CROSSROADS
ASIA

The Crossroads Perspective

Claus Bech Hansen

Crossroads Asia Concept Papers

Competence Network Crossroads Asia

Editors: Ingeborg Baldauf, Stephan Conermann, Claus Bech Hansen, Anna-Katharina Hornidge, Hermann Kreutzmann, Katja Mielke, Dietrich Reetz, Conrad Schetter and Martin Sökefeld.

Partners of the Network:

The Crossroads Perspective

By Claus Bech Hansen

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, Area Studies (AS) disciplines as traditionally conceptualized, organized, and taught at universities have been subject to worldwide debates. Charged with notions of ethnocentrism, methodological obsoletism and for creating fixed geographical 'areas', solidifying regimes of (Western) hegemony, AS has been described as unsuitable for the study of the modern world, processes related to globalisation, and the increasing mobility of people, goods, and ideas. In Germany, the debates have resulted in numerous 'rethinking' initiatives and corresponding funding lines sponsored by government and research agencies such as the *German Ministry for Research and Education* and *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.*

This paper discusses how figurational sociology can serve as a fruitful interlocutor for rethinking AS in the 21st century. In doing so, it draws on recent relational theories in the social sciences and related disciplines as well as the findings from the research network *Crossroads Asia* to shed new light on the interdependencies between actors and structures under the condition of globalization. Moreover, based on the research results, experience, and theorization of the Crossroads Asia network, it sketches out the contours of a *Crossroads Perspective* (CP). The CP is not meant to put up a rigid research paradigm but rather lay out flexible research avenues based on a relational, processual approach broadly speaking within the field of figurational sociology. CP thus aims to provide researchers with ideas and ways to approach, study, and analyse the stuff of our social reality by constituting a set of tools that can enable us to better understand socially constructed translocal contexts, spatial arrangements, positionality and epistemic regimes, as well as the compound interrelations between structures and action in today's globalised world.

II. Area Studies and Crossroads Asia

In 2011, the interdisciplinary research network Crossroads Asia was launched to contribute to rethinking and positioning Area Studies (AS) disciplines in the 21st century. Preceding the project's foundation was a long-drawn debate over the means and ends of AS at German universities (Middell 2013; Mielke and Hornidge 2014). Throughout the 2000s, several science policy agencies, including the German Ministry for Education and Research, were involved in assessments and recommendations of AS, peaking in a crucial report by the German Council for Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat, WR) in 2006. The report concluded that "the process of globalization on the one hand, and the consequential increasing consolidation of cultural and regional identities on the other, have led to a growing interest in regional-specific expertise" (Wissenschaftsrat 2006, 5). Given the increasing need to provide expert knowledge to policy makers in times of globalization, the report argued that "the currently existing range of regionally defined disciplines must also in the future be preserved and structurally strengthened" (Wissenschaftsrat 2006, 29). Contrary to voices critical of AS disciplines, the report thus implicitly acknowledged that area specific knowledge appeared more urgent than ever in a globalised world. The decade-old WR report must be applauded for its projections. For if the past decade serves as a yardstick, globalization has evidently not mainstreamed the world into one homogenous whole; that opposing interests incontrovertibly still characterise international relations; and that national, cultural, religious differences persist. There is, in other words, indeed an urgent need for area specific knowledge and to consolidate AS research centres.

Contrary to other countries, the deliberations during the early 2000s over the future of AS in Germany revitalized AS disciplines and institutes. During the past several years, funding agencies have supported a series of interdisciplinary AS projects that cover all the world's regions and seek to rethink, reform, and redress AS disciplines for the 21st century. Simultaneously they aim to better link AS to the 'systematic' disciplines such as political science and sociology as a means to increase student and policy-maker interest as well as to integrate output into overarching theory and methodology debates (Hornidge and Mielke 2015). The funding opportunities have, moreover, strengthened AS research in Germany, providing a solid base for conducting cutting-edge research that serve and ideally inform the interests of government agencies, students, and the public. In other words, the German

approach strongly suggests that rather than attempting to strangle AS through budget cuts, universities and funding agencies worldwide would be well advised instead to push for a constructive rethinking process.

A cooperation of seven partners over a project period of six years, Crossroads Asia was founded following a call from the German Ministry of Science and Education and has consisted of two funding periods (2011 to 2014 and 2015 to 2016 respectively).[1] In the name of interdisciplinarity, the project gathered researchers from the social and political sciences, human geography, linguistics, social anthropology, and history. It was consciously decided to disrupt traditional notions of territorial areas such as Central Asia or South Asia by researching an area that has traditionally been one of high mobility and exchange of people, goods, and ideas, and which spans the territory from the Aral Sea to China's Xinjiang province on an east-west axis and from Kazakhstan to India on a north-south.

Broadly organizing its research around Norbert Elias' concept of figurations (Elias 2000, 1970) and the intricate web of interdependencies he sees shaping the social world, Crossroads Asia's initial funding period focused on mobility in the three thematic areas *development, conflict, and migration*, in which it devised a series of empirical studies in seventeen interrelated work packages.[2] While keeping Elias' figurations as the overarching conceptual framework, the second funding period aimed to analyze the empirical findings of the first phase from a conceptual perspective around the themes *figurational construction of space, follow the figuration,* and *reflexivity* in seven work packages with the goal of contributing theoretically and methodologically to the revitalization of AS.[3]

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[1] Partners of the first phase included Zentralasien-Seminar der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Geographisches Institut U Cologne, Asien-Orient-Institut/Department of Ethnology U Tübingen, Institut für Ethnologie Ludwigs-Maximilians-University, Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), Institut für Orient- und Asienwissenschaften (IOA) and Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung (ZEF) for Bonner Asien Zentrum of U Bonn, Centre for Development Studies (ZELF)/Institut für Geographische Wissenschaften at the Free University Berlin. In the second phase, Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) joined the project instead of the Geographisches Institut U Cologne and Asien-Orient-Institut/Department of Ethnology U Tübingen.

[2] The project website provides a full overview of all work packages: http://crossroads-asia.de/crossroads-asia.html.

[3] The projects were: 1) 'How to speak conflict' - Konfliktualität in sprachlicher Kommunikation; 2) Mobilität im mobilisierten Raum: Interaktion von autochthoner Bevölkerung und Kolonialmacht in der mittelasiatischen Frontierregion; 3) Menschen im Zwischenraum: Umgang mit erzwungender Immobilität in Kabul; 4) Spatial production and identity negotiations along Xinjiang's roads; 5) Sozialräumliche Transformation von Handelsorten und Zielorten der Bildungsmigration: Die relationale Konstituierung des Lokalen; 6) 'Re-bordering' in Kaschmir: Aushandlung von Räumen und Staatlichkeit in umstrittenen Grenzregionen; 7) The Crossroads Perspective: a fundament for Crossroads Studies?

This paper draws on the research results, experience, and theorization of the Crossroads Asia research, and sketches out the contours of a *Crossroads Perspective* (CP). The CP is not meant to be a rigid research paradigm; it rather aims to delineate flexible research avenues based on a relational, processual approach broadly speaking within the field of figurational sociology. CP thus aims to provide researchers with ideas and ways to approach, study, and analyse socially constructed translocal contexts, spatial arrangements, positionality and epistemic regimes, as well as the compound interrelations between structures and action.

In the next section, we will briefly introduce Norbert Elias' figurational sociology, which will serve as a basis for subsequent discussions of recent advances in the social sciences and related disciplines, many of which have not only sparked critique of AS disciplines but also brought to light a series of challenges that pertain to AS disciplines. In a second step, the paper examines more specifically how Elias' theory can be implemented in relation to key themes of *Crossroads Asia's* research, thus highlighting some of the areas in which figurational sociology can benefit from a view to recent scholarly work to strengthen Elias' work methodologically and theoretically. As a result, the paper contributes to the growing literature on how to conduct AS in the 21st century.

III. Figurations in Times of Globalization

In recent years, the theories of the German sociologist Norbert Elias have gained considerable traction in the social sciences and humanities. His holistic approach, insisting on drawing on a variety of disciplines (e.g. sociology, psychology, and history) in order to meaningfully analyse and understand the development of human society, appear well-suited for a science arena characterised by a growing demand for interdisciplinarity, as the world becomes increasingly global, intertwined, and interdependent. While the revival of Elias' theories is not least due to structural changes in the academy of a globalizing world, Elias' theories have also served as discussants in recent research concerned with the century long debates over the relationship between structure and agency (Dunning and Hughes 2013; Gabriel and Mennell 2011; Deacon 2007; Kilminster 2013).

Central to Elias' theory, prominently expressed in his seminal work *The Civilizing Process* and later in *Was ist Soziologie*, is the concept of figurations, which Elias understands as a dynamic

web of interdependencies characteristic of human society, into which every human is born and that form and impact individual agency (Elias 1970, 151pp, 2000). According to figurational sociology, societies are socially constructed entities made up of networks of human interdependencies, which tie agents to one another. Moreover, if we are to successfully analyse and understand the essence of societies, we must, says Elias, examine the interdependencies that provide the glue between individuals in society (with its inherent structures) and perceive of these as figurations (Elias 1970, 151pp). Based on the incorporation of actor- and structure-centred disciplines, Elias' approach aims to overcome what he saw as a faulty division between the individual and society, first and foremost in the theories of disruption championed by Talcott Parson (Elias 2000, 449–84). Hence, Elias argued, a separation between actors and the structures of the social world they inhibit would fail to explain the bonds between humans that allow them to make up a society and its structures in the first place and, by extension, the processes of development that societies go through (Elias 2000, 453–57).

The interdependencies conceptualised by Elias are not merely related to socio-economic or political interdependencies. On the contrary, Elias defines figurations with analytical finesse, conceiving of them as varied in nature and made up of not only affective elements such as emotions, fear, superiority, but also social, economic, and spatial realms of human interaction (Baumgart and Eichener 2013, 113–23). Such are the complexities that tie together and that Elias understands as comprising inter-related complex figurations through interdependence chains that constitute figurations. These figurations are resilient to varying degrees but essentially always susceptible to change, stresses, and impacts through social and individual processes. Moreover, changes occurring in one 'corner' of a figuration, may (but must not) release an impact that affect interdependencies in another. Analytically then, figurations can be extended vertically and hierarchically across planes, levels, and scales in human society, potentially generating ever larger and encompassing figurations (Dunning and Hughes 2013, 52–56).

Abstracting from the theoretical level, Elias famously analogised figurations to games or dances: "no one will imagine a dance as a structure outside the individual or as a mere abstraction. The same dance figurations can certainly be danced by different people but without a plurality of reciprocally oriented and dependent people, there is no dance […] just

as the small dance figurations change – becoming now slower, now quicker – so too, gradually, or more suddenly, do the large figurations which we call societies" (Elias 2000, 482). The analogy to a dance does not equal its essentialization. The point Elias intends to bring across is that the structure of and the agents participating in a dance are interdependent and that structural or action-related changes can affect the entire figuration; "it is a process linking together action and structural conditions " (Sökefeld 2016, 6). By underlining the dynamism of a dance, Elias alerts us to the processual nature of the social world and offers a methodology that allows us to analyse the processes of human interdependencies and the contexts (structures) in which they develop.

The Crossroads Perspective (CP) builds on figurational sociology's general assumption that studying interdependencies between humans provide a powerful tool to understand human societies and the processes that direct them. Meanwhile, CP acknowledges that Elias' figurational paradigm has been criticized for remaining logically weak due to its expansive nature (Layder 1986). There is a grain of truth to the critique, especially on a purely theoretical level. For how does one analytically delimit interdependencies in any meaningful way when they arguably can encompass every human being? Despite the justified criticism, it too is problematic. For it speaks to a general problem known from chaos theory and famously popularized as the butterfly effect: a small change in one state of a system can have severe repercussions for a later state (Gleick 1988). The logical weakness of figurational sociology does not necessarily contradict its methodological or even theoretical operationalization, however. CP contends that it belongs to the core practice of any research to follow and delimit evidence of interdependencies, and the plausible web of causality they generate, and construe it to produce coherent arguments, while drawing a border between logical extremes. Moreover, while we can reasonably argue for a direct and comprehensible causality chain between the accumulative effects of individual actions in regard to climate change, for example, we face difficulties building a strong argument around the influence on individual agency between actors with no other connections than being citizens of earth given the unsurmountable number of contingent factors of influence. Before developing CP further, though, it is necessary to align aspects of figurational theory with more recent advances in the social sciences and humanities that have spoken to questions of space, mobility, development, and knowledge production. This will be the focus of the following section.

IV. Advances in the Academe and the Crossroads Perspective

The basic principles of Elias' figurational sociology with its aim to bridge the gap between functional and strategic analyses stand at the beginning of a debate that still marks the social sciences. Some scholars even see him as the initiator of a 'relational turn' (Dunning and Hughes 2013, 3). But independently of Elias' specific role, he evidently partook in a debate, in which scholars have attempted to provide key theoretical and methodological tools that allow us to overcome the dichotomous view of structures and agency, and analytically perceive of them as mutually constituent of the social world.[4] Operating within the purview of holistic theories, relational approaches have been advocated in different forms e.g. as structuration theory (Giddens 1984), strategic-relational theory (Jessop 2001), reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), the TPSN approach (Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008), and communicative rationality (Habermas 1984; Niemi 2005) but the scholars have yet to agree on a one-size fits all paradigm.

Advances in the structure-agency debate have been part of and influenced by various new – isms and turns in social sciences and humanities. The drive towards inter- and even post-disciplinary scholarship, the linguistic-, cultural-, spatial-, non-human-, Anthropocene-turns, as well as post-structuralism, constructivism, new institutionalism, transnationalism, are among the results this process has yielded. They have expanded our views on the social reality and called new voices onto the scholarly arena that challenge existing epistemic regimes, methodology, and theorization (Hornidge and Mielke 2015; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006; Grosfoguel 2015; Quijano 2007). In reference to AS disciplines, particularly the cultural turn (Lackner and Werner 1999; Bachmann-Medick 2007), spatial turn (Lefebvre 1992; Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008; D. Massey 2005; Soja 1989; Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008), and post-structuralism (Jackson 2003) have been instrumental. Hence, concepts such as transnationalism (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995; Mintz 1998; Spivak 1993), transregionalism and regional orders (Hentschke 2009; Godehardt and Lembcke 2010), scale (Novak 2014; van Schendel 2002), and translocality (Freitag and Oppen 2009) are testimonies of a period, in

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[4] The structure-agency dualism is by far not the only form of dualist debates in sociology. Eric Dunning and Jason Hughes (2013, 8) for example count materialism vs idealism, social statics versus social dynamics, synchronic studies versus diachronic studies.

which world developments sparked scholars to go beyond specific national and regional containers and eschew 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Schiller 2003).

Increasing focus on trans-isms has produced a wealth of studies that question traditional conceptualizations of society, amongst which the works of John Urry (2002), Manuel Castells (1996), and Arjun Appadurai (1996, 2000, 2013) have been particularly influential. Having each produced seminal works, their scholarship has profoundly shaped views on mobility, interconnectivity, and networks in the age of globalization. Departing from the observation that the globalizing world defined by high levels of mobility of humans, resources, and knowledge crucially influences not only the way we experience and act in everyday life but also the 'traditional' borders of state and society, Urry (2002) argues for a reconsideration of 'the state' as traditionally conceived of in sociology. In his reading, the role of the state has dramatically altered, making it a regulator rather than an arbiter of change, outdating its role as sociology's core object (Sheller and Urry 2006). In a similar vein, Castells (1996) argues for a reconceptualization of society to suit the information age, in which it is increasingly the flows between (worldwide) networks and networked spaces that direct it (Sheppard 2002). Finally, Appadurai (1996) has shed light on the global from the local, depicting the Global Now with its disrupted patterns of social relations that have upset identities and boundaries but created new spaces, famously captured in his -*scapes* typology.

Moreover, Castells, Urry, and Appadurai have contributed to a better conceptualisation of the processes that continue to challenge traditional pillars of society and social organisation, and further scholarship to this effect has sparked vivid discussions about the constituents of space, place, locality, and positionality, and their relevance in an ever more interconnected world. For which are the properties of e.g. nation states when distance, borders, and time collapses through increasing mobility and technological advances connecting distant localities anywhere in the world or when nation states begin to lose power e.g. to networked 'global cities' (Sassen 1991)? What repercussions does it have for the spaces we inhibit, their location, and the institutions that order them? How does it influence agency and how can we trace the change in socially constructed institutions that on the surface still organise and govern social reality?

The rising emphasis on trans-isms should not lead to a belief that the factor space is inconsequential. Henri Lefebvre (1992), the perhaps most prolific writer on space, held that

"social space is constituted neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel of various contents" (1992, 27pp). Space is constructed, defined, and delimited by the people and institutions acting within or in regard to it. Hence, "social space serves as an important frame of reference for social positions and positioning and […] determines everyday practices, biographical employment projects, and human identities, simultaneously pointing beyond the social context of national societies" (Pries 1999, 26). At the heart of these considerations stand the basic acknowledgement that while the traditional institutions ordering the space we live in are undergoing change, human beings are always products of and act within concrete places; they are woven into a web of spatially defined relations, dependencies, and boundaries (Appadurai 1996; Segbers 2000; Lewis and Wigen 1997).

The Global Now is thus characterised by simultaneous, yet opposing forces: we observe a de- and a re-territorialization of space, while place continues to impact people's lives and opportunities. This alludes to Ron Martin's remark that "globalization may well have eliminated *space*, but it has by no means undermined the significance of location, of *place*" (Martin 1999, 15–16), precisely because the spatialization e.g. of networks needs concrete places (Crossroads Asia 2012a, 11; Harders 2000, 28): global and local factors merge in communities around the world, a circumstance eloquently captured by the concept 'glocal' (Robertson 1995). Eric Sheppard's research into positionality, i.e. the geographic situation of a place, and the global economy, supports this view and alerts us to the relationship between positionality and development, arguing that 'worm-holes' diminishing space can arise through specific events that are connecting areas with others (Sheppard 2002, 308).

The debates on globalization, space, mobility, and networks have altered our view on AS and pushed the self-reflexive rethinking process. This is especially the case with regard to one of the core critiques directed at AS disciplines, which has been based on a dual interconnected argument relating to the history of AS as academic disciplines and the artificial, constructed nature of their subject matter. The former rightfully contends that AS institutes were by and large products of imperial interest of domination, as it arose during the era of European empires and following World War Two in the United States (and the Soviet Union) (Mielke and Hornidge 2014, 4–5). The latter holds that AS arbitrarily divided the world into regions based on Othering processes, developed often for the purpose of political and economic

domination or Cold War alliances (Burgess 2004, 125; Chou and Houben 2006). "Areas are not facts but artefacts", Appadurai thus rightfully holds, "built on our interests and our fantasies as well as on our needs to know, to remember, and to forget" (2000, 8). In other words, areas and AS reflect an academic process of 'making sense of' social reality and we need to ask "ourselves what it means to internationalize any sort of research before we apply our understandings to the geography and regions" (Appadurai 2000, 9). Although Karin Knorr-Cetina recognizes a "diversity of epistemic cultures" (1999, 3; Amsler 2007) in her study of their production, the cultures of AS are to a large degree deeply rooted in 'Western' academic production. Moreover, the act of 'making sense of' through AS has a western tilt and must, as the epistemological underpinnings we implement to understand the world, undergo rigid critical examination. Indeed, we must too be critically aware of our own stance in how we reproduce knowledge, as well as our own positionality in construing the areas we examine, in order to meaningfully reflect social constructions and how our 'geography of knowing' informs us (van Schendel 2002).

The explicit aim to factor into analyses the many variables of an ever more complex reality does provide considerable methodological challenges (Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008). In their TPSN approach[5] Jessop et al therefore aim to perceive of territories, places, scales, and networks as "mutually constitutive and relationally intertwined dimensions of sociospatial relations" (Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008, 389). As a tool to explain sociospatial processes, TPSN is undoubtedly strong but the focus on territory, place, scale, and network arguably poses a limitation that excludes other potential spatial figurations. By contrast Elias' figurational sociology breaks free of such limitations with its emphasis on the various dimensions of interdependencies. For given its methodological premise and emphasis on interdependencies, Elias anticipated, we can reasonably argue, fundamental processes of social realities that add further substance to recent structure-agency debates by equipping us with tools to analyse the link between agents and structures at different levels and scales as well as the specific spatialities they produce.

It is with these deliberations in mind that the *Crossroads Perspective* (CP) uses figurational sociology. On the one hand, based on figurational sociology it provides a flexible conceptual

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[5] TSPN is short for: Territories, Places, Scales, and Networks.

framework, promoting a multi-dimensional processual analysis of sociospatial relations as dynamic interdependencies across time and space. The processual premise of CP further alerts not only to the constructed nature of research objects – be it areas, space, conflicts, etc. – but also to the epistemic regimes that research and researchers operate in. CP should, moreover, be understood as a theoretical toolkit that can help push the boundaries of relational research and offer ways to explore the ontology of structures and action within the realm of social reality. On the other hand, CP aims to offer methodological insights into how scholars can approach and conduct research based on mobile methods. Captured in the phrase 'follow the figuration', CP is footed on an inductive and multidisciplinary methodology, drawing on quantitative and qualitative methods from the social and political sciences, human geography, linguistics, social anthropology, and history, although it by no means wishes to delimit itself methodologically.[6]

Meanwhile, multi-sited research plays a key role for scholars to familiarize themselves with the life worlds they explore, with emic and etic conceptualizations of social reality, as well as to follow and navigate figurational dynamics as a means to investigate further the nature, depths, and extent of human interdependencies (Marcus 1995; Falzon 2012; Hage 2005; Hornidge and Mielke 2015). In line with Elias' processual understanding of development, CP seeks to define middle range concepts for macro-level theorization (Merton 1949; Mielke and Hornidge 2014) and to include self-critical enquiry into the researcher's positionality to raise awareness of epistemic regimes to challenge traditional concepts and voices of academic production. CP thus aligns itself with critical theory (Jackson 2015; Spivak 1988; Tlostanova 2015; Grosfoguel 2015; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009; Butler 2011), without rigidly prescribing research directions. Moreover, CP argues that AS scholarship is particularly meaningful under these preconditions and aims to inspire questions and enquiries needed for rich contextual AS research to inform meta-level theorization.

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[6] The Crossroads Asia network comprised researchers from the social and political sciences, human geography, linguistics, social anthropology, and history not only highlighting the wish but also the need for interdisciplinarity to navigate the complexity of the modern world.

V. Operationalizing the Crossroads Perspective

In the previous sections we discussed figurational sociology as well as recent advances in the social sciences and related disciplines in order to delineate the contours of CP along with its theoretical and methodological blueprint. By contrast, this chapter will turn to the operationalization of CP and review how CP can assist scholars when formulating their research questions, analyse their empirical evidence, and theorize it. With the limited space here available, it impossible to cover in detail all research areas of the Crossroads Asia network. In this chapter, I zoom in on various overarching themes, on which Crossroads Asia researchers have worked. It is divided into subsections related to space, mobility and development, which however is informed by Crossroads Asia research on a multitude of topics such as identity, power hierarchies, conflict, linguistics, interventions, and gender to name but a few of the areas in which Crossroads researchers have worked. The chapter shows how a figurational analysis can help us better explain sociospatial processes from a relational point of view. Finally, we use the research results to push the borders of figurational sociology by relating findings and methods to Elias' ideas, while at the same time underlining the flexibility of CP and its wide range of applicability.

The Figurational Construction of Space

Areas are social constructions and as such, imagined communities. They share this property with spatial constructions like nations, borders, and social space on a more generally level (Anderson 1983). Notions of space are 'social space' that are always "already imagined, made, moulded (*zugerichtet*), appropriated or discerned from the point of view of gain and development" (Pries 2008, 81); they are not given, natural entities but the product of processual space-time entanglements, (imagined) cognitive maps that are negotiated through communicative action, producing subjectivities and objective spatialities (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Knoblauch 1995, 2001, 2013; Keller 2013). Moreover, if, as mentioned above, areas and space, both defining pillars of AS disciplines, are mere constructions, produced by research as 'a practice of imagination' that have little ontological foundation, what is the basis for AS and what could an adequate alternative be?

A simple answer would argue that by self-critically studying and deconstructing spatial arrangements, we identify the forces and processes leading to these constructions. And while this surely is a worthwhile endeavour, it reveals little about the actual constituents of the lived social space. By contrast, CP, with its emphasis on figurational sociology, aims to engage in critical investigations of spatial constructions' provenance *as well as* to provide insights to spatialities on the ontological level. In doing so, we look to Elias' initial thoughts, for although today's spatial theorization goes far beyond his considerations, space did hold a prominent place in his figurational deliberations.

Discussing the relationship between structure and subject, Elias notes that "social systems, in which structure is recursively implicated […], comprise the situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and space."[7] Space provides the situation for agents to act and structures to reproduce – a process taking place through the interdependencies of figurations. Elias' thoughts sound akin to Lefebvre and Pries, who argue that the premise of the social construction of space entails several aspects that determine not only the lifeways and practices of individuals and communities, but also identity and social hierarchies (Pries 1999, 26; Lefebvre 1992, 27pp). In other words, we can reasonably argue that Elias saw figurations as arbiters of spatiality and vice versa, which allows us to speak of a 'figurational construction of space'.[8]

Crossroads research has probed analysis into the figurational construction of space and provided instructive results relating to spatial appropriation and layering, identity building, and conflict. Drawing on empirical findings from studies of cross-border trade between Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Xinjiang and on education migration in Gojal, Pakistan and Kumaon, India, Alff and Benz (2016) suggest a relational, processual and constructivist approach to space.[9] Centering their analysis on actors, relationality and translocality, they read place as an arena for interactions of differently positioned actors; understand territory as a marker toward governance of clearly delimited areas; use networks to underline connectivity of all space; argue that positionality is inherently relational and power laden; and

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[7] Quoted in: (Dunning and Hughes 2013, 176)

[8] I follow Lefebvre's distinction between space as a 'natural space' and spatiality as the production of social space (Lefebvre 1992, 1–67).

[9] Alff's and Benz' conceptualization draws on John Agnew's threefold view on place as locale, location, and a sense of place (Agnew 1987, 25–47).

finally, see mobility to be about the embodied practice of movement which includes the meanings, ideologies or representations associated with the mobility of people, objects, ideas, etc. Researching figurations (predominantly migrant networks) and accounting for these factors in their analysis, Alff and Benz provide insights into how space, place, identity, and power is appropriated, disrupted, and negotiated in various localities, resulting in changes in figurations at various spatialities. They show that agency contests religious symbols and lead not only to a change of norms (structures) that conventionally rule, for instance, in university environments, leaving them altered through the contestation, empowering female students (Alff and Benz 2016).[10]

Research on ethno-political figurations and the way they are expressed in spatial layering have yielded equally illuminating results. In her analysis of the China's Xinjiang Uyghur population, Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi (2015; Kinzley and Joniak-Lüthi 2016) focuses on ethnically defined figurations to exemplify how spatialities are subject to change due to government policies. Traditionally constituting the ethnic majority in the region, increasing migration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang has led to new hierarchies of power in various domains. Traversing the Xinjiang Province and the state-led development schemes in infrastructures, Joniak-Lüthi reveals how changes become salient through the altered spatial layering, resulting from new spatial practices and language, which marginalizes the traditional Uyghur spatialities, revealing how we can read power, development, and the dynamic of figurations in space.[11]

Spatial memory, ordering, and production are key components of identities and states habitually challenge spatial identities in political conflicts and changing geopolitical conditions.[12] While political conflicts as well as bordering and/or re-bordering processes often

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[10] Alff's and Benz' examples of subtle contestations bring to mind Leitner et al's 'spatialities of contentious politics' referring to counterhegemonic social and political action, evoking thoughts on the varied nature of activism and agency (2008, 157).

[11] Agniszka Joniak-Lüthi exemplifies this change e.g. through the tomb-shrine of Qirmish Ata, which once served as an important Muslim spatial marker on the Slik Road and a testimony to Uyghur identity. Located in a unique natural environment, the tomb is decayed in a distant corner of what is today known as the Park of Mysterious Trees (Han Chinese), which serves as a tourist attraction (Joniak-Lüthi 2015, 437–40).

[12] Studies on the construction of nations and nationalism are abundant. Apart from Anderson's imagined communities, important works have been provided by Roger Brubaker (1994, 1996) and Eric Hobsbawn (1990). The quest for new identities became particularly urgent in Central Asia (and other post-Soviet countries) following the collapse of communism and governments have invested huge efforts in generating a national consciousness through often clumsy spatial layerings such as changing street names, re-defining national monuments etc. Notable works produced e.g. by Laura Adams (2010, 2013), Diana Kudaibergenova (2014) and Paul Bergne (2007).

result in changing spatialities, they may not always produce the intended results but instead muddled relations that care little for officially constructed categories of ethnicity, religious belonging, or nationality (Reeves 2014; Megoran 2007). Researching how the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, Antia Mato Bouzas has shed light on how the local population, who qua their location of residence caught in a political conflict between Pakistan and India, has developed a distinct sense of communal and regional belonging because "statehood in a modern sense (after partition) has not been experienced much in everyday life", making the self-identification to Pakistan nebulous at best (Bouzas 2012, 875). In her micro-level study she shows that the people in the town of Skardu instead turn to other group ties and cultural identities that emerge on the local level, precisely due to the lack of integration into the larger figuration the Pakistani state (Bouzas 2012, 882–83). Moreover, spatial layering e.g. in form of political orders may spark but not always resonate with identification processes and feelings on the ground, underlining the importance a sensitivity to the relational dynamics between interdependent structures and action (Kreutzmann 2015).

Studies on space, identity, and power are suggestive to the contingencies inherent to the dynamic of interdependencies and CP allows researchers a powerful toolbox to explore how these dynamisms play out through figurational movements. The emphasis on the interdependence between space and figurations allows us to unlock the organization, appropriation, and properties of spatiality, which substantiates both spatial theory and figurational sociology. In fact, as shown by the examples above, incorporating spatial considerations into figurational sociology not only allows scholars to shed light on spatial aspects of figurations, leading to a better understanding of their constitution. It also enables us to show figurational aspects of space, providing additional insights into its formation and properties.

The examples alert us of the need, moreover, for careful inductive analysis as a means to understand social reality and the spatialities it consists of. In addition, they give an inkling of the complex entanglements between human action, structures, space, power, and time to name but a few of the factors that influence spatial objectivitives and subjectivities. CP offers an alternative way to conceive of and analyse space that allows for self-reflexive, critical AS research by incorporating a combination of spatial theory and figurational sociology, which provides an avenue that does not delimit space to certain areas, hermetically closed off to

the world and recalcitrant to change (Soja 2009). On the ontological level, it sheds light onto the manifold dimensions of structures, space, and human action, which can unearth contingent developments by examining interdependencies. In short: CP provides an approach that allows us to deconstruct socio-spatial processes as part of a dynamic interdependent, multi-layered reality that is constantly negotiated by different actors and their (spatio-)structural constraints. This negotiation process occurs continuously and may be rooted in local, translocal, or glocal interdependencies, characterizing specific figurations, and made possible through the partial collapse of time in the information age.

Mobility and Migration

CP understands mobility as the flows of humans, goods, ideas, and resources among networks, and sees mobility and the effects arising from its flows as a central, defining aspect of today's world. Mobility, in this sense is movement, and it appears when a contextually determined potential for movement is activated through mobilisational dynamics, which could, for example, take the form of migration, exchange in ideas across virtual and material space, trade in material or immaterial resources, or upward or downward social mobility, habitually resulting in further mobilisation processes (Urry 2002, 2; Crossroads Asia 2012a, 1). Inherent to mobility are forces that can disrupt existing orders by perforating the social constructions of space, power, identity, etc.

The benefits of implementing figurational sociology to analyse mobility have proven fruitful through various publications and projects.[13] But neither motion nor mobility are in and of themselves new to it. Elias factored in the influence of mobility both explicitly and implicitly in developing key concepts such as mobile figurations, interdependency chains, figurational dynamics, and power balances. Indeed, Elias' analogies to dances or football games too allude to the importance of movement to and in figurations, where factors can influence interdependencies or lead to changes at other scales and spatial contexts within broader figurations.

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[13] Crossroads Asia ("Crossroads Asia" 2016) stands out but see e.g. also Eric Dunning and Jason Hughes (2013), Vincent Houben and Mona Schrempf (2008), and Tim Newton (2002; 2002).

Notwithstanding mobility being an inherent part of figurational sociology, he never seriously elaborated on it with the conceptual finesse and sophistication of more recent research. Urry's 'social as mobility', 'new mobilities paradigm', Castells 'flows' and Appadurai's 'theory of rupture' all consider mobility one of the primary forces not only defining modern society but also capable of altering its conventional pillars and borders (Urry 2002; Sheller and Urry 2006; Castells 2005; Appadurai 1996). In other words, all borders – political or imagined – are permeable and porous and mobility engenders movement that sieves through them giving rise to exchange and change. Against the background of Elias' dance analogy, we might with Urry say that mobility not only introduces novel movements but, on a fundamental level, bears the potential to alter the very rules of the dance through its influence on figurational dynamics. For according to Urry, diverse mobilities in today's world result in complex intersections in all areas of social reality which are characterised by an element of unpredictability, continuously disrupting and changing it. What is more, society is directed not only by social entities between humans but include inhuman components (think here e.g. of climate change) so that "societies are necessarily hybrids" (Urry 2002, 15).

CP agrees with Urry's hybrid society and combines it with Elias' understanding of 'development'. Explained in the *Civilizing Process*, Elias delineates his processual understanding of 'development' of society and describes the *Civilizing Process* as a study that approaches personality and social structures, not as fixed entities "but as changing, and as interdependent aspects of the same long-term development" (Elias 2000, 452). Societies, then, are in constant development, trapped, inevitably, in flux and hybridity, and even if Elias did not explicitly mention mobility as an arbiter of change, it is fair to assume he considered interdependencies receptive to change through mobility inside or outside any given figuration capable of changing its dynamics. Indeed, Elias did comment that one of the forces underlying all *intended* interactions of human beings is their *unintended* interdependence.[14] Mobility must thus be understood as an influence factor to any given figuration (economic, spatial, cultural, social, etc.), which can cause changes and disruptions that are not only unintended but also undesired.[15]

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[14] Cited in (Newton 2002, 194). See further Richard Kilminster (1991, 101).
[15] An often cited example of the negative impact of unintended interdependence is that of car use. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman, Richard Newton (2002, 194) rightfully describes how cars were intended to deliver unheard of personal mobility but in accomplishing it the corollary were delivered traffic jams, air and noise pollution etc.

CP with its view to Elias and recent mobility research has been tested on different contexts by Crossroads researchers. In his study of the Wakhi of Gojal in Gilgit-Baltistan, Andreas Benz highlights how the changes in education, employment, income, and financial resources have in part turned on its head the social stratification of local society: "former 'lower-class' families [who] participated from the very beginning in migration strategies and had the chance to advance socially through education and job-income, while some former 'upper-class' families have missed the chance." Migration and the mobility of ideas resulted in that social position in today's Gojal is less determined by "family origin (class) and agricultural resources (irrigated land, livestock) and instead on formal education, knowledge, skills, and professional careers" (Benz 2014, 132). Construed figurationally, the alteration of conventional class-based structures among the Wakhi people ushered in a new period of socio-cultural interdependencies, a change likely to materialise further, as knowledge of possibilities spread through society. Moreover, agency altered the structures of social interdependencies inciting change into the nature and dynamic of the figuration.

Equally compelling evidence on the influence that migratory groups have on societies and communities through their movement is seen across the world (Hansen and Kaiser 2017; Adaawen 2016; Wenzel 2013; Schetter 2012; Kirmani 2015; Massey 1998; Castles and Miller 2009; Pries 1999; Wimmer and Schiller 2003; Nieswand 2011). But migratory mobility has many facets: Madeleine Reeves has shown that migration for the purpose of labour or education is often realised against the immobility of members of a solidarity group (Reeves 2011). Other research has shown that 'movers' habitually land in a mobilisation 'trap', where the host society deprives them of upward mobilisation, while, paradoxically, upward social mobility of the immobilised is achieved nonetheless through remittances payments (Skeldon 2012). Mobility is further not a resource accessible to all groups of society. Despite huge migration waves internationally and domestically (such as rural and urban environments in China), the majority of the earth's population are caught in immobility, restrained from movement by insufficient economic means, political structures, conflicts, etc. This is not to say that figurations among the immobilised are not subject to change but that change is perhaps likely to be less rapid, or to occur through other kinds of mobility such as the state-

as a consequence of the unintended interdependence of millions of "autonomous" car users. See also Bauman (1990, 188).

sponsored mobility of resources or the forceful imageries of the virtual world (Nadjmabadi 2014; Hill and Nehls 2015; Hill 2013), imaginaries of mobility outcomes are particularly powerful (Appadurai 2013).

Adopting CP on migration as a form of mobility of people and knowledge from A to B, we view migrants qua their active movement to and from environments as arbiters of change in different figurations – be it through economic possibilities (e.g. remittances, economic investment), human and social capital (e.g. education, ideas, networks), the exchange of ideas and goods, mobile groups spark or (re-)invigorate the dynamics of figurations (Dittrich and Schrader 2015). Figurational disruptions can materialise through the changes in traditional structures and cultural particularities, behavioural properties, taste, ideology, and preferences (Adaawen 2016). However, migrants may also provoke changes in larger figurations on the community or state level through activities upon return or through diaspora groups.[16] Migrants not only become constituents of change in existing figurations, they can spark the development of new figurations often based on their shared migratory experience. Central Asian labour migrants in Moscow, for example, have established well-functioning ethno-cultural figurations that assists in providing social security, housing, jobs, etc. that influence home and destination countries. Conversely, migrant networks based on common experience often persist among migrant returnees in home countries (Kaiser and Schönhuth 2015). Notwithstanding the possibilities that migration and mobility stimulates, the quest for improving one's livelihood is cumbersome and its success chances are to a large degree dependent on mobility being accompanied by concrete possibilities of social mobility (Kern 2008).

It deserves emphasising that mobility and movement are not independent variables. Despite the challenges that nation states face against the backdrop of undermining forces, states, governments, and intergovernmental organisations possess eminent powers to influence social, political, economic, cultural, and geographic mobility potentials. This has been seen times over e.g. through the Iron Curtain and persists in several authoritarian regimes today, which is often not only an obstacle to the movement of people and goods. In Turkmenistan,

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[16] "Changes of human figurations are", Elias notes (1977, 3rd ed.:26), "influenced by the possibility of any given generation to pass on their experiences to subsequent generations as learned societal knowledge. The accumulation of knowledge is in itself a bearer of alterations in human cohabitation and changes of the human figurations" (translation by author).

for example, whose government ferociously curbs the movement of its people and their exchange with the outside world, the youth's dreams and imaginations about the world is undergoing fundamental change. Eloquently captured in a statement by a young Turkmen blogger, this change is reflected in their mental maps: "the main difference between [the older] and the younger generation is the way they perceive the world. While for the young people Turkmenistan is the entire world, for the older ones it is the former Soviet Union, where they were born and grew up" (Schwartz 2014, 198). States in other words still claim the power to curtail, mould, and influences interdependencies of figurations.

Analytically CP provides powerful tool to understand mobility and its influence on societies useful for AS research. It enables us to break the conceptual strait-jacket generated by socially constructed boundaries and borders, which have often been reproduced uncritically. Furthermore, researching mobility writ large allows us not only to discover new relationships and dynamisms of interdependencies; it allows us to push the conceptual boundaries of figurations. For in processual engagement with mobility through mobile methods, we encounter the changing nature of figurations and their translocality as they travel across vast distances through the entanglements of the virtual and the non-virtual world, through spatial objectivities and subjectivities (Marsden 2011; Schetter 2012). Moreover, the time-space collapse that we experience in an increasingly globalised and hybrid world adds to the complexity of figurational dynamics, and CP provides a research avenue with which we can better understand them and the influence they exert on the relationship between agency and structure.

Development and Transformation of Society

Modernity, its adverbial derivative, as well as the modernization theory that grew out of it, are some of the most controversial concepts in the social sciences and related disciplines. Meant to capture the political, economic, and socio-cultural ruptures in Europe that produced the pillars of liberal democracy, resting on the rule of law and a capitalist mode of production, the term originates from a quintessential European development (Cooper 2005, 113–51). The 'end of history' and with it the end of the dualistic system conflict that kept the world on tenterhooks for the better half of the 20th century, unleashed to some scholars seemingly indomitable forces toward homogeneity by 1991 (Fukuyama 1989). The forceful neo-liberal

narrative that celebrated free market economy and financial de-regulation quickly smothered any critical voices to the traditional modernization theory, and the practical manifestation of this worldview has taken different forms throughout the past 25 years: in former socialist countries of Central Asia, development equaled 'shock-therapy transition' to overcome reminiscence of the socialist yoke; in countries such as Afghanistan, interventionist western foreign policy has sought to bring countries out of 'backwardness' and push them toward liberal democracy, a 'higher' level of evolution (Schetter 2013; Schetter 2016).

Twenty-five years on, the modernization debate has sobered up. The initial neo-liberal infatuation has resided given the "apparent failure of 'transition'" (Heathershaw and Cooley 2015, 1), and a more solemn, less ideological tone has been marking debates over modernity, transition and development. The modernization paradigm has been shelved (Crossroads Asia 2012b), and like Katherine Verdery (1996, 205) most researchers now deny the "notion of a progress (from sickness toward health, from nothingness to being, from backwardness into development) and purposely [mock] the very idea of evolutionary stages." Development, moreover, has been deconstructed and is no longer understood as a movement by which any socio-cultural, economic, and political process leads to the same outcome of modernity.

In hindsight, one might suggest that champions of modernization theory should have read Elias' work more closely to collect ideas on development. As noted above, Elias' view is akin to recent research in its insistence on the hybridity of society, thus naturally emphasizing an open-ended, non-linear processual understanding of the term (Mielke and Hornidge 2014; Quijano 2007; Chambers and Conway 1992). CP picks up on Elias' ideas and conceptualises development as a set of multi-faceted processes, and it highlights the role of diversity and innovations in them, while facilitating (and promoting) investigations into the multiple ways in which local development processes become linked to national, regional and global representations (Crossroads Asia 2012b, 2).

This understanding allows researchers to scrutinize how development processes unfold and change social realities, not only on the meta level of human society but also in its applied sense 'development as practice'. For despite theoretical deliberations over modernity and development, development as a practice has been and continues to be problematic. Development conducted through (western) states or (international) organizations as a means to 'assist' under-developed countries toward a Eurocentric ideal, imposes upon targeted

societies an external purportedly superior narrative and knowledge system to supplant the local 'backward' ways of life (Shahjahan 2016; Kreutzmann 2013; Jamali 2013). This approach entails considerable caveats, and Mark Baker eloquently argues, that state "support, whether for common, private, or public forms of property regimes, invariably reinforces a specific array of power relations at the local level, thus helping to forge specific types of communities" (2007, 97). Moreover, with a view to CP we may argue that despite growing recognition of local epistemologies, science, and ethics as meaningful resources in sustainable development debates (Crossroads Asia 2012b, 2), development policies and projects always make up of a force that is likely to (positively or negatively) influence (local) figurations in recipient countries. This may result in social, economic, cultural and/or political transformations often marked by a bitter aftertaste questioning who the profiteer of development practice really is. It is at this contentious point that CP focuses its view.

The areas and countries that stood at the heart of Crossroads Asia projects illustrate not only the ineptitude of modernization theory but also the interrelated processes linked to development. The trajectories of the former socialist Central Asian states are case in point. Far from reflecting a unilinear development processes, the countries have each embarked on different paths leading to different scenarios from disintegration in Tajikistan, relative liberal developments in Kyrgyzstan to rigid authoritarian regimes in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Tiller and Herbers 2013). The waning of rigid theoretical constraints has resulted in scholars instead focusing their research on examining novel systemic, socio-cultural, and economic configurations. A series of studies have found that traditional governance agents such as clans have proven highly adaptable to the altered structural conditions of post-1991, which combined with insufficient state action have allowed clans to survive and become powerful political actors (Kandiwal 2016; Collins 2006, 16; Ilkhamov 2007; McGlinchey 2009). We witness a situation where the classic liberal democratic governing structures may exist, but do not exercise their intended power. These studies allude to similar developments in India, which were famously captured as 'modernity of tradition' by Susanne Rudolp (1984), and are indicative of the hybridity of any society in more general terms. Moreover, in a similar vein CP conceives of states or modern state bureaucracies as figurations and underlines the multitude of actors and interdependencies that go beyond the classical analyses of political systems.

One of the features often lamented by classic governance studies on Central Asia writ large is the high level of informality, which constitutes another fruitful research node of the Crossroads network (Van Assche and Hornidge 2012, 2013). The Soviet shortage economy, plagued by scarce resources, gave rise to a flourishing informal sector, as party secretaries dispensed over vast resources and funds (Khalid 2007, 87; Roth 2007). Given the virtual lack of elite exchange following the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as the continued scarcity, informal structures perpetuated, while oligarchs ruthlessly divided among themselves the countries' wealth. As a structuring element of economic and political transformation, informality does not only feature on the top-levels of society, however (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Giordano and Hayoz 2013). Throughout Central Asia, people turn to *blat*, informal networks based on kinship, friendship or patronage, and corruption to access universities, in job allocation, in food and commodity security, in earning money on the side or in successfully migrating to other countries (Fitzpatrick 1999; Kaiser 1998; Leontyeva 2013; Wheatly 2013; Nee 1992; Sik 1994). In regards to local agricultural development in Uzbekistan, informality has also been related to evolutionary governance as it provides structures for and merges with new forms of governance principles making up of an adaptable system hybrid, the features of which often hamper foreign development aid given its rigid structural constraints with regard to implementation (Hornidge, Assche, and Shtaltovna 2014). From the view of CP, informality is a structural element that reproduces 'tactics of the habitat' (Johnston 2011; Ehrhart et al. 2009), understood as a set of resources or coping strategies, to which citizens in all walks of life turn to improve their livelihoods and overcome the very bureaucratic, economic, political or cultural obstacles that, in turn, continuously reproduce informality (Hansen and Kaiser 2017; Hansen 2016; Alff 2015).

Crossroads researchers have also implemented CP in regard to concrete state-led development projects throughout its region of interest. Understanding infrastructural road planning as figurations, Shahnaz Nadjmabadi (2014) investigated the influence of road-construction in the Eastern Iranian province of Khorassan on the border to Afghanistan. Akin to Joniak-Lüthi's research on the China's Xinjiang province, roads and infrastructure improvement emerges here as opportunities for spatial and social mobility, that emerge through a convoluted process of 'development as practice'. Aimed primarily to promote Iranian state interests regarding strategic geopolitical goals concerned with a stronger

economic entanglement with Iran's neighbours, the routes too advanced the mobility of people, technologies, and goods with transformative influence on potentials e.g. for social upward movement and exchange (Nadjmabadi 2014, 25–26). In his study of social differentiation and farmer-managed irrigation for mountain agriculture across the Alai-Pamir-Karakoram-Himalaya, Joe Hill (2014b) explored how spatial mobility and processes of social mobilisation interacted with state and non-state interventions in irrigation (Crossroads Asia 2012b, 8–9). State-led development through irrigation projects here emerges as figurations that create new interdependencies that local communities translate and adapt to the local environments following the temporary intervention (Hill 2013, 2014). While state-led development thus inspires hopes of better living conditions for many old residents, they often bring with them dreams of prosperity in urban settings for the younger generations that are reinforced by modern media consumption, leading to social and generational negotiation processes (Hill and Nehls 2015).

Implementing CP on areas pertaining to development as practice, implicitly means to understand development interventions as figurations that challenge local environments, forge new interdependencies, and bear potentials that carry positive and/or negative consequences[17] depending on a variety of factors related to implementation, adaptation, socio-economic hierarchies, as well as cultural particularities. Methodologically promoting to 'follow the figuration' (or in its slightly adapted form 'follow the innovation' (Ul Hassan et al. 2011)), CP lend researchers flexible, multidisciplinary tools from ethnography, human geography, and social sciences allowing them to explore the intended and often unintended interdependencies arising of interventions.[18] Development or transformation thus becomes a story of adaptation (and/or resilience[19]) to altered circumstances in the economic, social and political affairs. With its aim to figurationally investigate local development processes, CP eschews from viewing local governance structures based on kin, convention, and/or tradition

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[17] Hill (2017) suggests that, due to fragmentation of knowledge among various stakeholders, the very development projects meant to support irrigation systems may in the longer term actually undermine them.

[18] Indeed, one Crossroads research project experienced an unexpected of reversal of the 'follow the figuration' approach, as Anna Grieser had to abandon her initial project on the Diamer-Bhasha dam. Moreover, given the sensitive nature of the project, Grieser experienced how the 'figuration followed her', eventually hampering any research due to state interference. What we learned from the process as well as questions pertaining to how we can perceive of the state from an anthropological perspective have been described by Martin Sökefeld (2016).

[19] Resilience is a loaded term (Olsson et al. 2015). Here it is used strictly analytically to refer to interdependencies between structures and actors in the event of interventions.

as mere dysfunction of transformation/development nor does it essentialize such formations in terms of 'backwardness' (Hansen 2016). Instead it views the multi-faceted processes that ensue with development interventions as the complex interplay between agency and structure, as figurations become entangled resulting in constant processual change and linked to national, regional and global representations (Crossroads Asia 2012b, 2).

VI. The Crossroads Perspective and Area Studies in the 21st Century

The 21st century has put enormous pressure on AS disciplines worldwide. On the one hand, there is a demand (and need) for increased knowledge about areas of the world, while, on the other, globalization releases forces that are said to undermine the very regions, the knowledge about which is in demand. In this paper, we have made a case for using CP as a way to meet these demands and redress AS for the 21st century. We could have included further examples from Crossroads Asia research to flesh out in more detail its applicability in other contexts, especially as Crossroads scholars have produced instructive research in regards e.g. to gender (Grieser 2014; Amoo-Adare 2017; Ismailbekova 2015b), conflict (Ismailbekova 2013, 2015a; Kirmani 2015), and positionality (Joniak-Lüthi 2017; Grieser 2014), linguistics (Rzehak 2011) or frontier research (Smolarz 2016). But for the sake of a succinct argument, the paper was limited to a limited number of examples to sketch out the blueprints of CP based on some of the overarching themes of the Crossroads network.

To recap: CP provides a flexible conceptual framework, promoting a multi-dimensional processual analysis of sociospatial relations understood as dynamic interdependencies across time and space. It rests on a processual premise that alerts us not only to the constructed nature of research objects – be it space, conflicts, development etc. – but also to the epistemic regimes that research and researchers operate in. On the one hand, then, CP should be understood as a theoretical toolkit that can help push the boundaries of relational research and offer ways to explore the ontology of structures and action within the realm of social reality. On the other hand, CP offers methodological tools to generate questions and conduct research. Captured in the phrase 'follow the figuration', CP is footed on an inductive, multidisciplinary methodology that suggests to follow figurational dynamics as a means to investigate further the nature, depths, and extent of human interdependencies (Marcus 1995; Falzon 2012; Hage 2005; Hornidge and Mielke 2015). In line with Elias' processual

understanding of development, CP seeks to define middle range concepts for macro-level theorization (Merton 1949; Mielke and Hornidge 2014) and to include self-critical enquiry into the researcher's positionality as a core concern of CP to raise awareness of our stake in and challenge traditional concepts and voices of academic production.

Developing CP has allowed us to place under close scrutiny the applicability of Elias' figurational sociology and review it in relation to recent advances in the social and political sciences and humanities. We have pushed some of the weaker areas of figurational sociology, in this paper as per example of space, movement, and development by combining it with prominent contemporary research, providing strengthened analytical conceptualizations of figurations and interdependencies, while simultaneously highlighting how CP can be implemented to analyse the relationship between structure and agency. The paper is thus meant to contribute to a growing literature on rethinking AS, and serves the purpose of critical reflexion not only on the way we conduct AS research on our journey to form a basis of a broader, more inclusive practice to produce knowledge (van Schendel 2002). It also constitutes an approach that AS scholars can use in order to make sense of the many forces and relational dependencies that influence our everyday lives, our agency, and the institutions we create to order social reality. It is our hope that this combination of micro-level empirical findings with meso- and macro-level theorisation through CP can help revitalize AS in the 21st century.

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