualitative dimensions while basic reasons continue to be the same as they were over time. People are set in motion by natural and man-made disasters, political changes and by economic crises and shortages; or by spiritual and mundane desires of sorts. Due to the technological breakthrough in means of transportation and communication, migration networks of today are more dynamic, complex and extended than ever before. They do no longer end in Kabul, Mashhad, Karachi or Orenburg but span around the globe. The flows of people, goods and ideas are speeding up, with masses of people being set on the move in short time, while mobile phones and access to the internet engender realtime communication. Mobile and migrant individuals have always contributed to the livelihoods of their networks of solidarity and more specifically, to its immobile members. Today, however, this has become a true mass phenomenon (Cohen & Sirkeci 2011: 99). The flows of remittances sent by Tajik labor migrants in Russia, for example, make up a substantial part of Tajikistan's BIP. The potential of labor migration for Afghanistan's economic growth and stability is not yet fully recognized by the government or foreign policymakers (Stigter&Monsutti 2005), as is the positive force as well as the potential threat brought about by mass education migration and brain-drain out of large zones of the area, or massive influx of ideological and technological novelties into the core area, for that matter.

Patterns of migration can only be understood if external stimuli like force and disaster and endogenous dynamics like motivation and desire are duly taken into account. The individual act of migrating in its turn must not be solely viewed as a result of individual choice. The decision to migrate is taken in a social context; it involves a household, a community, or another set of people. Within the theoretical framework of the Crossroads Asia project the Eliasian concept of figurations (1970) will be tested in analyzing these communities of intention and action. The latter consist of individuals who may significantly differ in so-called 'motility', the potential or capability to become mobile, but share a common interest in physical migration which also interrelates with social mobility. Our research on migration issues takes its departure from the assumption that networks (networking processes and flows) and mobility/migration form a dialectic relationship. We intend to investigate the interdependent dynamics of translocal networking and mobility/migration by carrying out meso-level studies (Faist 1997, Cohen&Sirkeci 2011) that pay special attention to multiply interdependent links and network ties, personal contacts and exchange relations at various interlinked levels of society, which trigger and dynamize migratory action. At the same time, networks that rapidly change in scope and complexity will be scrutinized as a feedback mechanism that further contributes to ongoing networking processes.

This concept paper consists of three parts: A first section briefly outlines our understanding of mobility and migration. Section two is dedicated to a more in-depth glance at the connection of mobility with the approaches of networks, translocal spaces, and the Eliasian concept of figurations. In the concluding section we are drafting a preliminary process model in which the approaches outlined before will be merged.

2. Mobility and Migration

In a recent attempt to break free of reductionist definitions of migrations, social scientists have proposed to replace 'migration' by 'mobility' altogether since that term "emphasizes the changing, floating, fluid nature of this phenomenon and captures the regular as well as irregular moves of people on the ground regardless of time or destination" (Cohen&Sirkeci 2011: 7). We intend to go beyond that definition by particularly emphasizing the spatial *and social* component. Social mobility pertains to changes in social status in a vertical way, relating to the rise and fall between distinct positions in the social hierarchy, or in a horizontal way with respect to the changing of positions within the same level of hierarchy (cf. also Bähr et al. 1992: 539-40; Gans et al. 2009: 74).

Much of the scholarly discourse on mobility suggests that mobility is a major signifier, or principle, of modernity and closely related to modern technologies (Bonß et al. 2004: 258f.; Canzler et al. 2008: 1-3; Kesselring 2008: 81ff.), primarily with regard to the enormous increase in speed and moreover in amount (speed itself having reached its peak decades ago) that these means enable "people, machines, power, money, ideas and dangers" to move "around the world" (Urry 2007: 6; cf. also Faist 2004: 198). According to Bonß and his colleagues "modern mobility can be commonly defined as the disposition to changes in the geographic and/or social space and as the ability of an actor to influence his own movements" (Bonß et al. 2004: 260). Canzler et al. go even further in arguing that only in modern societies, mobility and social change would bear positive connotation (Canzler et al. 2008: 3).

Not all theorists confine mobility to modernity in such an exclusive manner. Many acknowledge that human movements across (tribal, urban, nation-state...) frontiers and borders are a socio-historical constant and have been at the center of much historical development (Urry 2007: 35; de Haas 2009: 6). "Posing the question itself [i.e., why people migrate] presupposes that migration is an abnormal condition" (Chamberlain 1997: 5), which, as we may add, would be an abnormal assumption – not only, but particularly when we are talking about people in the region of special interest to the Crossroads Asia network of competence.

Migration is generally viewed as a specific type of spatial mobility of people. It has been distinguished from other forms of circulation by setting minima in distance or period of stay (Bähr et al. 1992: 539-40; Gans et al. 2009: 74; Treibel 2008) or postulating temporary or permanent change of place of residence (Han 2005: 7). Benchmarks like these have, however, not led to a universal definition and they are of minor interest to our research projects. Migration should rather be understood as "... a multidirectional (sometimes circular) relocation which changes place of residence but not always the places where time is actually spent, the intensity of social relations but not systematically their structure. It is therefore a complex social phenomenon involving much more than flight or attraction towards prosperous lands. The conception of a definitive resettlement or irreversible move does not take account of the social reality, for the migratory phenomena observable today are mostly bidirectional or circular" (Droz&Sottas 1997: 70, cited in Monsutti 2005: 4).

Along with time and space, scholars have used functional and causal dimensions for differentiating forms of people's mobility (Strasser 2010: 17; for an overview cf. Cohen & Sirkeci 2011: 3ff.). As Hahn and Klute (2007: 10) state, a purely aetiological perspective on 'push and pull' factors, along with

overstressing the sedentary / immobile point of view, would reduce migration to departure and arrival while neglecting other important structural elements, and pay due attention to economic factors only. Instead, these authors propose an understanding of migration movements as complexes of cultural representations which are "momentous results of interactive processes among people and between them and their surroundings" rather than fixed patterns (ibid.: 15).

In strands of scholarship preoccupied with the nation state as primary entity of social structure, migration has mostly been framed as a transnational phenomenon (Pries 2001; Glick Schiller 1997; Vertovec 2009). Since the research of the Crossroads Asia network pursues a non-state-centered approach from the outset, such an understanding does not appear promising. Instead, we will apply the concept of translocal migration as outlined by Freitag & von Oppen (2010; cf. also Schetter 2011), paying due attention to the fact that there are geographical, political, social and cultural borders that are to be, and actually are being, crossed or at times – as we are postulating through our 'streetlight' metaphor – hamper and limit mobility.

3. Linking Mobility to Networks, Translocal Social Spaces, and Figurations

All sub-projects of our working group depart from the above-outlined understanding of migration as multi-directional processes that are interrelated with networking processes and flows that can be subsumed under the concept of figurations.

M1 *Spaces of Refuge* focuses on the various ways and strategies, spaces of memory and coping are being constructed in Afghanistan, a setting that has been much influenced by migratory processes since 1978/9. The sub-project examines how these spaces of refuge operate in discourses and narratives produced by those Afghans who had either taken refuge in other places and countries or are still on the run. In doing so, the sub-project preferably deals with small groups of 10 to 15 persons, who share their experience. Guided by the premise of mobility, it takes into consideration areas in Afghanistan (Northern Afghanistan) the vast variety of potential places and spaces of refuge, e.g. in Pakistan, Iran, the Gulf States, or Central Asia.

M1.2. *Flight, networks of Migration and Spaces of (Forced) Refugee - Migration in present-day Afghanistan* investigates the various meanings, functions and effects of mobility and migration in contemporary Afghanistan in the example of the city of Mazar-i Sharif which is a destination of various migration movements and processes. The importance of mobility for the people will be traced on the basis of migration stories and experiences of young Afghan men, whose migration strategies and networks point out principles of cooperation in the present Afghan society.

Centered on a network-theoretical approach, M2 *The Quiet Mobility of Women. Patterns and Strategies of Marital Networks in Northern Afghanistan and South Central Asia* explores the practical meaning of relationships established through the maternal line. With this, it highlights marriage as a strategy employed to enlarge social networks of certain domestic groups and the social and spatial mobility going hand in hand with this phenomenon. For example, polygyny allows a family to achieve manifold alliances across ethnic, regional and political boundaries.

Selected high-mountain communities in Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan) and Himachal Pradesh (India) with a high number of education migrants form the starting point of the research conducted within M3 *Networks of Knowledge*. Connecting the places of origin to central places of knowledge and education to the lowlands within the nation state or to international migration targets, education networks of migrants will be investigated through the use of qualitative empirical field methodology and analyzed with the help of tools for qualitative network analysis.

M4.1 *In and out of South Asia: transnational community-building in religious and ethnic networks* investigates networks of Islamic groups and movements as forms of transnational community-building that operate out of South Asia and have spread to Central Asia. It aims at achieving a better understanding of the nature of cross-regional and transnational networking by identifying independent perspectives, activities and structures of religious actors. Therefore it will look into the organisational history, concepts, formats and motives of such transnational activism in the example of the *Jama'at-i Islami*, the *Deobandis* and *Tablighis*, but also groups such as the *Barelwi Minhaj al-Quran*, or the *Salafi Ahl-i Hadith*.

Conflict Dynamics, Local Strategies and Trans-local Ties in the Ferghana Valley form the research objective of M4.2. The project analyses the interrelation of local conflict dynamics and survival strategies with trans-local discourse flows and networks of mobile actors across the regional divide, linking them with other populations in neighbouring Central Asian states, but also with centers of religious-political activity in South and West Asia (Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran). Focusing on Osh and its vicinity, the project views mobility as a strategy of individual actors and groups to cope with recent conflicts.

M5 *Re-Islamisation between State Influences and Global Muslim Networks* elucidates the mobility of actors embedded in translocal networks of re-Islamisation, their aims and activities and their relation to the state. Paying particular attention to both, the negotiation of power within the states and the analysis of religious networks, the sub-project highlights case studies in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

M6 *Historical Investigation of Mobility and Translocality in Crossroads Asia in the Example of the slave Trade in the 18th and 19th Centuries* explores the patterns of mobility of the actors involved in slave trade in the 18th and 19th centuries. The traffic in slaves was facilitated by translocal networks that materialized through permanent exchange of actors who were spatially and socially mobile. With its historical focus, the sub-project will be based on archival work and the investigation of documents from local and colonial archives.

In the following, we would like to outline a series of concepts that seem to be useful tools for the investigation of mobility and migration in the context of Crossroads Asia. Having been borrowed from the social sciences, most of the theories and concepts will serve as points of analytical embarkment for the respective sub-projects. Thus, we present here rather an elaboration of the current state of knowledge and pieces of work in progress rather than a new and fully designed theory. Furthermore, the concepts to be discussed represent options to advance research and show what could potentially be done in this field, but do not mean that all of them will be tested and applied by each and every sub-project. Depending on focus and scope, that the individual projects can of course be enriched by other sets of theories as well.

3.1 Mobility, Immobility and Motility

Studies on mobility analyze and explain processes, strategies, motivations and circumstances of becoming, being, or having been mobile. Actually, however, most people do not move although they might have had the means and possibilities to do so. Remaining in a certain place and position is often not merely a default option, but the result of an active choice against becoming mobile – even in cases where alluring alternatives would have existed.

A great deal of the literature on migration is deeply concerned with mobility but neglects immobility although that is the reverse side of the coin and inseparably tied to it. Mobility and immobility are interrelated and interdependent (Urry 2010: 54). Not only do "all mobilities entail specific often highly embedded and immobile infrastructures" (Sheller&Urry 2006: 210; cf. Urry 2008: 18), but increase in mobility of some people often even deepens the immobility of others (Sheller & Urry 2006: 207). Nonmovers are, in short, "critical to understanding mobility and the cultural, social, and economic impact of migration" (Cohen & Sirkeci 2011: 88).

From an actor-oriented perspective not only spatial mobility, but also immobility can be interpreted as an expression of people's agency and a result of their active choice for not becoming mobile. More generally speaking, the potential or capable mobility known as motility (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 749; Kesselring 2006: 336), depends on socio-cultural, politico-institutional, economic, ecological, and other conditions and on the embeddedness of individual actors in social contexts and relations. Dichotomies like 'forced : voluntary' fail to describe people's migration decisions in real life. Richmond (1988: 20) is rather suggesting a continuous scale that allows for differentiation reaching from "proactive" (maximum autonomy) to "reactive" (minimum autonomy), with migration for retirement, labor and education ranging among the most proactive decisions, and eviction in the context of war and civil war, displacement for ethnic 'cleansing', and being traded in slavery, as phenomena implying minimum autonomy. The concept of motility applies to social mobility / immobility as well, referring to the various degrees of capability of actors to pursue and achieve social advancement and status improvement. Structural opportunities and constraints play an important role here as well.

Strategies of mobility and migration are hardly ever purely individual projects. They are embedded in social contexts, which entail anything from facilitation by pooled resources and support by other group members to impediment and total constraint – all of it resulting from an unequal distribution of power and agency within the relevant group. If migration is understood as a strategy of households to enhance their livelihoods (for more, cf. Bohle 2007), part of a multi-local livelihood strategy can be to keep some household members in the place of origin to look after the house, the lands and the cattle, while other members are located elsewhere and are involved in off-farm income generating activities (Schetter 2011: 21). The community may for a variety of reasons, including cultured ones, put constraints upon an individual's wish to migrate (Cohen & Sirkeci 2011: 65f.) or force mobility strategies upon the individual which affect his / her personal life in a most intimated manner, like for example the decision to give a daughter in marriage or a son in service and slavery. Moments of social force need to be included in the debate on proactive vs. reactive mobility decisions. Amartya Sen's conception of the household as an arena of "cooperative conflict" (Sen 1987; 1990; Moser 1993: 24) does away with any innocent notion of the household as a harmonious and monolithic unit. Unequal power positions and the struggle over individual interests yield unequal

levels of motility across the dimensions of gender, age, lifecycle position and socio-economic status, to name just a few. These disparities are central issues in every study of mobility.

Any mobility decision involves active and reactive elements, which renders terms like 'forced migration', 'flight' and 'refugee' problematic. 'Refugee' is a highly selective and political (Zetter 2007) representation, created and defined for usage in legal and administrative affairs where it comprises only persons who find themselves in another place but their country of origin (Zolberg, Suhrke, Aguayo 1989: 3-4). A broader and less exclusive definition describes refugees as victims of natural disasters, violence, oppression, and war—events for which people as individuals cannot be held responsible. The categories of 'forced migration' as well as 'internally displaced persons' (IDP) were introduced for differentiation and clarity, but more recent research shows that the distinction between voluntary, less voluntary, and involuntary migration comes out as lesser important when the ways, forms and networks of migration are studied: „Without denying the specificity of refugees with respect to legal status or the risks which they face, [...] researchers have been inspired by theoretical and methodological approaches which had originally been developed to discuss voluntary migrations. This is justified by a number of observations. First, people who are recognized as refugees are not mere victims of a fate beyond their control; they are actors who attempt to respond to difficult conditions by relying on the social and cultural resources which remain under their control. Next, the strategies they develop are often similar to those used by people considered to be migrant labourers. Finally, the borders between the different types of status (internally displaced people, refugees, migrant workers) are not airtight: by adapting to a constantly changing context and by manipulating labels, the same people may belong to different categories simultaneously or sequentially“ (Monsutti 2010: 46f). As Monsutti (2005, 2007, 2010) and Harpviken (2009) have shown in their works on Afghan refugees, decisions to leave a certain place and to go to another are not taken head over heels but are “proactive decisions” (Harpviken 2009:168). Economic considerations affect flight decisions, and so do experiences from former migrations (ibid.: 168).

This criticism notwithstanding, the term 'refugee' is not obsolete, since when applied as an emic term, in many cases it expresses the person's representation of self and identity. Developed first by the linguist Pike in 1954 and adapted to anthropology by Harris in 1964, the terms 'emic' and 'etic' relate to self-denotations (*autonyms*) and external denotations (*xenonyms*), respectively, and apply to terms and categories meaningful to the members of a group themselves, or those meaningful to external observers and researchers (Lett, 1990:130). When trying to understand mobility and migration in the context of Crossroads Asia, it is important to scrutinize the emic terminology in the first place. Preliminary observations indicate that in Afghanistan, 'migration' connotes with opportunity and is described in terms related to 'flying', whereas in countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the term migration seems to bear negative connotations, such as insecurity and instability, and is circumscribed in terms of 'being in the field'. Similarly, self-classification of migrating people as 'refugees', 'displaced', or 'being in exile', can be taken as a starting point for further empirical inquiry and analysis. Thus problematic and one-dimensional etic classifications of 'forced migration' and 'flight' can be avoided without prematurely rejecting the concept.

In Project M1 (on flight, networks of migration), for example, mobility of sorts appears as a structural element of the lives of many of the young movers, yet the distinction between forced and voluntary migration is blurred. Monsutti has observed similar features: "Escape from violence is not necessarily

incompatible with a real migratory strategy. The geographical dispersion and the resulting economic diversification can become an asset. Afghan refugees and migrants have known how to adapt to each context. People with similar identity and sociological profile have defined themselves differently according to their migratory trajectory and their final destination" (Monsutti 2010: 61f). A very obvious case in point for poor autonomy on the part of individuals are marriage strategies which are at the core of Project M2 'The quiet mobility of women'. Yet even there, force and desire, opportunities and threats interplay in complex ways. Social rather than individual choice also dominates decision-making on student mobility from the mountain periphery of Gojal in northern Pakistan (Project M3 on networks of knowledge). Gojal is comparatively secure, calm and stable which gives mobility a much more proactive touch. Still, individual strife for social and physical mobility in search of opportunities is often outplayed by decisions of the household: As is the case in Osh, some members are dispatched while others are forced to stay, often against their aspirations and desires. Interpreting emigration of members of the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan (Project M4 on conflict dynamics and strategies in the Ferghana valley) only in terms of flight and escape from violence also misses the point, since it is also being interpreted as a proactive coping strategy in a situation of constant pressure and threat: While suffering from economic and political deprivation, seizure of property, lack of jobs, and verbal and physical abuse, many Uzbek households of Osh dispatch male family members as labor migrants to Russia or Kazakhstan, who then send substantial financial remittances back to the women, children and elders who have stayed behind to hold on to property at home. In the case of Central Asian historical slave trade and the traders' networks (Project M6 on mobility and the slave trade) another interesting blend of proactive and reactive mobility as well as of mobility and immobility can be observed. While traders and raiders are on the move after resources, the specific mobility of the slaves is a prime example of reactivity. Along with that, immobile infrastructure including trade centers, caravansaries and located business partners form a precondition for the mobile activities of traders and the mobilization of slaves.

3.2 Mobility and (Migration) Networks

Movers, like all people, are part of social networks. Their relationships to other people are set in these networks. Especially in cases of migration and mobility social networks are playing an important and dialectic role. Mobility leads to the emergence and extension of networks on the one hand, while networks are enabling and facilitating mobility on the other. Migration networks can be regarded as "sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community of origin" (Massey 1998:42). But what are these ties and what constitutes them?

Faist suggests that relations in social networks can be based on social or symbolic ties (Faist 1998: 218). Social ties imply personal relations and acquaintance, such as exist in the household, family, kinship, friendship, or village network. Symbolic ties in their turn rest on collective identities and representations, as is the case for example in networks based on religion, ethnicity, or nationality. Another categorization is proposed by Poros who is classifying social ties in interpersonal, organizational, and composite ties. Interpersonal ties also cover personal relations and are often based on trust and cooperation whereas organizational ties are connecting people through institutions like schools, associations, or workplaces. Composite ties include both, interpersonal as well as organizational ties – for example in family business or ethnic economies (Poros 2011:141).

Ties manifest as connections or channels for mobility of people as well as transfer of material and immaterial goods. Movements along these ties are generally called 'network flows'.

Migration networks – if for a moment we imagine them to start from a point zero – are expected to be laid out by the arrival of first 'pioneer migrants' at new destinations and their forming a first basis of relations between their point of origin and the new place (Gans et al. 2009: 83). As Faist admits, these pioneers often actually follow pre-existing lines like those established by pasture or trade, power relations and colonial ties, and fall back upon symbolic ties like those mentioned above, e.g. shared language, religion, or ethnicity (1998: 225). Migration networks are at the core of what comes out as the perpetuation of migration: "The term *cumulative causation*, for instance, refers to the argument that international migration reproduces itself over time through the expansion of networks and a culture of migration, among other mechanisms. Each time someone migrates, the social context of subsequent migration decisions changes, so that further migration becomes more likely as the networks expands, and so on" (Poros 2011: 149). Networks support proactive chain migration "[...] in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants" (MacDonald & MacDonald 1974: 227). By the same token networks have a great influence on decisions, destinations and forms in reactive migration processes (Harpviken 2009: 16). Chain migration in its turn stabilizes and enhances migration channels and causes specific patterns of migration to emerge (Gans et al. 2009: 84). It should, however, not be misunderstood as indicative of a stable or mainly one-way movement of people. Since mobility and motility are highly dynamic and relational, migration networks also need to be understood as sets of relationships continuously undergoing change. "Migration [...] is a relational act. It shapes networks; it creates possibilities for new networks, and it changes relations within old and new social ties. The interactions between configurations of social ties cause certain types of migration, and migration streams produce and reproduce networks that affect migrant's physical, social, and economic mobility" (Poros 2011:161).

The projects of this working group will show how various types of social ties and structures are conducive for different kinds of migration movements and vice versa in diverse historical and geographical settings.

Looking at mobility in present day Afghanistan, Project M1 ("Flight and networks of migration") is investigating the creation, use, and transformation of migration networks as well as the maintenance of social ties in cases of migration. Social relations that can be activated in case of need are an important resource for movers. In decades of war Afghans have fled and migrated all over the world forming a geographically widespread community (Monsutti 2005; Schetter 2011). Their migration networks are based on family and kinship ties, and on shared ethnicity and/or geographical origin. They facilitate the transfer of persons, information and material goods (Harpviken 2009; Monsutti 2005) and are part of multilocal livelihood strategies. However, alternative personal networks can also support individuals who wish to break off with their families and other communities of primary belonging. Investigating the quality and relevance of such alternatives will be an important part of the work in project M 1.

Project M2 investigates what has been called the "silent mobility of women", which among other things consists in strategically usable translocalization of maritable females for the sake of establishing and/or strengthening social networks (Rasuly-Paleczek 1991). An important issue will be the interdependence of patrilineage, the "milk line" (Schindlbeck 2005), and other structural elements of kinship, as well as, in all of these, underlying processes comparable to chain migration.

Project M3 ("Networks of knowledge") analyses historical and ongoing processes of educational migration of members of high-mountain communities from northern Pakistan and northwestern India. Particular attention will be given to the genesis, evolution, and continuous importance of translocal networks (Pries 2001:34-5; Han 2005:17-8) in enabling and facilitating migration. Starting with the migration of first pioneers (Gans et al. 2009:83), who left their villages in search for employment or education in the cities, translocal ties between high mountain communities and distant places have emerged. Subsequent migration to the same places was facilitated by these ties and connections and at the same time reinforced the ties and enhanced the evolving migration network. The project will pay particular attention to phenomena typical of chain migration such as described above.

Adopting a holistic approach to (translocal) networks, which is inspired by structural-constructivist ideas, the Project M6 ("Mobility and translocality in connection with slave-trade") will pay attention to social and cognitive structures produced by human behavior (see Mielke et al. 2011). In addition, the investigation of slave trade will be enriched by a range of theories on power, according to which social power is the 'glue of society', manifesting in multiple interlinked webs of human relationships (Mann 1990: 14-16, 21, 34-35; Foucault 2005: 114-15; Wrong 1990: 69). This premise helps to link network analysis to an investigation of historically developed power structures, for example in tribal groups which appear as open and dynamic networks rather than as entities bound to a common territory and subjectivity. In order to understand and contextualize network structures appropriately, the project will rely upon a loose qualitative and metaphorical network analysis applied to the historical sources (Harders 2000: 23; Freitag and van Oppen 2010: 20). In addition, social positioning methods will be applied to identify the shifting positions and movements of actors and (social as well as geographic) places within the dynamic and complex translocal networks of the slave trade. Thus, qualitative network analysis will be combined with a multi-range investigation (implying the multisitedness suggested by the *Histoire croisée*) that allows to bridge the gap between approaches of anthropology and history which focus on either the 'local' or 'the global', or on an assumed polarity between the two (Freitag and van Oppen 2010:20).

3.3 Translocal and Transnational Social Spaces

Mobility is not limited to spatial or geographical movement in the sense of moving from A to B, and space is not a pre-existent geographically bounded unit or container (Lefebvre 2000:1, 85). According to Lefebvre "social space is constituted neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel with various contents" (ibid.: 27ff.). As a consequence, it cannot be reduced to a 'form' imposed upon phenomena, things or physical materiality. Highlighting the social character of space, Lefebvre argues that space is socially created and its creation is, in fact, a constant process that incorporates social actions of human subjects, both individual and collective. Thus, the social space cannot be reduced to the dimension of an object (Lefebvre 2000: 73).

According to Pries, “the social space serves as an important frame of reference for social positions and positioning and also determines everyday practices, biographical employment projects, and human identities, simultaneously pointing beyond the social context of national societies” (Pries 1999: 26). Social space “contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information” (Lefebvre 2000: 77). The notion of social space, which can be grasped in procedural terms, finds itself in more recent products of sociological pondering, for example in Castells’ ‘space of flows’ (2001) and Urry’s attempt of moving beyond society (1999). However, we owe these concepts basically to the insight that networks and flows ‘materialize’ and concretize at specific places. Or to put it in other words, the spatialization of networks needs concrete places (Harders 2000:28). In a step further, Jessop, Brenner and Jones question the single dimension of sociospatial processes and suggest a ‘TPSN framework’ in which territories (T), places (P), scales (S), and networks (N) are seen as “mutually constitutive and relationally intertwined dimensions of sociospatial relations” (2008: 389).

Based on the premise that space is an expression of society, the theory of the ‘space of flows’ implies that spatial forms and processes are shaped by the dynamics of the entire societal structure. Social processes influence space by affecting (socially) constructed environments. As Castells puts it, flows (of capital, information, technology, symbols etc.) are crucial because they are not simply elements of social organization but an expression of processes dominating the economic, political and symbolic life of humans (Castells 2001: 467). Following this, we define flows as “goal-oriented, repetitive and programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically unconnected positions” (Castells 2001: 467). To put it in a nutshell, ‘flows’ quantify circulation processes including those involved through social mobility and spatial migration. Flows of people, finances, ideas and information circulate throughout the social landscape, travelling within and beyond concrete ‘societies’ and ‘communities’. To capture the interdependent dynamics of networks and flows, Urry introduced the concept of *scapes* as physical infrastructure for the organization of flows. *Scapes* are here seen as networks “of machines, technologies, organizations, texts and actors that constitute various interconnected nodes along which the flows can be relayed” (Urry 1999: 35). It can be helpful to think of *scapes* as geographical, mechanical obstructions and conduits for water – pipes, pumps, river-beds, dams, canals, and dykes. Whereas the flow sometimes breaks the conduit, or overcomes impediments, it is possible to map the general flow(s) along these features.

The space of flows, however, does not penetrate the whole realm of human experience. The majority of people live at concrete places. Therefore, they perceive space as a localized phenomenon, tied to certain localities. As a result, a landscape or urban architecture is likely to digest enormous physical changes it is exposed to. The relations between the space of flows and the space of places, between globalization and localization going on simultaneously, are not fixed. Yet since the functions and power of society are usually organized and manifesting in the space of flows, the latter has an impact on the importance and dynamics of places (Urry 1999: 482-84). For example, in the mid 1990s not only the Afghan civil war had an enormous effect on the urban landscape of Kabul, but the flow of refugees emanating from there left its mark, too. Whilst in this time the deserted Afghan capital continuously lost importance as Afghanistan’s political and commercial center, other towns like Jalalabad and Mazar-i Sharif became focal points of urban development with new quarters, streets and bazaars added. These had become the new places where networks of refugees and migrants crystallized and where flows of capital (in the form of foreign development aid and investments of

Afghan merchants) were channeled and concentrated. Today, Kabul has regained its importance as the country's undisputed center and commercial hub due to the flows of returnees, labor migrants, foreign capital and development aid, information, overland trade, and of course the flows of foreign soldiers and modern weaponry.

Investigating the correlation of the space of flows and the space of places also makes sense for historical phenomena like slave trade in Central Asia (Project M6). Supplementing Castells' concept, the notion of the space of flows will be widened by the space of places where different localities were integrated into a translocal sphere by flows of slaves and other exchangeable 'goods' and highly mobile agents (raiders, traders). The translocal network(s) of the slave trade contributed to the ongoing creation of a space of places that had been made up by reservoir areas (e.g. the Caspian coast, villages and towns in northern Khurasan), crisscrossing trade routes and passages, intermediate stations, entrepôts for the flows of slaves (e.g. Maimana, Shibarghan and Kunduz on the Oxus plain), and last but not least slave marts (Bukhara and Khiva), which were the central nodes within this dynamic translocal social space.

Translocality was introduced in response to the concept of transmigration and transnational social spaces (Faist 1998; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Pries 2008; Vertovec 2009), which refers to perpetuated forms of international migration (first and foremost between nation-states) and the formation of networks that coincides with migration processes. Regional migration can similarly be viewed as a permanent process in the course of which migrants form translocal networks (Freitag & von Oppen 2010; Schetter 2011) that span between places of origin and destinations within the state of origin or beyond its borders.¹ Being produced through interaction and communication, which facilitate processes of permanent or chain migration or coincide with them, translocal social spaces are dynamically, variably and multi-locally anchored in the physical geographic space.

As a descriptive tool, translocality was designed to meet the requirements of researchers in the non-European world, particularly Asia, Africa and the Middle East. It opens up the perspective to conceptualize research on empirical realities such as waves of south-south migration. With this, it provides a methodological sensorium for discerning linkages beyond the 'local'. Besides, it can be used as an intermediary concept to reach a better understanding and to conceptualize translocal connections (Freitag and van Oppen 2010: 3) in the framework of a 'geography from below' (Zitelmann 2004: 42-43). Translocality can be defined as "...the sum of phenomena which result from a multitude of circulations and transfers. Translocality also designates the outcome of concrete movements of people, goods, ideas and symbols which span spatial distances and cross boundaries, be they geographical, cultural and political" (Freitag and van Oppen 2010: 5).

With this the term 'translocality' encompasses a fundamental critique of the nation-state as the sole lens for analyzing political and social processes in non-Western contexts. In Afghanistan, for example, the registration of landed property has always remained piecemeal. Below the district level, the populace, its property, streets, irrigation canals and dwellings were and still are not territorialized

¹ As a methodological tool, the translocality concept was drafted parallel to the approach of transnationalism, e.g. in the framework of a DFG-funded research project from 2000 until 2008 at the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin (Freitag & von Oppen 2010).

(Mielke and Schetter 2007). The Afghan-Pakistani border zone epitomizes a second example of a translocal social space shaped by solidarity among the border tribes and the constant transgression of the boundary. Other cases in point are extra-territorial Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, which nevertheless form central nodes in the Afghan network society. As such they are exposed to constant processes of change from within, e.g. since the 1980s the camps have become transit thoroughfares whence flows of refugees (migrants) emanated towards other places such as Quetta, Peshawar, Zahedan or Mashhad (Schetter 2011: 18-19).

Translocal practices contribute to the emergence of new institutionalized cultural and social structures, new identities and localities within the translocal space. However, these places and new structures are in permanent flux, transient and often of an ephemeral nature (Freitag & van Open 2010: 16). Within this translocal social space people are not only physically and socially mobile. These classical forms of mobility are supplemented by 'inner mobility' (Beck 1998b: 132), which is the 'mobile modus of consciousness', or in other words a 'translocal consciousness' that captures the constant multi-local to-and-fro as well as co-presence, the living here and there whilst crossing several boundaries. This includes the necessity of permanent mediation between several places, which coincides with specific social tasks and demands (ibid.). Against this backdrop, it seems appropriate to speak of a kind of translocal consciousness that corresponds to life in translocal frameworks of references. For example, the spatially dispersed and highly mobilized populace of Gojal in the Karakorum can be described as a 'translocal community' (Faist 1998: 221) or even as a 'translocal society' (Schetter 2011: 21). Maintaining manifold translocal ties within an extended migration network, many villages in northern Pakistan embody, on the lines of 'transnational communities', communities without propinquity, in which communal life and spatial proximity are de-coupled (Faist 1998: 221). Furthermore, the members of those communities "link through exchange, reciprocity and solidarity to achieve a high degree of social cohesion, and a common repertoire of collective representations" (Faist 1998: 221). By employing the concept of translocality at a lower scale, one can understand social dynamics and the spatial dispersion of members of rural (translocal) communities, who are living in, and at the same time moving between, different places.

Translocal spaces often emerge through the interplay of concrete spatial movement(s) and imagined movement, which results in, and is facilitated through scapes. Translocality research picked up Urry's ideas and conceptualized the Indian Ocean as a *seascape* and the Sahara as a *desertscape*, social spaces that materialize through multiple layers of translocal relations. These spaces were cut apart in the course of the colonial delineation of boundaries. The translocality approach re-establishes a geography from below that is helpful in examining old linkages (Zittelmann 2004: 42-43). Focusing on labor migrants with roots in two countries, Appadurai specifies the geographical imagination of people and their every-day life experience (e.g. ethnoscape). He on the one hand uses the concept of translocality for understanding how people modify their vision and habits of their home country by being abroad. On the other, he demonstrates how it may help to grasp processes in the course of which communities get extended to other places through the mobility of their members. Hence, he defines the term in relation to various processes – such as transnational labour migration and diasporic community-building – in which the locatedness or territorial anchors of identity and community are facilitated by modes of practice that effectively reconstitute these communities in locales beyond the boundaries of fixed territory (Appadurai 1995).

In our area of interest, political boundaries and territorialized authority (which culminates in the nation-state) are of limited relevance only. 'Transmigrant' and 'transnational social space' are not always useful as tools for analysis in these settings that radically differ from the Western world. The concept of translocality, however, reduces the central role (of transgressions) of national borders to one possible factor amongst others and widens the view by considering a multiplicity of possible boundaries (social, cultural, etc.). Transnational social space can then be understood as just one special form of translocal space and as new social interlacing coherence networks (Pries 1999: 26). Take for example the labor migration from Tajikistan to Russia. Although it can be described as a kind of return migration, the influence of the modern means of transport and communication as well as political and culture-specific aspects greatly contributed to a long-term process of transmigration. Since under a gender-specific perspective, labor migration is viewed as a 'masculine way of life' widespread in Tajik society (Olimova 2007: 5), multi-local life in migration circuits is now perceived as the order of the day, but at the same time as a survival strategy, too (Faist 2004; Pries 2003). For a number of years an uninterrupted flow of remittances has been channeled through translocal lines and linkages, enhancing the conditions of many Tajik families at home. Because of the strong relationships Tajik labor migrants entertain with their home country, migration represents a translocal (transnational) practice (Basch 1994).

In Afghanistan, where the nation-state is of much lesser significance, it seems reasonable to refer to translocality instead of transnational practice. Project M1 (on flight and networks of migration) is situated in an uneasy framework: People cross many borders such as the structural divide between urban and rural areas, the lines between secure and insecure regions, and invisible yet factual borders between different and at times conflicting value systems. In many cases, people identify with 'deterritorialized categories' (Malkki 1992, 1995) like those 'refugees' that have been born in the neighboring countries, and large numbers of returnees coming back to a 'home country' they never saw before (Saito 2007, 2008, 2009). Especially in cases of forced migration relocation is often only temporary – or at least expected to be transitional – and migrants develop special ways to keep up ties in order to get information and secure personal properties (Harpviken 2009). Places of refuge are only inhabited in a selective manner: Time is bided in the place of asylum before going back to the places of origin. Places of temporal refuge can even be just points or punctual stations on the way to other destinations within and outside Afghanistan. At the same time, work opportunities abroad are readily taken while in exile, which blurs the line between flight and labor migration.

Translocality also seems to be an appropriate tool in the research on migration as a coping strategy in the conflict-ridden Ferghana Valley (Project M4), which is crisscrossed by borders of three states (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). In this highly sensitive setting, political boundaries are at the same time paramount and irrelevant for the everyday lives of the people. Tied into translocal (in many cases: transnational) networks, many families maintain historically developed relations with relatives on the other side(s). Many people actually transgress political boundaries inherited from Soviet times all the time for commercial purposes, for visiting relatives or in order to attend sacred sites. Yet, simultaneously, the existence of border between three nation-states cannot be denied. The border regions are highly militarized, which is legitimized by a prominent security discourse that refers to the region as a breeding ground for fundamentalist Islamic groups, like the al Qaida-linked Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. As in most of Central Asia, national governments compete with a

wide variety of loyalties to regional and local groupings on different levels of identification, many of which cut across republic boundaries.

3.4 Figurations of Migration and Mobile Ways of Life

Our understanding of migration is shaped by Elias' sociology of figuration (1970) which is related to relational constructivism, taking an intermediate position between structuralist instrumentalism which is bound to utilitarian theories, and structuralist determinism which neglects the role of agency. According to relational constructivism, "relationships and elements of a network are mutually constitutive" (Holzer 2006: 79). From a formal-structural point of view, a network cannot be captured without due regard to its individual actors and their specific attitudes, nor can individual actors viewed as anything other than embedded in and dependent on networks.

Setting out from the premise that basically everyone is or has been inscribed in a network of people (Elias 1978: 123), Elias drafted his ideas about figurations as interdependencies between individuals who live, (inter)act, and move in power-driven, hierarchical relationships with other individuals. Individuals that belong to the same figuration are mutually dependent. All of their actions are inseparably interwoven and can only be understood in relation to each other (Treibel 2008: 70). This is best exemplified by the set of personal pronouns which represents the elementary system of coordinates by which all human groupings can be plotted out (Elias 1978: 123-28). Another case in point is general game structure: Being an outcome of the actions of a group (or two teams) of interdependent people, the course of the game is autonomous from every individual player. However, the game does not exist independently of its players, as the word 'game' might suggest, nor would it be an idea or a kind of ideal type to be reconstructed by an (outside) sociological observer by considering the separate moves of the players. One can only understand its course and the permanent flux in the grouping of players on one side if one sees that their opponents on the other side are also in constant flux. Since the interdependence of the players may be interdependence of allies or of opponents, each of the two teams forms a figuration of its own. But given the interdependence between the two teams, both together also build a figuration (Elias 1978: 130-31). Thus, one can speak of figurations of figurations. Like in a game or during a dance of many couples, a change in one figuration automatically leads to changes in the positioning of other figurations, or in other words, in the course of the game. Hence, 'figuration' means the shifting dispositions of different players in relation to each other and the course of the game, or the shifting constellation of actors within the framework of a given polar structure (Willems 2010: 263-64).

The concept engenders a procedural understanding of social order(s) / societies as open and unbounded networks characterized by fluctuating power imbalances. Elias compares figurations to flexible lattice-works of tensions (Elias 1978: 131). Similarly, John Urry, by employing the mobility paradigm, suggests moving beyond societies as self-sufficient entities and taking networks into consideration (Urry 1999, 2000). Mann similarly argues that society can be grasped as a social interaction web, which is delineated in rather fuzzy ways by interaction stitches vis-à-vis its environs and other networks. Instead of looking at society in the singular, he promotes the idea of breaking up the conventional 'containers', which dominate sociological mainstream thinking, and postulates that, following the initial meaning of the Latin word *societas*, one should conceive of society as a more or less loose amalgam of stratified (interdependent) allies and networks (Mann 1990: 14, 34-35).

We understand mobility as an inherent element of figurational processes. Mobility manifests in flows of people, goods, ideas and resources circulating in networks. It also manifests in effects caused by these flows. Figurations of movers and non-movers are driven by mobility of those and sustained through these. The concept thus enables us to capture the complexities of migration, mobile ways of life and processes of networking. A single change in a figuration of interdependent actors may induce some of them to become mobile, or to migrate, whereas others become spatially or socially immobilized, even though their motility may still increase. Very often, for example, the decision to migrate is made by more than one person. At the same time, mobility can also be seen as an essential trigger of networking processes engendering chain migration because it influences the relation between actors in different ways. Mobility gives rise to new complexities. The absence of members of a household, as a result of migration, for example, changes social relations among kin groups as well as the lives of migrants at other places. The first generation of educational migrants from Passu, through establishing contact platforms and networks in Karachi, enabled co-villagers who belonged to the second or third generation to migrate, too. Tajik and Afghan labor migrants to Moscow and Teheran also enable their fellow countrymen to migrate to Russia and Iran respectively, due to their contacts to potential employers and their embeddedness in migration networks. Thus, we maintain that people migrate while they are socially embedded and play an active role in networks, but their interdependence also causes yet new mobilities. Thus, it is possible to speak of migratory figurations as a complex amalgam of networks and (migration) circuits, which are the cause and the outcome of mobility. From this vantage point, we propose to look at both the cause and outcome of mobility as interrelated phenomena and to consider mobility as a tool to grasp the dynamics of migration regardless of the actual location of actors. According to such a flexible understanding of the social universe, a wide array of research topics can be defined through figurative attribution.

We intend to apply the concept to a range of contexts to understand the dynamics and structures of local societies. In Osh (Project M4 on conflict dynamics in the Ferghana), for example, it may help to understand the circumstances and the major changes after the conflict of 2010. Here, many people moved not only across the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border but also at local level, for example between different localities on the Kyrgyz side. However, these movements in combination with the conflict situation have also yielded far-reaching changes within local societies: marrying off one's daughters earlier than before; avoiding the public sphere; sending one's sons far away as a survival strategy. The interplay of conflict, state domination, and movement of people results in the emergence of translocal coping communities which we may understand as figurations.

In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Project M5 "Re-Islamisation between state influences and global Muslim networks"), highly mobile actors are part of the figuration of re-Islamisation that involves the government, Islamic activists and missionaries coming from abroad (being part of the global Muslim networks), the population, and, depending on the place and region, members of local Sufi-networks and religious dignitaries (*imams, ishans, pirs*). The process of re-Islamisation is also influenced by labor migrants returning from Russia, and students from Islamic universities abroad, as well as by radical domestic and foreign forces. The process of re-Islamisation is facilitated by this lattice work of tensions and overlapping networks. The idea of interdependent individuals enables the researcher to follow the flows of ideas, theories, images and information about Islam which are channeled through chains of interdependencies and actions reaching out to places as distant as Siberia or Saudi Arabia.

One can also explore the dynamics of flows by looking at educational figurations (Project M3 on educational networks in Pakistan and beyond), which, taking the form of translocal livelihood networks that facilitate chain migration, connect the non-mover inhabitants of Passu and other villages in the Gojal region with their colleagues who moved to other places. Being highly mobile, during the last decades the villagers established translocal links and networks by creating new network bases in various cities, conveying information and images of those places to their home region and facilitating subsequent migration. In this case, the concept of figurations will help to explore and to elucidate mobile migration circuits and flows, spanning large distances and resulting in a comparably high number of well educated people in a geographically speaking remote corner of Pakistan. Since Gojal still embodies a central position in this kind of nexus, the question of center-periphery relations and perceptions gains a new qualitative hue.

Employing the concept as transnational figurations of labor migration helps to shed light on Tajik labor migrants from an anthropological perspective. It enables the researcher to keep track of the interdependencies and personal relationships young Tajik men are embedded in. In this case, Elias' concept will serve as an instrument for the investigation of personal relationships that facilitate mobility in the form of chain (labor) migration and the expansion of transnational networks. At the same time, it may be employed to explore the interwovenness between mobility and extended sequences of interdependent action at various scales of the local social order(s).

When investigating figurations of forced migration in the example of domestic migrants in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i Sharif (Project M1 on flight and migration networks), the Eliasian approach may be useful to highlight the social dimensions of south-south migration at translocal level. Here, the concept of force is to be understood as a relational concept intertwined with figurations. Such a research perspective helps to explain migration decisions and movements in a better way than would be the case with a one-dimensional focus on structural weaknesses and deficiencies reflected in a dearth of economic and educational opportunities. This means that force, a major trigger of migration processes, is socially constructed in, and mirrored through manifold chains of inter-dependencies.

Dealing with translocal figurations of the slave trade, the historical project M6 (on translocal slave-trade) will place emphasis on relations rather than conditions, processes rather than structures. Thus the approach will be used as a neutral term that enables the historian to capture the actions, strategies and constellations of all actors involved in the 'business'. Hence, it will be employed as a methodological tool for the investigation of historical records, enabling the historian to capture the interdependencies that tie actors together (slave raiders, traders, middlemen, slaves, customers etc.) and to identify the wider web of relationships they were embedded in. The concept will be examined with particular attention to its potential to serve as a point of departure for the discovery of historical facts, provided that it helps to overcome the bird's-eye view of many sources and to reconstruct / establish a regional history from below.

The fuzziness of figurations as an analytical tool, that is the difficulty to spot and delimit concrete figurations in social practice, is due to figurations embedding both actual patterns of relationships ("dependencies") and the representations through which the relationships are acted ("motives"). Therefore aspects connected with the interplay between structures and strategies, the contradiction

between which Elias' concept of figuration – or Bourdieu's of *habitus* – aims at solving, shall appear as the key focus. Project M2 on patterns and flows in marital networks in Northern Afghanistan and Southern Tajikistan takes such a stance. The analysis of patterns of marriage (embedding together matrimonial strategies and marital networks) requires clearly to consider both the exploration of nets of actual relations and the examination of categories and conceptions with which matrimonial relations are constructed and experienced.

3.5 Mobile Methods

When it comes to researching 'Figurations of Migration and Mobile Ways of Life' as outlined above, a set of 'mobile methods' can be considered. The methodology of most projects in this working group is inspired by Marcus's concept of a 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995) and the guidelines for studies following a translocal perspective, as proposed by Freitag and von Oppen (2010: 17-21). When tracing people's social and spatial mobilities, paying attention to different socio-cultural sets of norms and their interconnectedness by 'following' people, things, metaphors, stories, and biographies in the sense of Marcus (1995: 105-110) can help to scrutinize the relationality of figurations. Freitag and von Oppen argue for multiperspectivity when a "plurality of perspectives related to various locations" need to be reflected and confronted with each other in order to render translocality comprehensible the way it is. Especially the different perspectives of concrete actors involved in some translocal phenomenon need to be given due attention. Translocal research has to reflect its use of terms, categories and concepts for analysis with regard to their "temporal and spatial boundedness" (Freitag & von Oppen 2010: 18). With every term and category, if applied by the researcher as an analytical category or mentioned from the perspective of the actors involved, specific attention needs to be given to contextual semantics for duly paying attention to varying meanings in different contexts. Reflexivity necessarily includes reflecting on the positionality of the researcher, i.e. the "role, position and concepts of the observer" (ibid.: 18) in the course of a multi-sited ethnography. Furthermore, the authors summon a concept for a "systematic linking of different scales, both at the level of observation and at that of analysis" (ibid.: 18f.), systematic reflection on the interdisciplinary adaptation and applicability of methods and concepts originating from certain disciplines like history, anthropology, human geography and economics. They suggest that qualitative network analysis, partly applied in a rather metaphorical way and combined with a range of different methods and approaches,"is highly valuable for the understanding and description of translocal connectedness" (ibid.: 20).

The educational migration networks studied in Project M3 (on educational networks) for example, will be traced along the flows of students from their high-mountain home villages to their target destinations. Empirical research will take place in both types of sites, the mountain village as well as in selected target destinations. The research on proactive / reactive migration in Afghanistan (Project M1 on flight and migration networks) will also be conducted at different places, although specific day-to-day conditions in Afghanistan may set limits to that type of 'mobile research'. Not all places can be visited, especially not those places that were left behind out of security concerns. Collecting and interpreting narratives about these places and conditions that triggered migration may pose some extra methodological challenges, but appears worth the effort. The first piece of intensive fieldwork in Project M2 on the quiet mobility of women (Afghanistan, Tajikistan) has underlined the value of multi-sited research in understanding the rationales of translocal strategy-making, and will thus be pursued in further fieldwork as well.

4. Conclusion

As an outcome of the above outlined discussion of concepts and approaches for mobility and studies on migration in the context of Crossroads Asia, Norbert Elias' concept of figuration could prove its value and utility for this purpose and has been selected as the common overarching approach under which all subprojects of this working group will be united.

The concept of figuration constitutes a synthesis of aspects from structural and agency theories. Next to Bourdieu's theory of praxis and Giddens' theory of structuration, it is among the three most influential attempts to reconcile structural with actor-oriented approaches. From a network perspective, the antagonism between structure and agency, between relations and subjects has also been reconciled by the approach of relational constructivism, where similarly to the concept of figurations, relations and subjects are viewed as mutually constitutive and interdependent elements of the same totality, that is, network or figuration, respectively.

We cannot get any understanding of the actions of subjects by considering them in isolation, since we need to know about, and take into consideration, their embeddedness in social interrelations which are fraught with power, characterized by inequality and constrained by interdependencies. In the same way, relations and ties between the subjects have to be seen as outcomes of former / other actions of the subjects involved. Both aspects of the figuration, relations and subjects, are mutually constitutive. Though, for analytical purposes, a certain temporary shift of perspective (with a stronger focus on the one or the other side of the duality between subjects and relations) may be a useful tool for gaining new insights. By applying such a shift of focus, a process model of mobility and migration can be developed, as will be briefly outlined in the following.

The process model is based on the idea that the subjects are embedded in interdependent relations within figurations. It connects the various terms and concepts outlined in this paper in the course of a process cycle of mobility and migration. Most, if not all, of the projects in the working group deal with a combination of some form of compulsion that forces actors into mobility and migration on the one hand, and a (true or perceived) promise of better access to resources, of security, freedom, or a better life in general on the other. The element of compulsion is often rooted in the volatility of the region of origin, which allows for only limited agency of individual actors or groups. Stimulated by trends, ruptures and shocks in a vulnerable geographical, economical, and social setting, deficit or lack of required (material or immaterial) resources becomes a prominent every-day experience of people. As part of a strategy to overcome this lack of required or desired resources, some people resort to mobility and migration. To become geographically or socially mobile thus means to live out one's agency and perhaps, to acquiring more of it through networks one can build, and build upon.

Constellations of people interrelated in processes that come with mobility and migration, can best be described and analyzed as 'figurations'. The relations in these constantly reshaping figurations create and support social networks with expectable and quantifiable flows of people, ideas, and resources, which not only secure the networks' stability, but most importantly provide connectivity and exchangeability of whatever resources are required to solve the deficit problem identified at the beginning of the mobilization process. Actors strive to build themselves a network that can respond to their needs. Movers open up a translocal space. The search for resources can and will work out

(only?) on the trajectories of this translocal space where the original locations are as much part of the interaction as are the destinations.

There is of course no final stage which ideally should be achieved in this process model of mobility. We are not assuming that translocal networks always constantly extend or intensify. To the contrary, they may just as well shrink or even collapse; goals pursued on the move may remain unachieved and the perceived deficiencies may not be overcome. Also the imagined point zero, from which the mobilization process starts, does not exist as such, since every possible initial stage in itself is a result of an ongoing figurational process. Therefore, the model outlined here should not be misunderstood as a linear process model, but rather as an approach centered on the fluidity of mobility patterns, and ultimately of figurations as well.

Of course, such an agency-based process model of mobility and migration has many open fronts and may be attacked and criticized from many sides. Even within the working group it is not yet taken for granted. As outlined above, it constitutes only one of many possible perspectives, with a strong inclination towards agency theories. This paper documents the point of debate the working group has so far achieved, and should serve as a source of inspiration and a basis of discussion.

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Postscript to “Crossroads Asia through the Lens of Mobility and Migration: A Conceptual Approach”

Introduction

People’s migration and different forms of mobility are the joint areas of investigation in our working group. In the literature on social networks, migration and borderland studies, the mobilities of people, objects, and ideas are considered constitutive for the creation and reproduction of different layers of translocal connections. Mobility and connectivity/connectedness evolved as the key elements of the working group approach and are central aspects characterising the current stage of our research. In this supplement to the original concept paper on migration (Crossroads Asia Working Group Migration 2012) we reflect on the practicality of our initial conceptual framework in the light of our fieldwork experience, empirical data and findings. Some concepts have proven their value in our research contexts, while others we had to rethink, to enhance and to complement with new conceptual ideas. During the research process, new aspects came to the fore and gained importance, such as the power of discourses and processes of boundary setting and enacting. In the following we document some of our ongoing conceptual reflections with particular focus on different modes and formats of mobility and connectivity, and reconnect these considerations to the emerging Crossroads Asia Studies approach (Mielke & Hornidge 2014).

Modes and Formats of Mobility

Mobility is one of the central aspects in our work. It is linking our projects but is at the same time embracing a broad range of phenomena. Our research work centres on people’s migration and internal displacement in the context of war and insecurity in Afghanistan (Work Package (WP) Christoph Wenzel), flows and connections in Afghan marital networks (WP Ayfer Durdu), migration networks that facilitate higher education and livelihood change in high-mountain areas of India and Pakistan (WP Andreas Benz), transnational community-building in religious networks (WP Dietrich Reetz), migration and coping strategies in the aftermath of the inter-ethnic conflict in the Ferghana Valley (WP Aksana Ismailbekova), processes of Re-Islamisation in Tajikistan (WP Petra Tiller), and the mobility of slaves across and beyond Central Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries (WP Elena Smolarz).

Spatial mobility – linked to highly diverse ambitions from securing survival to obtaining higher education to spreading ideas and concepts, both secular and religious – is central to our research work. This spatial mobility is often linked with social mobility or at least the hope of achieving any form of improvement by employing the strategy of mobility or benefiting from existing translocal ties. Mobility in our case studies is reflected in flows of migration or travel for labour, education, marriage, pilgrimage and religious activism, trade and flight. Its material aspects include old and new transport links, telecommunication networks, mobile goods and presents, and remittance transfers; its immaterial aspects comprise information, ideas and ideologies that are passed on through telecommunication, mass media and the internet, but also through hard-copies of books and CDs or just through the stories of travellers and returning migrants.

In light of the heterogeneous character of these flows, we want to further clarify our understanding of the term. We understand ‘flows’ as regular or at least repeated (not exceptional and only singular)

movements with a spatial dimension. Similar to this, the Crossroads Studies-Paper defines *“flows as purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political, and symbolic structures of society. We include migration - the movement of actual people - among these flows.”* (Mielke & Hornidge 2014:20).

An analysis in terms of flows appears as a ‘natural’ fit when dealing with mobility. The example of the working package researching ‘the mobility of women through marriage’ (WP Ayfer Durdu) shows that flows can be more than a convenient analytical tool providing a true conceptual perspective. Marriage materialises here as a confluence of flows of people, goods, commitments and social status, concerning first of all women given into marriage, matrimonial payments, ceremonial ‘gifts’ and binding prestations, promises to be trusted and fulfilled, negotiations and bargains— and social status bestowed on some, withdrawn from others, as a consequence of the rules of the matrimonial market.

At the same time it appears useful to differentiate various dimensions of mobility, such as strategy, ability, potential, or objective. In several cases flows depict the commitment of actors to strategically make use of translocal mobilities, provoked or encouraged by the frail nature of the social and economic fabric in the region. Translocal mobilities may be part of coping, avoiding, or risk mitigation strategies of people or groups emerging from certain settings deemed disadvantageous (Benz 2014a, 2014c; Wenzel 2014). Other cases investigate strategies feeding on expansive ambitions of agents following certain ideas or ideologies. The example of Uzbek migration from Osh discusses conflict coping strategies. People affected by repeated outbreaks of inter-ethnic violence in Osh pursue conflict avoidance as a post-traumatic approach. Even though the Uzbeks, like other ethnic groups in Central Asia, used to practice migration during peaceful times as a way to earn money and send remittances back to their families, another form of migration has been imposed upon them as a result of conflict leaving Kyrgyzstan temporarily in search of safety (Ismailbekova 2013, 2014).

In this example as well as in other working packages, it becomes obvious that actors’ strategies of mobility are closely linked to places, social positions, and opportunities. Not all people at one locale, being a meeting place or node in overlapping networks (Massey 1991), share the same strategies to get along, diversify their income, save their physical integrity, or achieve secular or spiritual education (Benz 2013b). In many cases people feel forced or coerced to become mobile; it is not perceived by them as their free choice. In that sense ‘force’ or coercion become relational and positional and go far beyond ‘flight’ and ‘forced migration’. All our projects detect this relational and positional character of mobility, places, and social actors. The same dynamic is displayed in the working package on ‘forced migration’ of slaves (WP Elena Smolarz) where coercion takes on various shapes and forms for the slaves which also includes scope for greater social mobility for them through spatial movement.

As most forms of mobility being central to our work have some kind of regular, repetitive and purposeful character, it may be necessary to refine the categorizations of mobilities and the movement of people. Defining categories of migration introduces a lot of “ontological uncertainty” (Novak 2014 (forthcoming)), especially in the discussion about political categories like refugees or internally displaced persons (IDP) (Bakewell 2011, 2008). Deciding on such categories involves

'boundary works', as laid out in the Area Studies discussion paper outlining "Crossroads Studies" (Mielke & Hornidge 2014:25), i.e. the (power of) negotiating and defining social categories and their boundaries. Such boundary drawing is also involved in the negotiation of the emic concept of 'muhajir' vs. the international concept of IDP in Afghanistan (Wenzel 2013a). The choices involved in adapting local categories or mediating 'international' discourses, e.g. in the context of humanitarian assistance, exemplify knowledge production at different spatial levels.

Modes and Formats of Connectivity

'Opportunity Networks': translocal connection- and community-building as a strategic tool

Migration and spatial mobility often serve as a strategic means to reduce risks and increase opportunities in the context of coping and livelihood strategies, or to achieve economic, political, ideological or religious objectives. Empirical evidence from several working packages indicates how strategic mobility ties in with different modes and formats of connectivity and social interaction. There appears to be a dialectic relationship between mobility and connectedness based on social interaction: on the one hand, spatial (as well as social) mobility is a catalyst for establishing (new) connections, and, on the other, connectivity often enables and facilitates (new, increased) mobilities. It is thus not mobility alone which is used as a strategic means for securing survival and improving livelihoods, but also the utilization, nurturing and strategic development of social connections, and with this, social capital (or "network capital" (Urry 2007, 2012) in 'opportunity networks'. Different modes of connectivity, on which such 'opportunity networks' operate, have been researched by members of the working group. In one case they comprise of kinship networks in Mazar-e Sharif, Afghanistan and Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan (WP Ayfer Durdu). Here, connectedness in the form of 'relatedness' is produced through strategic marriages opening channels for potentially beneficial flows of people, goods, communication and ideas as well as for social status advancement. Afghan refugees stranded in Mazar-e Sharif (Wenzel 2013a, 2013b, 2014), and Wakhi from Gojal striving for higher education and professional employment (Benz 2013a, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) have been pursuing a blend of kinship networks, shared regional identity, ethnicity and friendship in their 'opportunity networks'. The expansion of religious network activities of Deobandi and Tablighi missionary movements (WP Dietrich Reetz) from South Asia into Central Asian countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has not only contributed to building transnational religious communities, but has also brought benefits for individual members of these networks. For example, graduates of the International Islamic University (Islamabad, Pakistan) from Tajikistan could occupy key positions, both private and public, in the young Islamic sector of the country. The Islamic education from Pakistan appeared not as a burden but as a facilitating factor and a career opportunity, as the graduates brought structured Islamic knowledge which so far has been scarce in Central Asia. These graduates and activists skilfully adapted their newly gained knowledge to the local cultural and political environment in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. At the same time they used their access to Pakistan's English-speaking political and commercial environment to acquire additional precious knowledge and training enabling them to play an active role in translocal and transnational processes of globalization, on aspects of trade, administration, governance or management. One could argue that the region is increasingly structured by such 'opportunity networks' which make use of the potential of social, cultural, religious and economic bonding in a way compatible with promises and hopes of both material and immaterial gains.

From figuration to positionality

The Crossroads Asia network started with a major reference to Elias' concept of figuration in order to gain a deeper understanding of people's interactions in social contexts and their socio-spatial implications. In the course of empirical research and data analysis, the figuration concept indeed helped us to understand and demonstrate how mobility and connectedness can create new and changing patterns of interaction in space and over time. With its particular take on the structure-agency dialectics, the figuration approach proved to be valuable for conceptualizing social relations and practices in defined actor settings, such as kinship networks. The analysis of the marital networks in Mazar-i Sharif, Afghanistan and in the Vanj district of Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan (WP Ayfer Durdu) produced new insight into this relationship. It showed that for gaining a deeper understanding of the interplay between structures and actors in the study of social life, it is necessary to shift the focus from normative models of attitudes to the empirical exploration of networks of actual interrelations and flows. The concept of 'relatedness', as discussed in the literature on 'new kinship studies', underlines the importance of people's active role in conceptualising and constructing the modes and formats of how they relate to each other and through which categories and rules these relations are enacted. Interactions, as the central constitutive element of connections (Freitag and Von Oppen 2010:20), are guided by such shared and negotiated concepts and imaginaries of belonging, positioning and identification. While the concept of figuration proved to work well in comparatively small, well-defined inter-personal networks (e.g. kinship), the need to broaden Elias' concept was felt when dealing with networks connecting heterogeneous actors, objects and places at different scales and across borders and boundaries of very different kinds. The dynamics of slave trade in Central Asia during the 18th and 19th century and its complex networks of actors (WP Elena Smolarz) are characterized by such diversity. For instance, ransom networks established with the objective of redeeming slaves of Russian origin in Central Asia included a broad variety of actors and agents, such as Russian imperial institutions (e.g. the "border commission"), rulers of Kazakh and Turkmen background, merchants of Bukhara and Khiva, agents acting on behalf of the Russian Empire, and slaves themselves. These actors belonged to different political systems, to different social and religious groups. The ransom network can be understood as a translocal network acting across political frontiers, as well as social, cultural and religious boundaries. The concept of 'positionality' could provide a promising way to broaden Elias idea of actors' positioning within figurations by complementing the social dimension with a spatial and a temporal dimension. Sheppard (2002) understands positionality as a tool to conceptualise and explain the changing mutual socio-spatial situatedness of agents to one another across space and time (Alff 2014; Alff & Benz 2014). Further, it draws attention to the active role actors and interactions play in social positioning. They are involved in processes of 'othering', discursive distinctions, social boundary-drawing, imaginaries and categorizations establishing difference and defining identity (Mielke and Hornidge 2014:24).

Towards a more relational reading of connectivity: from the network to the meshwork?

The network metaphor, which we used as one of our central concepts in the first three years of Crossroads Asia research in order to gain a better understanding of migration and mobility processes, focuses on connections (ties, links, relations, exchange, flows) between entities or nodal points with a certain mutual stability. Elias (1970) applies the network metaphor in his conceptualization of figurations as consisting of individuals (as given entities), connected in a fluctuating web of relations, interdependencies and power-balances. Moving conceptually from figurations towards positionality

also demands that we revisit the network metaphor (cf. Alff & Benz 2014). Positionality suggests a more thoroughly relational reading of connectivity. From such a perspective, connections are not simply established between pre-given entities (e.g. actors, institutions, places, objects, ideas) which then are put in relation to each other in networks of nodes and edges. The role of relations in creating the very entities considered has to be addressed as well. According to Ingold (2006:13) entities only come into existence and are constituted within relational fields. Therefore, they cannot be thought of as separate from their environment. Consequently, a mere interactional perspective (relations between pre-given entities) needs to be replaced by a “transactional perspective” (Verne 2012:26), which considers entities not as “independent existencies present anterior to any relation” (Cassierer 1953:36, cited in Verne 2012:26) but as themselves being the very result of relations (cf. Conradson and McKay 2007). This implies a shift of analytical focus “from the elements and identities towards relations, from traits to processes” (Berndt and Boeckler 2008:3, cited in Verne 2012:26). Ingold suggests moving from the network metaphor and its seemingly solid, static and self-containing nodes, towards a “meshwork” image of the lifeworld as a “field of interwoven lines” (Ingold 2006:13), in which no clear boundary between an entity and its environment can be drawn.

Dynamics and Trajectories of Translocal Connectedness

One of our main research foci in the migration working group was on tracing and understanding the socio-spatial and temporal trajectories of mobile connectedness. Conceptually this was grounded in Elias’ dynamic model of social figurations epitomized in what he calls the ‘Figurationsprozess’ (figurational process). In this process, relations, power balances and actor constellations are constantly fluctuating. Aiming at contributing to a new reading of Area Studies, we were particularly interested in the spatial references of these figuration processes, e.g. their rooting in and implications for certain places. The issue of understanding, analyzing and describing the nature and quality as well as the magnitude or quantity of trajectories of mobile connectedness has been raised in all working packages of this working group. Examples comprise the figurational dynamics of slave trade and ransom networks in Central Asia in the 18th and 19th century (WP Elena Smolarz), the recent dynamic developments of transnational Deobandi and Tablighi networks expanding from South Asia into post-Soviet Central Asia (WP Dietrich Reetz), and the expanding migration networks of the Wakhi of Gojal and their implication for regional (and translocal) development (Benz 2013a, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). We found that the dynamics of connectivity are shaped by and negotiated through what could be called ‘boundary works’ (Mielke and Hornidge 2014:24) in processes of boundary setting, enacting and their redrawing. These can become manifest in changing border regimes and fluctuating attempts to control cross-border flows. For instance, the fall of the Soviet Union gave a boost to the figurational dynamics of Islamic missionary networks in the region opening space for them to spread into the post-Soviet states (WP Dietrich Reetz). ‘Boundary works’ can also become manifest in processes of discursive bordering, e.g. in categorizing who counts as a ‘refugee’ (Wenzel 2013a), in re-defining kinship relations (WP Ayfer Durdu), or in creating a shared religious identity between formerly unconnected groups of *maulai* and *khoja* Ismailis (Benz 2013a, 2014b). Based on insights from our empirical studies, we feel the need to broaden the initial conceptual approach followed in our working group. We need to consider more explicitly the power of discourses and boundary-producing knowledge regimes at different scales affecting people’s lives and daily social practices. Future research and analysis will pay more attention to setting discourses and categories, drawing boundaries and defining knowledge.

Spaces and Places of Translocal Connectivity

Three aspects/questions concerning the spatial anchoring of figurational processes became particularly important in our empirical studies: a) how places are created and shaped by diverse flows passing through and by networks overlapping there; b) how events and developments in one place effect events in other interconnected places; c) how people's actions in and between interconnected places are shaped by influences and events from other places at various geographical scales, and how to make a living and manage in a translocalised, interconnected world. We will deal with each in turn.

Places in an Interconnected World of Flows

An important reference point for a better understanding of the relationship between place and flows is offered by Van Schendel's (2002) concept of 'process geographies'. Rejecting spatial categories as 'ontologically given – as static, timeless containers of historicity' (Van Schendel 2002:658), he suggests moving from 'trait geographies' towards the study of interconnections in what he calls 'flow studies' (Van Schendel 2002:665). Flows play a central role in the creation of process geographies, and, as flows move through localities, they define the character and destiny of places, 'contributing to their rise and fall' (Van Schendel 2002:662). A similar reading of place has been offered earlier by Massey (1991), who considers places as 'meeting points', in which various 'networks of social relations and movements and communication' weave together in a particular locus, creating a 'place' as the 'particular, unique point of their intersection' (Massey 1991:27). This thoroughly relational understanding of place is also close to Ingold's concept of the meshwork, as outlined above.

From Figurational Process to Translocal Development

The central argument of dynamics in figurations is concerned with the idea that change in one part of the figuration will cause reactions, shifts and adaptations in the entire arrangement. Following a more spatial reading of Elias' figurational process (as outlined above), this argument can be applied to places as well (cf. Mielke and Hornidge 2014:21). People, places and events that are distant in space can be interconnected in such ways that 'what happens in one place has a direct bearing on the other' (Zoomers and Van Westen 2011:379), in a process which Zoomers and van Westen (2011) term 'translocal development'. They draw on established notions of 'translocality' as a blueprint for interrelations across space. For example, Freitag and von Oppen developed their take on translocality with the intention of providing 'an intermediary concept which helps to better understand and conceptualise connections beyond the local' (Freitag and Von Oppen 2010:3). For them, translocality describes 'the sum of phenomena which result from a multitude of circulations and transfers. It designates the outcome of concrete movements of people, goods, ideas and symbols which span spatial distances and cross boundaries, be they geographical, cultural or political' (Freitag and Von Oppen 2010:5). For Zoomers and van Westen, the 'local'/ 'locality' remains critical from a translocal perspective as a place of social and cultural interaction, as a 'meeting place' (Massey 1991:28) and 'specific node' (Zoomers and Van Westen 2011:378). There, countless overlapping networks, relations and communications of different nature meet and weave together. An understanding of what happens in a particular place needs to take into account and has to be read as reaction to the interdependent developments and changes in the whole figuration. This has been exemplified by the impressive economic and socio-cultural development trajectory of the Wakhi of Gojal in Northern Pakistan, which can only be understood by taking into account a broad range of translocal links (Benz 2013a, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

Making a living in a translocalised, densely interconnected world

Against the backdrop of this new reading of space and place emerging from our empirical studies, central central question arises: how are people's actions in and between interconnected places shaped by influences and events from other places at different geographical scales? How do people make a living and manage in a translocalised, densely interconnected world? The answers to these questions are, as one might expect, diverse.

For example, patterns of migration and flight in and from Afghanistan are shaped by a number of factors ranging from the local (e.g. insecurity due to Taliban raids and oppression) to the international level (e.g. the international military intervention in Afghanistan). The insecurity in parts of the country that is forcing people to look for safer surroundings elsewhere, mostly in cities, is part of a larger regional power struggle and not limited to the territory of Afghanistan. At the same time many developments taking place in the cities are owed to the fast and intense changes that are characterizing the Afghan urban space. Processes such as international intervention, world market integration, technical 'modernization', and 'cultural globalization' make them spots of global connectedness. The way ordinary people are acting in these overlaying surroundings, how they interpret and try to adapt to what is going on is a central part of this research. There are many examples in our research showing how international and universal discourses are becoming part of people's daily life and how they are influencing daily social practices (Wenzel 2013a, 2013b, 2014).

How local people's subjective concepts of Islam are shaped by various non-local/translocal factors in urban and rural contexts of Tajikistan (WP Petra Tiller) constitutes another case in point. Mental mobilities, flows of ideas and images influence the subjective concepts of Islam of local people through various actors. The government, migrant workers and Islamic clerics educated abroad – as well as television, the internet, CDs and books – all play their part. In addition, it is not only the figuration of Islam read as a 'development process' that is important, but also its actors and the flows of related ideas, theories and images. The impact these flows have on the subjective concepts of Islam is of central interest in this working package (Tiller & Herbers 2013).

Conclusion

In this postscript to our concept paper on migration (Crossroads Asia Working Group Migration 2012) we developed and compiled some new thoughts and advancements of the initial concepts with which we started off Crossroads Asia research and which we documented in our first concept paper. After scrutinizing their applicability and utility in the context of fieldwork experiences and in light of empirical findings from our research, we have refined the terms and concepts central to our work. We have reflected on the character of mobility and connectivity and emphasized the importance of the ideas of positionality and situatedness. These aspects guided us, as we have outlined in this paper, in re-thinking the concepts of the 'network' and the 'figuration' and in pushing them a bit further by stressing the positions, specifics and opportunities of actors in contexts of mobility and migration as well as the dynamics of translocal connectedness.

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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 understands itself as a mediator 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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