

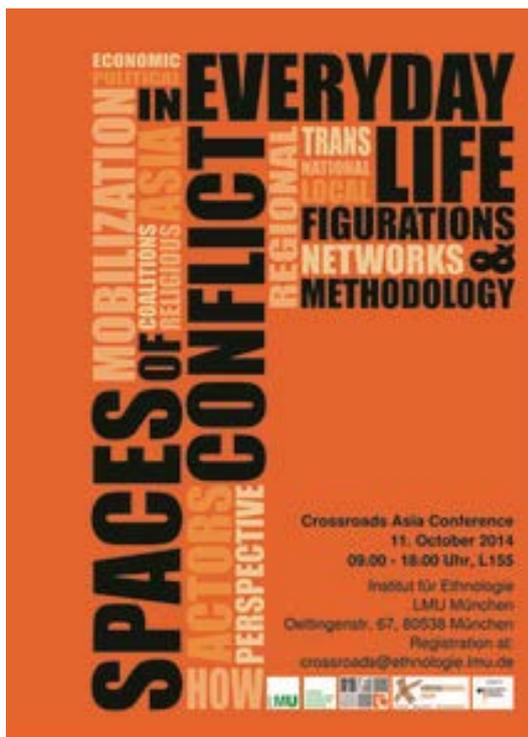
# Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life: Figurations and Methodology

Crossroads Asia Conference

Dept. of Social and Cultural Anthropology, LMU Munich

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Report by Laura Erben and Martin Sökefeld



### *Introduction*

The Crossroads Asia Conference “Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life” discussed empirical, theoretical and methodological issues of conflicts. Departing from a figurational understanding of conflicts, the conference aimed to focus not so much on the contents of conflicts – what they are about – but rather on the *how* of conflicts: the ways and modes of action and mobilization, the imaginaries and narratives, the structures and linkages created through conflicts. In addition, the call for the conference included also methodological issues – the question how to study conflicts. Among the speakers of the conference were both members of the research network Crossroads Asia and external researchers.

### *Welcome*

In his welcome address, Martin Sökefeld, the organizer of the conference (Dept. of Social and Cultural Anthropology, LMU Munich) gave a brief overview over the approach of the Crossroads Asia network to area studies and the significance of conflicts in the research of the network. The network studies social fields which are pervaded by different kinds and levels of conflicts and in which conflict is an everyday experience. He emphasized that conflict is a common context and condition in which social life takes place and to which actors have to relate in one way or another.

### *Opening Keynote*

The conference started with the keynote by Emma Varley (Dept. of Anthropology, Brandon University, Canada), titled *Inhospitable Hospitals: Sectarian Logics of Care and Harm in Gilgit-Baltistan*. Based on comprehensive ethnographic fieldwork, Emma Varley gave deep insight into the intersections of the Shia-Sunni conflict in Gilgit, Northern



Pakistan, with local medical institutions. She showed how the conflict has given rise to sectarian medical economies in Gilgit Town, whereby medical services have come to operate as unique sites of both sectarian capital formation and exclusion. She concluded by arguing that sectarian hospitals in Gilgit Town are socially permeable institutions which are simultaneously defined by, and generative of, novel forms of politico-moral affect, segregated geographies and segregated governance. In the following discussion mainly the roles of the state and the health care providers in this context was addressed.

### *Session 1*

The first session of the conference, chaired by Amélie Blom (Science Po/CNRS/EHESS, Paris) started with the presentation of Khushbakht Hojiev from the Center for Development Research, Bonn University. In *Identity Construction and Mobilization in Conflict Processes: Case Study of Inter-communal Conflict in Batken province of Kyrgyzstan* he focused on inter-communal conflicts in Batken province of Kyrgyzstan.



With a narrative approach, Hojiev tried to overcome the often taken for granted division between the instrumentalist and interpretivist approaches to inter-communal conflict. He pointed out that *framing* is one of the most important mechanisms in this regard as it enables the construction of a common identity and the legitimization of action. Referring to symbolic dimensions of violence and using the strategy of othering, actors framed the conflict which was studied by Hojiev as an inter-ethnic conflict between Tajiks and Kirgiz.

After that, Aksana Ismailbekova (Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin), discussed the conflict between Uzbeks and Kirgiz in the city of Osh in Kirgizstan in her paper *Invisible borders: coping strategies of inhabitants in the aftermath of the Osh conflict, Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia*. In consequence of recent violent conflict, Osh has become segregated along ethnic lines in many

parts. Tensions between Uzbeks and Kirgiz date back to the Soviet times. Today, she argued, mutual avoidance and social cohesion can be seen as strategies of dealing with the conflict: Her interlocutors presented segregation as a positive development towards a more peaceful future. Some districts of the city, however, are mixed even today and largely exempt from conflict. The discussion dwelled mostly on the comparison of the difference between these parts of the city and its implication for conflict dynamics.

Katja Mielke's presentation *Not in the Masterplan: Dimensions of exclusion in Kabul* (Bonn University, Center for Development Research) focused on urban development and exclusion at the outskirts of Kabul. Departing from a figurational approach to urban development she presented a case study of D 13, a district which is mainly inhabited by Hazaras. As a more recent, informal and unauthorized settlement, D 13 is not included in the master plan of Kabul, and the district is largely ignored by the development projects of the city administration. She showed how in a context of intersecting conflicts local representatives struggle to achieve certain infrastructural improvement, drawing on different level networks in order to overcome the gap of exclusion. Pointing out that local actors are part of multiple interdependencies she concluded that underlying forms of interdependence were determined by socio-cognitive identities, endowment with resources and imaginations about the future. The subsequent discussion followed up on the agency of settlers to organize resources of the state (e.g. electricity) but not through the state.

## Session 2

Katja Mielke chaired the second session that centered on the idea of con-tested space. Nick Miszak (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva) presented on *Land grabbing and the moral economy in Afghanistan*. Land is among the most important and conflictual resources in Afghanistan because land is not only a source of



wealth but also of social status. The significance of land has rather increased in the post-2001 situation because of growing demand and influx of capital. Nick Miszak analyzed a particular case of land grabbing in Afghanistan's eastern province of Nangrahar where two groups claim a piece of land that is legally the state property. Because the claims are thus illegal, the conflict is not taken to the courts but negotiated between the antagonistic parties with reference to *shaf'a*, the right of preemption that originates in Islamic property law. The parties use *shaf'a* to legitimize their action. Nick Miszak pointed out that although Afghan society is often described in terms of "lacking rule of law" this does not mean that simply strong-man rule prevails. On the contrary, actors take pains to enhance the social legitimacy of their action in place of formal legality.

In the following contribution on *Autonomy without Autonomy: Muddling through the conflict in the Pamir Mountains* Malgorzata Maria Biczuk (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/ Saale), analyzed the background of the 2012 conflict of Khorog in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAO). Drawing on the notion of a "frontier" and departing from a historical perspective she pointed out



that in Soviet times this marginal part of Tajikistan was rather privileged by Moscow in comparison with Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe. This furthered the production of two ethnic categories, i.e. Tajiks in the lowlands and Pamiris in the high mountains. The "parasitical economy" of GBAO which to a great extent depends on foreign NGOs, especially those of the Aga Khan Development Network, rather supports this ethnic juxtaposition which is also strengthened by the Tajik state's encroachment on the ostensible autonomy of the Pamirs. In the discussion a focus was laid on the question of strategic use of different identities.

Continuing the theme of border zones and contested space, Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra (University of Massachusetts, Boston) spoke on *Negotiating the Space in the Contested Zone of Kashmir: The Borderlanders' Perspective*. Focusing on the victimization of the people living in the immediate neighborhood of the Line of Control that separates Indian and Pakistani controlled parts of Jammu and Kashmir, he emphasized that the Kashmir dispute should not only be discussed in terms of state security and territorial claims. Detailing how the “LoC-borderlanders” suffer from the dispute in terms of displacement, the planting of landmines and other weapons, the domination of security personnel, etc. Auribinda Mahapatra demanded that the borderlanders’ voices need to be heard in policy making. State security discourse needs to be questioned for neglecting human security.

### Session 3

The last section, chaired by Emma Varley, commenced with Jan Koehler (Freie Universität Berlin, Sonderforschungsbereich 700) who addressed the issue of methodology in his presentation on *Institution Centered Conflict Research – The method and its application in Eastern Afghanistan*. Drawing on case studies of land-conflicts from the sample of a large-scale comparative research project he analyzed the role of both



formal and informal institutions in the processing of local conflicts. He departed from the hypothesis that specialized institutions which process a wide range of conflicts via specific procedures are conducive to dynamic social order, i.e. they make the institutional framework of society more reliable and hence enable selective change that is not disruptive. On the basis of his cases Jan Koehler showed that even in times of violent breakdown of statehood and fragmentation of society not everything is acceptable. Actors in conflict stick to some rules and do not apply all means at their disposal to further their interest and win. The physical destruction of the opponent, even if possible, remains an exception. He concluded that in Afghanistan local

conflict processing institutions survived war and social fragmentation.

Lutz Rzehak from the Humboldt University, Berlin, approached to the field of conflict from a literary and linguistic perspective. In his presentation *"You, obviously, think I am crazy!" Arguing out conflicts in the literature of the early modern Persian enlightenment* analyzed how supporters of modernity and their political or cultural opponents exchanged their arguments in literary disputes of the late 19th and early 20th century. Fictive dialogues authored by Malkom Khan, a high-ranking person at the royal court of Naser-al-Din Shah in Tehran who is regarded the pioneer of the constitutional revolution in Iran and the father of modern Iran, were at the center of the presentation. Comparing the fictional debate between a Vizier and his friend to a contemporary talk show, Lutz Rzehak argued that the dialogue was not written to convince the fictive Vizier of a reform agenda, but rather the dialogue's audience and readership. Malkom Khan chose this particular form of expression in order to expose the interests of the opponents of reform. Beside Malkom Khan's dialogue other authors from various places had similar agendas. Rzehak pointed out that in such dialogues arguments were mostly put into the mouths of foreign visitors, probably because the authors expected them to gain thereby in persuasiveness. In the discussion Rzehak pointed out that not all political structures allowed for such critique; while authors of such dialogues from Bukhara were mostly merchants who enjoyed the freedom to travel and to print. In Afghanistan, however, the bindings of intellectuals to the court and the court's monopoly on printing did not allow for similar publications.

Amélie Blom closed this section with her presentation *Do Jihadist "Martyrs" really want to die?* Based on biographical interviews with "Jihadists" who had left radical groups before committing a suicide-attack she analyzed the dynamics of recruitment for Jihad and the motivation of recruits. While most analyses of the motivation of suicide bombers that depend on posthumously published statements depict the "martyrs"



as rather hyper-motivated believers, Blom's interviews with survivors present a very different picture. Distinguishing different trajectories of recruitment and keeping a recruit within a militant organization, Blom argued that sublime methods of peer pressure and techniques of creating consent within a group that impress 'malleable' personalities are actually more significant than ideological radicalization and unshakable belief.

### *Concluding discussion*

The concluding discussion pulled the different strings of the papers together. It became clear that conflict is an everyday condition and experience with which people have to cope. Conflicts are aspects and conditions of people's agency. While we are rarely able to conflicts causally, it is important to understand the dynamics of the development of conflicts. There is the riddle of mobilization: Why do people get mobilized for a particular antagonism in one place and social context but not in another? A figuration-approach and focus on framing or the working of institutions can help to analyze conflict dynamics. Further, we have to deal with the impact of conflicts on different sites like neighborhoods of a city or medical institutions which again feed back into conflictual dynamics. The experience of violent conflict often results in spatial segregation of opposing parties, and segregation may be a strategy to avoid further escalation, but may also result in the aggravation of a conflict and growing polarization between parties because cross-cutting ties get increasingly lost. In any case, there is an intimate relationship between conflict, space and mobility. While in the past attempts to explain conflicts have mostly adopted a "rational" framework that refers in the first place to "the interests" of the parties involved, it became clear that conflicts cannot be understood without taking political emotions into account.

# Appendix 1

## Programme

9.00 Registration and Tea/Coffee

10.00 **Martin Sökefeld** Welcome and Opening

10.15 Keynote

**Emma Varley** Brandon University Department of Anthropology

Inhospitable Hospitals: Sectarian Logics of Care and Harm in Gilgit-Baltistan

Session 1: 11.00-12.30

Chair: **Amélie Blom**

11.00 **Khushbakht Hojiev** University of Bonn/ Center for Development Research

Identity Construction and Mobilization in Conflict Processes: Case Study of Intercommunal Conflict in Batken province of Kyrgystan

11.30 **Aksana Ismailbekova** Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin

Invisible borders: coping strategies of inhabitants in the aftermath of the Osh conflict, Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia

12.00 **Katja Mielke** University of Bonn/ Center for Development Research

Not in the Masterplan: Dimensions of exclusion in Kabul

12.30 Lunch break

Session 2: 14.00– 15.30

Chair: **Katja Mielke**

14.00 **Nick Miszak** Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland

The moral economy of land grabbing in post-2001 Afghanistan: *Shafa* (right of pre-emption) as a concept of social justice

14.30 **Malgorzata Maria Biczak** Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale

The Autonomy without Autonomy: Muddling through the conflict in the Pamir Mountains

15.00 **Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra** University of Massachusetts, Boston  
Negotiating Space in the Contested Zone of Kashmir: The Borderlanders' Perspective

15.30 Tea/Coffee

Session 3: 16.00 – 17.30

Chair: **Emma Varley**

16.00 **Jan Koehler** FU Berlin, SFB 700  
Institution Centered Conflict Research – the method and its application in Eastern  
Afghanistan

16.30 **Lutz Rzehak** Humboldt University Berlin  
"You, obviously, think I am crazy!" Arguing out conflicts in the literature of the early modern  
Persian enlightenment

17.00 **Amélie Blom** Science Po/CNRS/EHESS, Paris  
'This was not at all what I thought it would be': The everyday life, radicalization and de-  
radicalization of Jihadist recruits in Pakistan

17.30 Concluding discussion

19.30 Dinner

## Appendix 2

### List of Participants

Name	Institution
Blom, Amélie	CEIAS - EHSS
Sökefeld, Martin	LMU München
Hojiev, Khushbakht	Center for Development Research, Bonn University
Miszak, Nick	Graduate Institute, Geneva
Tiller, Petra	University of Cologne
Gheorghiu, Cristiana	LMU München
Erben, Laura	LMU München
Koehler, Jan	FU Berlin
Mahapatra, Debidatta Aurobinda	University of Massachusetts, Boston
Odierna, Beatrice	LMU München
Alff, Henryk	FU Berlin
Benz, Andreas	FU Berlin
Biczuk, Malgorzata	Max Planck Institute, Halle
Ismailbekova, Aksana	Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin
Nadjmabadi, Shahnaz	Tübingen University
Hornidge, Anna-Katharina	Center for Development Research, Bonn University
Rzehak, Lutz	Humboldt Universität, Berlin
Kirmani, Nida	Lahore University of Management Science, Pakistan
Mielke, Katja	Center for Development Research, Bonn University
Varley, Emma	Brandon University, Canada
Sherzada, Diana	LMU München
Reinhold, Beate	LMU München
von Gumppenberg, Marie- Carin	
Friese, Klaus	LMU München