



Network or community? Two tropes for analysing social relations among Uyghur traders in Kyrgyzstan

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Network or community?

Two tropes for analysing social relations among Uyghur traders in Kyrgyzstan

Rune Steenberg¹

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1. Introduction

The road between Kashgar in Xinjiang, China and the Ferghana Valley in present day Kirgistan, Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan has repeatedly become an important trading route since the early days of the Silk Road up until today's penetration of Chinese goods, money, companies and policies into Central Asia along the 'New Silk Road'. Uyghur traders have in several historical phases played an important role in this trade. They do today too. Their networks of business and personal relations stretch across China from the production areas around Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Shanghai over Tianjin and Beijing, Ürümchi and Kashgar into Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tadjikistan.

Networks? Yes, such relations are often described using the metaphor 'network,' and the relations between the traders do display network structures and features typical of network organization: They are not locally bound, stretch over many nodes connected across vast distances, each of which is connected to certain other nodes, but not to all; they are open to new linkages and connect chains of units indirectly. These network features are easily detectable from the outside, they are characteristic for the trading relations and provide crucial pre-conditions for the trade to function the way it does. But they are not the only important elements in the trading relations: Less visible and at first sight less characteristic features are as essential to the trade as the network features. These features, such as multiplexity and longevity of relations, group cohesion and identity categories of a us/them type, may be better described using another, less popular trope; that of 'community'. The central preconditions for successful trading, besides the networks of actual business partners placed in different geographical locations, also prominently include participation in more locally bounded and comprehensive communities. Such communities, in the trading location in Central Asia and back in the trader's villages and neighbourhoods of origin provide the basis for trust and the infrastructure needed for undertaking the risky business of cross-border trade within legal frames and stately authorities as unreliable to Uyghurs as those found in West China and the Central Asian republics.

This article focuses on Uyghur traders from rural Atush trading in southern Kyrgyzstan, more precisely in Kadamjay in Batken. People from Atush are known to be especially gifted in trade across all of Xinjiang and Central Asia. The local idiom projects these features into the person, the *atushliq sodigher* (tradesman from Atush; cf. Raxman et al. 2008: 227-230), but a social science perspective recommends us to seek the explanation for them in the social environment and the social relations it facilitates. It is my proposition that these Atush traders' success in trading enterprises is closely connected to their social relations (cf. Tilly 2005: 1-17), and that important elements of these social relations are better described using the analytical concept of 'community' than that of 'network'. Finally, it is my proposition that 'community' and 'network' are not categories of social organisation according to which certain empirical examples can be classified, but rather provide analytical tools with which to access different aspects of social institutions of lasting personal relations in Central Asia and should therefore be seen not as alternative but as complementary tropes. This paper aims to design an analytical tool for approaching such social relations and social institutions of close permanent social interaction in Central Asia (and possibly beyond); a tool comprised of the mutually complementing identification of network-aspects and community-aspects of these. By using the terms 'network-aspects' and 'community-aspects' instead of identifying 'networks' and 'communities' I am deliberately not striving at any classification of social institutions into exclusively

'networks' or 'communities'. I employ the analytical metaphors 'network' and 'community' in a complementary, not mutually exclusive manner. The analytical approaches behind 'network' and 'community' respectively pose many similar questions and treat many similar phenomena. But they formulate them in a different idiom, within a different metaphorical frame. This different metaphoric has different connotations and holds different analytical possibilities. Each metaphor is, as Max Black has put it, but the peak of a sunken (analytical) model (1996: 396) and these two models can profitably be applied as complementary tools.

Within the last two decades the network-metaphor has certainly been the dominant of the two in social science, while community, a prominent theme in sociology around 1900 and in anthropology well past the mid 20th century (Raport 2002, Cohen 1985), has received less attention. This general trend is also reflected in writings on Central Asia (cf. Collins 2006, Luong-Jones 2002), despite 'community' resurfacing somewhat in recent years (cf. Bellér-Hann 2008a). The popularity of the concept of the 'network' as a lens through which to approach the complexity of social reality is not confined to the scholarly realm. It fits well into the most wide spread ways of thinking and living social relationships in the predominately Western influenced urban centres from which most of the theory domination and dictation in social sciences derives: A 'modern', individualistic and flexible way of conducting social relations framed by an anonymous bureaucratic state apparatus providing most of the essential material infrastructure (cf. Dumont 1980, Pfeffer 2003). It is therefore not surprising that the network metaphor has become as popular as it has. It also goes well with a post-modern theoretical concern with flux, transgression, changes, relations and processes; as opposed to essences, groups, stability and continuity. The latter concepts seem of less interest to theoretical development in the social sciences today, partially because they are associated with a certain kind of so-called 'traditional' social context (or rather, the imagination of such) that is believed to have all but disappeared in the increasing globalisation (if it did indeed ever exist). This social context is one for which the designation of 'community' is mainly reserved, a social context which despite of the dichotomy of 'modern' and 'traditional societies' being repeatedly criticised as obsolete, is nonetheless implicitly imagined precisely as being the 'traditional Other' across (and itself upholding) such a divide. The disinterest in 'community matters' and in how 'community' may still matter (Bellér-Hann 2008a) and the associated neglect of certain aspects of social relations and institutions (those which I chose to call 'community-aspects') are indicative of the continuing existence of such a dichotomisation in the form of an analytical bias. Even when approaching such complex, mobile, 'modernised' social contexts as those we arguably encounter in contemporary Central Asia, it is my contention that we miss something by only focussing on the network-aspect and that we can gain in insight by also addressing the community-aspect. In this paper I will demonstrate this primarily by treating social interactions and mutual dependencies of Uyghur traders, trading across the Sino-Kyrgyz border. I empirically focus on a group of male traders from Atush in southern Xinjiang (China) selling clothes and cloth fabric to female Uzbek traders from Uzbekistan in two bazaars outside the town of Batken in the Fergana Valley of southern Kyrgyzstan. Following the description of their social contexts I draw up the characteristics of the analytical metaphors 'network' and 'community' to apply them to the material presented. I then draw some theoretical and methodological conclusions concerning the analytical tool I am developing. In the last part of the paper I provide a few short examples of how the analytical tool here suggested may be profitable employed.



Map 1, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and neighbouring states and provinces. (Design by the author, supported by Zheng Chuyang)

2. Uyghur traders in Kyrgyztan – Athush traders in Batken

During the fieldwork for my doctoral thesis I lived in Kashgar for a total of 15 months. During this time I frequently visited Atush, especially the village of Köktagh in which I had several acquaintances involved in cross-border trade. This was widespread among the households in the village. Last summer I re-visited Kashgar and crossed the border at Irkeshtam into the Kyrgyz Republic. Here I got the chance to visit some of my acquaintances from Köktagh and their friends and relatives trading in South Kyrgyzstan. I stayed three weeks with traders in Karasuu and Kadamjay witnessing and partaking in their trade at the local bazars. Among the traders, I saw two important areas in which community-aspects are of utmost importance. Firstly, aspects of community is constitutive for the personal relations of the trades in their daily



Map 2, The border area between Kashgar and Osh, including Atush and Karasuu. (Design by the author)

interactions on location. Secondly, the connections to their home villages and their networks and communities in rural Atush are of pronounced significance and facilitate their relations and their trade in Kyrgyzstan, just as they essentially made it possible for me to be there and be successful in my — very related — enterprise of learning about them.

Background

Uyghur traders have a long history of seeking westwards into what are today the post-Soviet Central Asian republics (cf. Bellér-Hann 2008a). Since the 1990s they have been instrumental in establishing the flow of cheap consumer goods entering the region from eastern China along the so called 'New Silk Road' (cf. Karrar 2012, Millward 2009). Trade from China into Kyrgyzstan, and other Central Asian republics, has rapidly increased over the past two decades. Uyghur traders have been involved from the outset, and had been trading along the same routes before the establishment of communist rule in China in 1949 and the Chinese-Soviet Union border closure in 1962. In the 1990s, trade was still quite limited and most went over Bishkek, where the Uyghur traders had their wooden shops in the Turmanbazaar in an old park. After this bazaar burnt to the ground in 2002 many of them moved to the Medina Bazaar in Bishkek or to Karasuu near Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan. In 1999 the border-crossing Irkeshtam between Kashgar and Osh was re-opened after more than 30 years of closure.² By this time the former Kolchoz bazaar in Karasuu, 20 km from Osh and only 45 km from the provincial capital Andijan in Uzbekistan, had already become a major transfer site for cheap Chinese products bound for a multitude of destinations in and beyond Central Asia. In the early 2000s this bazaar expanded explosively adding several floors of containers as storage space and shops (Angermann 2008: 62-70). A large number of Uyghur traders has been operating at the bazaar since, under shifting conditions, as Uyghur 'veteran' traders in Karasuu explained: The early years of Kyrgyz independence had been profitable but insecure. Most Kyrgyz did not haggle but naively paid almost any price asked for and the local population showed little interest in trading and establishing any serious competition themselves. Furthermore, taxes were low and easily avoidable. Yet, the security

² For the historical importance of cross-border trade via Irkeshtam see Kreutzmann (2009) .

situation was bad, police were as often perpetrators as protectors and many Uyghurs stayed within the bazaar out of fear of attacks on the streets. When Akaev was ousted in the Tulip Revolution in 2005 and Bakiev was sworn in as president, this quickly changed. The state increased its presence; security improved markedly but taxes were also raised accordingly. The monthly taxes for a regular container store at the bazaar in Karasuu went from 2000 Som under Akaev to 8000 Som in the early years of Bakiev, having reached 15,400 Som in summer 2013. Additionally the local Kyrgyz and Uzbeks entered more seriously into the competition as traders on the market and imported goods from China. This made it more difficult for the Uyghur traders to make profits on the bazaar of Karasuu. The situation became even worse after the killings in Osh in 2010 (cf. Ismaelbekova 2012) when the Uzbek authorities restricted and repeatedly prevented border crossing near Osh, depriving the bazaar of a large percentage of its customers. The Uyghur traders stressed that their business has continuously decreased over the last three years. This has motivated a large number of Uyghur traders to move south to Batken, while others have moved to Bishkek, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Kadamjay

I visited a group of five traders from Köktagh at their trading spot in Kadamjay in Batken. They had jointly decided to move there from Karasuu some months back, because they had heard from other Atush traders, that the conditions were good here. In Kadamjay two relatively large bazaars for clothing and cloth had recently opened, one of them by a rich Uyghur from Atush, the other by a Kyrgyz woman. The starting cost was low at merely \$2000-3000³ per container and taxes levied at officially 600 Som per month and in practice 1500-3000 Som per month were significantly lower than in Karasuu, where even the official tax charged amounted to 15,400 per month — an amount some traders had real difficulties even earning. The old bazaar of Karasuu, situated within the town itself close to the main road leading to Osh, had become too small and residents were complaining about the noise and the large trucks, so the city council decided to move the bazaar around five kilometres out of town, in effect bringing it closer to the in-official crossing spots at the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border from where a large percentage of the customers arrive. A Kyrgyz business woman⁴ founded the Bayman Bazaar on the plot designated by the city council. After controversies arose between her and some of the traders, especially concerning the price of containers which she soon doubled to \$6000-7000, and actual taxes of 3000 Som monthly collected from Uyghur traders — twice the amount paid by Kyrgyz and five times the officially propagated amount, an Uyghur businessman from Atush established the “Chinese-Kyrgyz Friendship Bazaar”, also known as “the Atush Bazaar”, some two kilometers further down the road. During my stay in Kadamjay, the Uyghur traders at the Bayman Bazaar were debating whether to move their stores to the Atush Bazaar in a collective display of loyalty and to possibly strengthen their cohesion and local position, or whether to stay at the Bayman Bazaar where business was clearly better.

In Karasuu the traders from Atush and Kashgar live in separate apartment buildings and have

³ This was the currency used by the traders themselves when discussing these prices, while they used Kyrgyz Som for discussing smaller amounts. \$2000 were approximately 70,000 Som in Summer 2013.

⁴ The trade itself and the relations surrounded the trade are to a high degree gendered. This very important aspect is somewhat neglected in this paper. Firstly, the relations of the Uyghur traders function somewhat differently because of the absence of women who are usually responsible for the gifting relations of a household. At the same time these relations are still connected to the household relations created by women's gift giving. Secondly, both Kyrgyz and Uzbek women play a big role in the actual trading in Kadamjay which also affects the relations to the Uyghur traders.

separate restaurants. The traders I met in Kadamjay were all from Atush, albeit from different villages. They told me that around 300-400 traders from Atush were renting rooms and apartments in Uzbek family compounds within walking distance of the bazaar for 1500 Som per month per person. Generally, people from the same village shared a quarter, cooked together in the evenings and prayed together. In the afternoon larger groups met to play volleyball or other sports and to sit and talk. Sometimes they even hired a car to go to a mountain lake to swim. Some of the traders had Kyrgyz drivers working for them on regular basis and even paid them monthly allowances instead of paying per trip. The relations to the local Kyrgyz and Uzbeks were generally friendly and the Uyghur traders were generous by local standards, but they did not have much contact besides the business. A number of cooks, bakers and other service providers from Atush had established themselves around the bazaar. Most of them were close relations of traders (relatives, friends, neighbours) that had invited them to establish their business here.

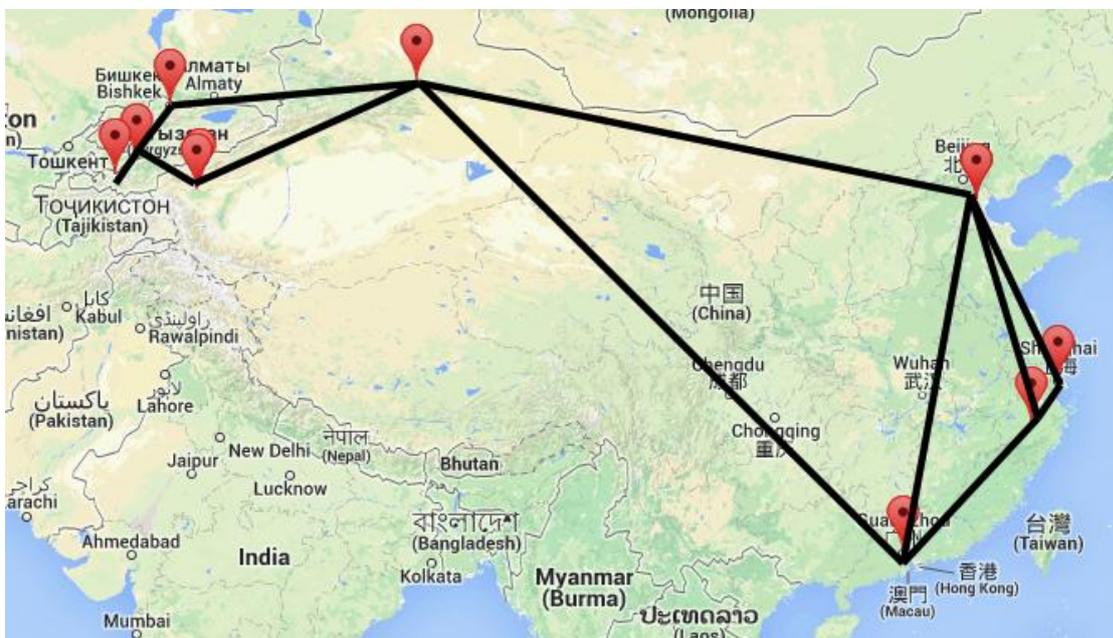
Occasionally the trader groups invited each other for a meal at their own compound. In case big meals were prepared the guests mostly contributed to the cost of the meal. Also when going for trips together the expenses were minutely split. The same was true for the housekeeping costs. All household expenses of the five from Köktagh I was living with were noted in a book and divided amongst them. Each of the five constituted his own economic unit and traded on his own behalf. Each had his own commodities transported from the Chinese east coast, Ürümqi or Kashgar to Karasuu and Kadamjay. All of their transactions were neatly separated and accounted for.

In Kadamjay the customers are mainly Uzbek women illegally crossing the nearby border on foot. They therefore only buy relatively small amounts of goods each time that they sell on to traders in Uzbekistan. Men are not allowed to cross the border or are searched. Women often carry gifts and food stuffs when visiting friends and relatives which is why they can more easily smuggle the commodities across. The women usually buy on credit (*nisi*) paying only after they have sold the things themselves. The debt is written into the notebooks of both seller and buyer and signed by both. This way, the traders take a lot of risk, sometimes only receiving the pay months later or even not at all. The women live on the Uzbek side and the Uyghur traders have no possibility of crossing the border to claim their money. Still, in most cases the trust pays off and the money is paid as agreed. In difficult phases, the traders provide loans to each other. Furthermore, large loans are regularly provided by the cooperation partners along their chain of supplies, as many of the traders acquire their supplies from middlemen in Ürümqi on credit basis, or they have confidential relatives or friends cover the costs for them. To cancel these debts and to transfer profits back to Xinjiang, trusted money carriers are employed. They regularly fly between Osh and Ürümqi taking large sums of cash with them to distribute it to the right people in Xinjiang. Only recently have some begun to employ banking services to transfer the money. The Atush traders share information and experiences regarding these money carriers, as well as the actual infrastructure they provide.

Mahmud's family

Mahmud's family may serve as a typical example found among the traders. Mahmud (25) had entered into border trade three years earlier when his father had taken him along to Karasuu where he had traded since the early 2000s. Here he sold clothes which his elder brother bought in Guangzhou in eastern China and which was repacked and exported by the elder brother's wife's younger brother stationed in Ürümqi. Mahmud's father went back and forth between Atush and Karasuu, staying about half a year in Kyrgyzstan and half a year in Xinjiang. The constellation of a

father and his sons with the possible extension of an affinal relative (relative through marriage) or a nephew is very typical of these trader relations (cf. Steenberg 2014). These chains of cooperation spanning across the entire width of China into post-Soviet Central Asia may also include neighbours and former school mates. In this they closely resemble Chinese *guanxi* connections (cf. Obukhova 2012, Huang and Aaltio 2013, Kipnis 1997, 1996, Yan 1996, Yang 1994). Individuals not belonging to the same household and thus the same economic unit but participating in these chains will often be paid for their work. The closer they are socially, the more likely this will not be a previously agreed fixed amount, but rather in the form of a percentage of the profit determined by the senior partner. Furthermore, such business partners lend each other large sums of money as this is an obligation inherent in their social relationship. This maintains permanent relations of mutual debt of an economic and social kind (cf. Graeber 2012). Yet, these debts do not keep the youngsters working for the elders for long. Many sons soon establish own businesses independent of their fathers, often even before they totally depart from the fathers economic unit by moving out and starting an own family (*öy tutmaq*; cf. Steenberg 2013: 81). This was the case with Mahmud’s friend and roommate in Kadamjay, Kamil, from the same village as Mahmud, who split off from his father’s business and established his own with the father’s support and using his chain of supply stretching over Karasuu, Kashgar and Ürümchi to Tianjin, from where a neighbour from their village was shipping cloth acquired on the huge wholesale markets of this city, known as the port of Beijing. Some traders ship via Bishkek instead of Kashgar, but almost all goods transfer through Ürümchi. Besides Guangzhou and Tianjin, also Shanghai and Yiwu are popular places for purchasing the commodities bound for Central Asia. They are bought and transported to Kadamjay by chains of business partners cooperating or supporting each other.



Map 3, The most used channels of supply and trade across China into Central Asia used by the Uyghur traders in Kadamjay. (Map basis: Google; design by the author)

Strong relations of trust exist between the traders functioning as links within these chains of cooperation and within the groups of traders sharing the same infrastructure at either of the central nodes of these chains, such as Guangzhou, Beijing, Tianjin, Ürümchi, Kashgar, Bishkek, Karasuu and Kadamjay. These trust relations entail, among other things, continued money lending between

individuals belonging to clearly separate economic units. The money lending is embedded into the trust relations, but it is also a central medium for actively constructing and maintaining such relations, thus at the same time functioning as economic capital and the generating factor of a certain kind of social capital (Bourdieu 1986), being both economic currency and social currency (Graeber 2012), making the transactions both an act of gift giving and a commodity transaction (cf. Alvi 1999: 285) and the economy it comprises may be seen as a dual one, a commodity economy and a gift economy (Gregory 1982), in which debt can be repaid but is can still never be fully cancelled, once the exchange and interaction has reached a certain level of intensity.

As Charles Tilly points out, it is important to think of trust not merely as an attitude or a personal quality, but also as a relationship containing certain cultural practices (2005: 12). In our case, money lending is a central defining practice of traders' relations, as is the excessive and almost limitless sharing of information between the traders and their sharing of infrastructure. The trust generated for and through this money lending, is not only directed towards certain individuals, but is inherent in the entire system of relations. When lending each other money and relying on each other's information, the traders trust not only the integrity and honesty of a certain well known individual; they also, and maybe more importantly, trust the institution within which the transaction of money or information takes place, an institution including a frame of moral obligations and certain possibilities of sanctions. Niklas Luhmann regards trust a mechanism for the reduction of complexity (1989). According to him, social situations consist of such a large number of variables that the full information needed to judge the rationality of a certain choice is rarely obtainable. Trust, as a phenomenon, is therefore a mechanism to reduce the complexity by choosing to do without this information. Luhmann sees this as a kind of self-deceit (1989: 33), since the information is in theory still necessary to make a proper rational choice. Instead of seeing trust as self-deceit, I prefer to view it as a way of moving the focus from the individual to the institution, about which more complete information may be known, a larger amount of experience is available and thus a risk-judgement can be better undertaken. Besides, the institution, carrying both a moral frame and the possibility of sanctions, in a sense creates its own facts regarding trust.

The institution facilitating trust within the trading networks we are here concerned with can be seen as a typical example of what Tilly calls 'trust networks' (2005). It includes a variety of possible social relations all entailing different cultural practices connoting different levels of cooperation, integration and trust as well as different possibilities of sanctions. Those belonging to the 'own' economic unit (mostly fathers, sons and brothers), direct business partners (often affines, cousins, nephews and close neighbours), contacts in the supply chains and house mates or other sharers of infrastructure in the trading locations (mostly those from the same neighbourhood, village or town) are some of the most important and closest of these relations. Further important relations are upheld to the host families (in Kadamjay mainly local Uzbeks), local guides and drivers (mainly local Kyrgyz because of their good connections to the local authorities), providers of goods in East China and the local customers in Kadamjay buying on credit (mostly Uzbek women from Uzbekistan). The individual implications and practices connected to these relations cannot be explicated here. The most important point to keep in mind as we proceed through the following argumentation is that these relations are framed by institutions of trust, based to some degree on the possibility of and to a large degree on honour and a shared morality.

Like Tilly, I have so far called the conglomeration of these relations 'networks'. Looking at the map of business relations and supply chains across China and Central Asia, this metaphor seems to have a certain visual legitimacy, but what does it actually imply? What are the analytical implications,

consequences, advantages and short-comings of employing this trope? What is 'network' about these traders' relations of trust and cooperation?

3. Network

We call many constellations and arrangements 'networks': conglomerations of social relations, flow of information, spatial patterns, organisational structures and arrangements of production. Networks have become an increasingly popular topic in social science in the past two decades and a vast amount of literature has been written on network analysis, social networks, the network approach and even 'network societies' (Castells 2007). This is paralleled by an increased attention to network structures in the non-scholarly world, too, at least in Western discourse: Business networks, 'networking' as a task in academia, virtual networks and social network sites (cf. Keim 2011: 19). This metaphor is well known to us from our common sense daily lives and discourses.

We may be tempted to differentiate 'actually existing networks' from a 'network perspective' through which all kinds of social interactions can be interpreted to display network aspects, but the former is merely an essentialising of the latter. Seeing a social (or other) complex as a network entails a marked reduction of complexity. Networks are abstractions, abstractions that reduce the innumerable elements of reality to basically two types of information: "sites" or "nodes" and connections. The network perspective can be defined as being concerned with connections between "sites" or "nodes".

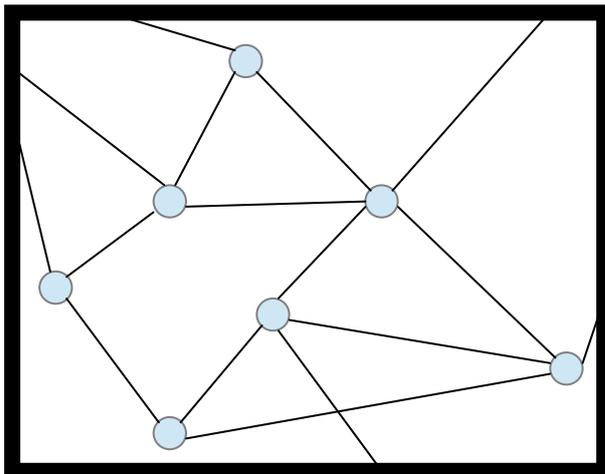


Fig. 1, Detail from a typical network model: The originally complex information is reduced to nodes and the connection between them. (Design by the author)

The network perspective is not primarily concerned with these sites themselves, but rather with the relations interconnecting them. Networks can be differentiated according to their size, boundedness, density, its heterogeneity of "sites", and the multiplexity of connections; they can be approached as partial networks, seen from an ego-perspective or as systems and wholes (cf. Keim 2011: 22-24). In economics and organisational sociology network-organisation is classified in between market and hierarchical organisation (cf. Hedin 2003: 128). The network approach is also often said to overcome the dichotomy between structure and agency (cf. Jones Luong 2002: 25, Bosco 2009: 136-146) and between micro and macro levels (Keim 2011: 25), and even to "overcome geography" (McMillen 2008: 13).

In social networks the nodes are most often individuals, but may also be households, families, social

categories, companies, organisations, social positions or spatial locations (cf. Tilly 2005: 5). The connections of these sites are made up of flows of money, goods, labour, information, opinion, of meetings, traffic, influence, etc. The “sites” are interdependent but relatively free to engage with each other within the network arrangement or to leave it. The relations between “sites” are based upon constant re-negotiation and have a tendency towards the egalitarian. Social networks very rarely have clear boundaries and are often very open to new connections and new “sites” entering the network. Unlike some other approaches to network analysis more concerned with the structures of wholes seen as networks (such as in semiotics and computer sciences), approaches to social networks are rarely concerned explicitly with any whole. Often it is even an important part of the approach to not be concerned with trying to define any outer border of the network. Regardless of the various differences of approaches to social networks, a defining characteristic is the central concern with the concrete relations between individual “sites” (cf. Keim 2011: 19-21). In the words of Schweitzer and White: “Network approaches typically emphasize the dual relation between individuals” (1998: 4). A prominent example demonstrating this analytical focus is Manuel Castells’s idea of a ‘network society’, characterised explicitly by a concern for such direct connections between individual sites. Castells poses it as a “fundamental dilemma in the network society (...) that political institutions are not the site of power any longer.” (Castells in McMillen 2008: 13) Regardless whether we agree that they were this before the advent of the so-called ‘network society’, or not, the scenario Castells has in mind is that power, in the network society, is situated in the relations between individual actors, be they individuals, companies, or other social units. This clearly formulates a network model concerned with these individual connections. A similar example is provided by Saskia Sassen’s models of ‘Global Cities’ (2001) being closely connected worldwide by flows of information, money, goods and people, while their connection to their geographically much closer hinterlands is much more fragmented, hierarchical and limited. Here too, the direct relations between concrete ‘sites’ is in focus.

This is a legitimate and useful approach capable of capturing a range of aspects connected to social organization and social relations, including trade and trading relations of Atush Uyghurs in southern Kyrgyzstan. Yet, any analytical bias has a flip side, and network approach, too, has certain analytical weaknesses or blind spots. Firstly, within the models provided by the network approach, it is difficult to deal with aspects of relations that go beyond the concrete relations between the individual “sites”. As described above, a salient feature, and an undeniable strength, of the network approach is its concern with these connections. Yet, besides the connections between “sites,” relations to a larger whole or an abstract principle, not depictable in a network diagram or considered as central by this analytical model, are of relevance too. Secondly, the connection between two given “sites” do not seem to be influenced by the connections of other “sites” within the model. Put more concretely, the relation between a trader in Ürümchi and his supplier in Guangzhou certainly provides the trader in Ürümchi with goods, enabling him to pursue a trading relation with a trader in Kashgar, but within the network model, the further content of his dealings with the supplier does not affect his relationship to the Kashgar trader, whereas in reality it certainly does, in the form of reputation and moral considerations. This becomes even more clear in the case of traders living together, as the Atush traders in Batken: Here the relation of trader A and B will certainly affect the relations of trader B and C and potentially even those of C and D and all others, e.g. by contributing to an atmosphere of trust or distrust and by setting examples of how to treat each other under the given circumstances. Thirdly, within a network approach, multiplex relations between nodes, i.e. relations

entailing different kinds of interactions, are not only difficult to depict but also quite complicated to analyse once they advance beyond a very limited number of possible connections. As long as the relations are kept relatively simple and one sided - such as relations of supply or of payment or money lending - this does not pose any problem. Yet, some social institutions (such as neighbourhoods and families) are characterised by the multiplexity and density of their interrelations. These are notoriously difficult to analyse as networks.

In analyses of political structures in Central Asia, the concept of networks often provides central analytical categories. Pauline Luong-Jones writes of “patronage networks” (2002: 14, 67, 68, 97, 112), “professional networks” (ibid.: 71), “clan networks” (ibid.: 93, 97, 98) and “regionally based networks” (ibid.: 98, 279) in Central Asia. Kathleen Collins focuses on “clan networks” (2006: 19, 25, 75) in Kyrgyzstan, which she defines as “social networks rooted in kin and fictive kin ties” (ibid.: 19). She even elevates ‘network’ to the “organizing principle” of clans (ibid.: 25). To both, networks are relatively open structures, based on personal relations between individuals and households. Collin’s understanding of clan networks carries the notion of the clan as a framing or uniting identity on the basis of which concrete networks of cooperation and loyalty are created in practice, and she chooses to call this ‘clan’ and ‘kinship’ (2006: 25). This is what we could also call the community-aspect of her analysis. Similarly Luong-Jones (2002) identifies regionality as a central uniting force, a community-aspect of her analysis. Yet, she introduces a network-aspect into the regionalism, too, by suggesting that much of the regional loyalty derives from personal relations and personal interest created within the administrative structures of the Soviet Union. Keim explicitly contrasts network and community as differing organisational principles, while at the same time sometimes treating them as synonyms, merely denoting personal connections (2011: 25-27).

What is ‘network’ about the relations of the traders in Kadamjay — and what is not?

The network-aspects of the Atush trader’s relations are obvious: The relations stretch over long distances, from southeast China to Kyrgyzstan and beyond. They are open to new connections and in parts continually adapting to shifts in business strategies and supply chains. They create material interdependences over several links between people that do not necessarily directly know each other and are structured by the flows of money, goods, information and people. Not least the traders stress relations of trust between concrete individuals, as emphasised in the network model. Yet, we have already been confronted with the fact, that such trust relations are based in institutions that cannot be readily analytically grasped as networks. The trader relations, thus, also entail a range of non-network-aspects. Amongst these is the tendency of more cooperation than competition amongst traders filling out the same business niches and not being business partners. A second factor is the huge importance attributed to the trader’s local communities back in Atush, Xinjiang. The first factor can be illustrated in the following observation.

When walking through the bazaar, my companion pointed out that we could clearly identify the stands of people from Köktagh by a certain type of coloured rubber sandals. About fifteen traders were separately offering large quantities of these sandals which had all been bought at the same market and came from the same factory near Guangzhou in China. The sandals had become the laughing stock of the whole bazaar. The supply clearly exceeded the demand as too many traders had bought too large stocks of them and as a new factory producing similar rubber sandals had been established in Uzbekistan. The traders, all being from the same village, knew each other well and also

knew each other's families back in Atush. They had helped each other to become established in the border trade, following with the exact same business model of selling coloured rubber sandals from Guangzhou to Uzbek traders in Kadamjay. They shared a common infrastructure of living quarters, drivers and provided each other with credits. They also shared nearly full information about their business, sales and profits. These traders operate separately and are, seen from the outside, each other's main business competitors. As we have seen above, they have clearly separate economies and every expense is minutely kept track of. Yet they openly share a common infrastructure and full information regarding prices, profits, raids, taxes and opportunities. There is much more cooperation than competition to be found among traders from the same or adjacent villages.

This is, to a large extent, due to the social obligations and moral codes existing between them and between their families in Atush. Initially obligations between their families in their home village are the driving force for them to help each other establish themselves in the trade and supplying them with information and infrastructure. Later in the trade, an atmosphere of trust, cooperation and obligation is created, not just among the "sites" in their supply chains, but also amongst the traders not directly connected in supply chains, through their common participation in the community at the trading location, Bishkek, Karasuu or Kadamjay. This participation creates clear moral duties between them. One of these is to never be of economic burden to each other, which is why all expenses are minutely noted and split, unlike what I experienced as custom in Kashgar or Atush. Another is to share full information on profits, market prices and raids (*reid*; razzias by the Kyrgyz authorities targeted at traders without proper licenses). Thus despite being each other's main business rivals in a structural sense, these traders cooperate more than they compete. But this is only the case within certain groups or categories of people and does not extend to the Kyrgyz or Han-Chinese traders. Traders from the same neighbourhood or village cooperate most closely, while traders from the same area (as in this case Atush) also cooperate, but less closely. This is well illustrated by looking at a bazaar phenomenon typically found all over Central Asia and beyond: If customers in a certain shop demand goods that have run out of stock, the shop owner will often visit a shop close by, to secure the wanted goods and sell them to the customers. This mode of action has several variants: The first shop owner may buy the goods off the second shop owner for a lower retail price and keep the profit for himself, he may sell it on behalf of the second shop owner giving him the whole profit, or they may split the profit. Regardless which option they chose, the transaction entails a high level of cooperation and a very low level of competition. In Karasuu such transactions are not undertaken with the Han-Chinese traders and in Kadamjay generally not with the Kyrgyz traders, but only with other Uyghur traders from Atush. Individual exceptions may of course occur, but within the category of Atush traders this is the expected and standard way of interaction, basically independent of the concrete personal relations.

Thus, while the network perspective is certainly helpful to understand their interactions and relations, some aspects of these, I argue, are much better approached through different analytical means. I suggest to apply the complementary analytical concept of community to account for aspects of the relations that are not captured by the network approach.

4. Community

Communities have been the focus of much ethnographic research. Especially in the early days of anthropology what was meant by this were relatively small, spatially bounded groups of people living closely together in mutual interdependence, sharing essentially a way of life and a common 'culture,' while upholding face-to-face relations, offering little flexibility for individual choice. To the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (2005/1887), community (*Gemeinschaft*) "meant both a social unit and a type of relationship" (Bellér-Hann 2008a: 9) which was based in closely knit groups upholding multiplex relations, i.e. relations that concerned several areas of life at the same time, much like Marcel Mauss' concept of 'totality' (Mauss 1990/1925: 17-31). Community relations in this sense were "moral, sentimental, localized, particular, intimate, ascribed, enduring, conventional, consistent, and based on intrinsic attachments" (Raport 2002: 176). Tönnies contrasts community to his concept of society (*Gesellschaft*), which is a way of social organisation drawing on relations that are more formal, acquired, "artificial, contractual, interested, partial, ego-focused, specialized, superficial, inconsistent, fluid, shortterm and impersonal" (ibid.). The multiplex relations within communities of little labour division (such as so-called 'traditional' subsistence agriculturalists) were also what Emile Durkheim a few years later described as 'mechanical solidarity' (1997/1893) as opposed to the interdependent, but one-sided and specialised relations of 'organic solidarity' in intensely labour-divisional societies (such as so-called 'modern' industrial or post-industrial societies).

As anthropology towards the mid 20th century started to concern itself with urban and more modern contexts, community relations, the way they had been hitherto imagined, were no longer seen as given a priori and often transgressed both spatial boundaries and categories of subsistence (Amit 2002: 2). Thus, instead of having communities as an object of study, some anthropologists began to concern themselves with community as a concept and as an analytical category. A much quoted example of this is George Hillery who offered 94 different definitions of 'community' (1955: 117, cf. Bellér-Hann 2008a: 8). In the second half of the 20th century, the usage of the term began to shift from defining community 'from the inside', with reference to some shared essence and face-to-face relations, towards definitions more concerned with the drawing of boundaries and thus the community's relation to an 'outside' or to defined other groups (cf. Bellér-Hann 2008a: 10, Cohen 1985: 11-15). Especially Frederik Barth's (1969) seminal work on ethnicity in Afghanistan was formative for this perspective. The shift to a relational, as opposed to an essential, understanding of community also included a move away from community as a concrete group (spatially bounded or not) towards a stronger concern with the symbolic rendering of belonging to a community (Cohen 1985: 16). Benedict Anderson (1983) formulated this aspect of communities quite radically in his well-known concept of "imagined communities," which potentially includes millions of people living thousands of kilometres apart, as his example of the construction of an Indonesian 'nation' demonstrates. This further disconnected the concept of community from the precondition of direct personal relations. The concept of community as used in anthropological discourse had transformed from designating a concrete group of people with a certain social organization to circumscribing an abstract category to which the individual could symbolically claim membership, or as Amit puts it: "from social relations to social imagination" (2002: 2).⁵ This moved the defining power of what was

⁵ Amit continues: "The conceptualization of community in anthropological and related literatures has involved a marked shift away from community as an actualized social form to an emphasis of community as an idea or

the community from the scientist and analyst to the observed subject claiming (or having denied) membership. Consequently, the quest for one definition of community was broadly given up to the advantage of the study of local concepts of community and how the idea was employed 'on the ground'. This in almost all cases accorded a very positive value to community and belonging to it (Raport 2002: 176-177).

The references to communities in scientific writings on Central Asia are not as frequent as those to networks, but occur mainly to describe neighbourhoods and mosque congregations; especially the Uyghur, Uzbek and Tajik *mehelle/mahalla* (cf. Boboyorov 2013, Trevisani 2008: 40-43, Hiwarati 2008, Sievers 2002, Luong-Jones 2002: 124). Unlike 'network', though, 'community' is hardly ever used as an analytical concept and the term remains tellingly absent from the index of most books on the region. Ildikó Bellér-Hann (2008a) is a prominent exception. Drawing on Stephen Gudeman, she defines community as "a social, ideological or spatial domain engendering attachment, security, predictability and identity" which is closely associated to sharing and reciprocity (2008a: 14), and to a common moral frame: "We certainly need to view community as a realm of rights and moral obligations, which regulate the relationship between the individual and the collectivity as well as between individuals" (ibid.: 17).

Recognising Bellér-Hann's approach, here the concept of community is used in an analytical manner that returns to some of the roots of the old definitions without losing the advantages made by the later discourses. Like Vered Amit, who aims at "reinserting the social into community" (2002: 9), this approach views face-to-face contact as a central factor — albeit not with everyone within the category (ibid.: 8). In this paper the term designates conglomerates of personal face-to-face relations as an analytical term applied 'from the outside', instead of only describing how it is used locally (though this is also an important concern). This can be said to be a return to the classical usages of concrete community relations. At the same time, though, the imagination of and (symbolic) reference to a framing 'whole' around the individual relations is essential to my usage of the concept. Community in this sense is an abstract idea of the concrete togetherness of actual people that is co-formative for their individual relations. I shy somewhat away from defining any concrete community as an analytical unit beyond the local designations, since this entails incommensurable problems of defining clear boundaries and holds no analytical gain. Yet, I see a great analytical gain in identifying the community-aspect of social relations between two or more social units (persons, households, families, lineages, neighbourhoods, villages). All of these units (except, possibly, for persons) also have the potential of constituting a community to which smaller units can refer as a frame for their interrelations.⁶ This would be the community-aspect of their relations. Preliminarily the community-aspect of enduring social institutions in Central Asia can be defined as the imagination of and reference to a framing 'whole' around concrete multiplex relations between concrete social units. This follows Amit in her effort to bridge the abstract identity categories of 'imagined communities' and the concrete "highly personal social collectivities which are attributed to them" (2002: 11).

quality of sociality." (...) "Community as collective identity rather than interaction" (2002: 3).

⁶ Also phenomenon like status and hierarchy are difficult to account for in network approaches, since they presuppose a whole to measure the relations against.

What are the community-aspects?

What then, are the community-aspects of the social relations and social institutions of the Atush traders in Batken? Firstly, cooperation is often stronger than competition within certain social categories. Many of the traders from Köktagh had decided to move to Kadamjay in common and were sharing almost all of their infrastructure and information, including prices, profits and business strategies. In a formal sense they were each other's main business rivals, yet they were not acting accordingly. This becomes best visible in the example of the rubber sandals above, where a trader shared his successful business model, including its concrete infrastructures, with a number of co-villagers, which resulted in a complete oversupply of such rubber sandals and economic losses for many of them. Here, the risk of economic loss when sharing information and infrastructure with one's business rivals seems to weigh less heavy than the potential gain of having close social relations around or than the coercion of the social obligation towards co-villagers or co-traders from the same oasis. Obligations and loyalties towards these people basically exist because of their belonging to these categories, not necessarily because of any direct personal links between the individuals involved, though this is often the case and exceptions to this basic rule occur. Secondly, and closely related, the trust facilitating money lending and the giving of credits within the trade is generated through the institution, not only by individuals. Traders often borrow money from each other and rely on money transporters to carry their money to Ürümchi without sufficient personal knowledge of each other, based on the fact that they belong to the same 'trust network' (Tilly 2005) or to the category or community within which such trust can be expected. This trust generation, though not exclusively including traders from adjacent villages, is to a large extent centred around close relations of the trader's families back in their communities of origin in Atush, Xinjiang.

This is a third important community-aspect of the trader's relations: The trading relations of trust and obligation are embedded into the multiplex relations of their families back home in the village in Atush. These relations imply obligations to help and support each other and establish good conditions for mutual trust. This has several aspects: Relations in their home villages offer a never explicitly stated opportunity of sanctions (e.g. in case credit is not paid back), and also provide the traders a common frame of reference, a common local dialect and a common habitus of constructing and maintaining close social relations. Many of the traders are connected via ties of kinship, friendship and neighbourhood in their home villages (cf. Steenberg 2014) and all of the traders I was living with were part of households and families upholding multiplex community-like relations to each other. As members, they underlie obligations existing between these units at home, also when doing business abroad, and many of them have indeed received the chance and necessary support to facilitate their trade primarily on the basis of such relations. Their trading relations, crucial to most of their household economies, in turn perpetuate and strengthen these community ties, and thus it is a main concern of the traders to act according to the communal moral rules — often more crucial than making short-term profit. Even those whose direct families or households do not uphold relations of a 'community'-type, uphold such relations with other households that do and are thus indirectly (in a network fashion) included into the same kind of (community-style) moral obligations and possible social sanctions.

Furthermore, friendships and loyalties between the traders in Kadamjay are modelled on a common habitus and a common cultural language learnt within constellations with a strong community-aspect, in part re-creating these. Local peer-groups are an essential part of young men's life in the villages and something they invest large quantities of both money and time into. The groups are based on mutual assistance at life cycle celebrations and in business tasks, on helping each other

with finding work as well as on continuously inviting each other for dinner, playing pool together, waiting for each other before heading back to the village in the evening and keeping in constant touch over their mobile telephones. During my fieldwork in Kashgar and Atush I witnessed and participated in these activities in painstaking quantities, and often they seemed to me a waste of time and resources, a judgement shared by their parents. Yet, these activities and the participation in peer-groups that they allow are essential for developing concrete relations between young men in a village and they teach the men a certain code for conduct for creating trust and close social relations. This embodied knowledge, or habitus, becomes a main resource for creating and participating in the very atmosphere of trust on which the success of their trade in Kadamjay depends. Though the basic mechanisms for creating such trust and obligations is alike, different locations in Xinjiang have their distinct specific dialects — not just of spoken language, but also dialects of giving and of communicating trust. While, for instance, rejecting a gift or an offer three times in Köktagh will generally lead to the offer being recalled, in Beshkérím near Kashgar this requires a much more radical and persistent rejection. Also the kind and amount of support expected from close friends varies from village to village depending on the interconnections between them. Therefore, while all of the traders have the prepositions to establish relations of trust with each other, in these rarely explicitly stated matters, it happens more easily and more smoothly between youths from the same or adjacent villages. This is one factor contributing to the 'localised' distribution of the traders. Another important factor is the fact that beginners mostly enter into the trading via close personal relations from Xinjiang, sharing their infrastructures and connections.

In Kadamjay I met only traders from Atush and the traders were mostly sharing quarters with other traders from their own village. In Karasuu one complete apartment building is inhabited by Uyghur traders from Atush. The Uyghurs from Kashgar live elsewhere. There are also designated Atush and Kashgar restaurants at which they gather respectively. Yet, they eat at each other's restaurants and there is no hostility between Uyghurs of the two categories. Though identity does play some role, this is not foremost a matter of identity, and though both groups consider their own bread and food superior to that of the other oasis, this is not a matter of an incompatibility of cultural customs. Instead, this distribution reflects their personal connections and shared infrastructure, based on the trader's 'home'-communities in Atush and shared habitus — or 'dialects of giving' — which facilitate the establishment of trust and close relations on a localised basis.

The trading relations between the traders depend on relations shaped in their communities in Atush, without which trust would not be established. These social institutions that support the trade by establishing trust and the obligation to share infrastructure depend on these community-aspects.

5. Network and community

In the case of Uyghur traders in Batken, we can identify both network-aspects and community-aspects. The network-aspects include the spatial flexibility of the traders, their connections over long distances, the importance of individual personal ties for the trading enterprises and how much is invested into these. Also the fact that all shared costs among the traders in Kadamjay are minutely kept track of can be seen as having a network-aspect, since it is an attempt to keep their relations limited and less multiplex than otherwise. Yet, this phenomenon is also connected to community-aspects, since it institutionalises the moral duty of not being of economic burden to each other, which is especially important in this context of living closely together with divided economies and a main motive for presence being precisely to make money for the own household and family. Several

other community-aspects have been identified above: Traders belonging to the same communities, while being each other's main business rivals, cooperate more than they compete. They share infrastructure and support each other's businesses to a very high degree, relying on the trust, obligation and possibility of sanctions provided by the community as opposed to only being based in direct personal relations. By doing this they relate to both the imagined community of traders and to the multiplex community-relations of their households and families in Atush.

Giving and community

The communities and networks of the traders and their households and families back in Xinjiang have a constituting effect on their relations in the trade, not least because their relations in the trade also potentially influence the relations at home and the position of their family within the local communities and networks. To most, the constitution and maintenance of these social relations is a more important goal than short term profit through niche-monopolization and competition. This is due to the fact that they rely on these social relations for a range of activities, but also to the fact that social relations are a value in themselves. In this sense their actions and mutual support can be interpreted as a type of gift giving in Anjum Alvi's sense (1999). Alvi defines gift giving as being aimed at social relations in opposition to commodity transaction which is aimed at acquiring certain goods or at economic profit (1999: 285). The moral conduct of the traders is not just oriented towards the concrete social relations to given units, but also towards a more general principle and towards the mostly religiously formulated aim of being a good and respected person. Obligations are not primarily towards any concrete social relations in particular, but towards the total trader community and towards the abstract moral principles it builds on. In a sense, any exchange relations amounting to what Marshall Sahlins calls 'generalised reciprocity' can be said to entail a strong community-aspect. In generalised reciprocal transactions the giver gives without any clear expectation of a concrete return (Sahlins 1972: 183-196), and thus the giving is directed at and motivated by a principle or social framework beyond the concrete relation between the two parties in the transaction. Meanwhile, 'balanced reciprocity,' according to which the given is always reciprocated by an equivalent return gift, carries much more concern with such direct relations and transactions. The community-aspect, in this sense, may have been what Bourdieu ignored when reducing gift giving to a direct barter of the *do-ut-des* (I give to you so that you give to me) type, merely 'veiled' by the passing of time in-between the two transactions of which it continues to consist (1998: 163-168). Bourdieu here stays focused on merely the relation between the two parts, not allowing for any orientation towards framing wholes.

Enter Max Weber

As described above, the traders from Köktagh share their business model with their neighbours and even help them to establish themselves as main competitors offering the same goods on the same (saturated) market. Max Weber may have phrased it in terms of it being *wertrational* rather than *zweckrational*. While a *zweckrational* action is carefully calculated and intentionally oriented towards an aim, *wertrational* action, which to the *zweckrational* perspective is irrational, is oriented towards a rule or a value of the action itself, which does not allow for the calculation of its detailed consequences to be the main motivating factor (Weber 1972/1922: 12-13). Being methodologically focused on the individual, Weber does not explicitly refer to a community or a whole beyond the relations between concrete individuals, he thus, in my terminology, stays committed to the network-perspective. Yet, *wertrational* action carries its motive in itself, independent of the prospects of

success of the personal aim. This applies to community-aspects of social institutions, since here the community and the abstract concepts informing it (moral, religious, local, kinship-oriented, ethnicity), towards which the according rules and actions are oriented, are attributed values in themselves. Now, it would certainly not be helpful to categorise the relations and interactions of these traders as *wertrational* as opposed to *zweckrational*. What can be said about these choices, and the social institution they derive from, constitute and re-produce, is that they are neither oriented towards individual economic profit maximisation nor towards the individual forging of ties between two “sites” in a network structure, but are rather oriented towards the larger community frame and the social obligations and moral imperatives it carries. This I would call strong community-aspects of the institution, though the network-aspects are also clearly detectable.⁷ The experienced value of community itself is also stressed by Amit when she writes of “(...) the visceral nature of community, that these are not coldly calculated contracts, but embodied, sensual and emotionally charged affiliations.” Community is thus both “personal and collective” (2002: 16).

I do not want to reproduce Weber’s dichotomy. Any *Zweck* (aim, end) is oriented towards a *Wert* (a value). All action is certainly *wertrational*, in the sense of being directed towards values, the question is just which value it is directed at. The establishment of social relations through sharing of business opportunities, as well as the acquisition of status through acting morally, are certainly very rational, and maybe even calculated choices of action. The value aimed at is just not mainly short-term economical profit. At the same time, every value creates its own system of rational calculations in a *zweckrational* manner and thus all action is also *zweckrational*. Indeed, in the light of the value attributed to social relations and the economic importance of these (especially in one’s own village), the sharing of the own business model with co-villagers may be argued to be very rational indeed, as it aims to uphold good social connections and fulfil community obligations. The long-term gain for the family may by far outweigh the short-term loss of the individual trader. Yet, we can use of Weber’s approach to ask a certain kind of question: Which value/aim is a social action or institution directed towards — to which a degree? At the relation between two given social actors — as the connection between two given nodes in a network? Or at a framing whole beyond the individual relation between the two actors — as within a community?

Defining community-aspect and network-aspect

The community-aspect of the relations is the aspect oriented towards the community as a whole — a community at the same time imagined and very concrete in the sense that it, unlike Benedict Anderson’s imagined national communities, consist of units (or “sites”, i.e. persons, households or families) who are concretely interconnected and whose actions have a direct effect on each other. But the imagination (or conceptualisation) of the concrete ties as a community is still important. I refrain from any attempt to define any concrete community and conceptualise borders around it, since this depends much more on context and situation than our abstracting analyses allow for

⁷ Read in this light, Weber’s categories lead us back to an element in Tönnies’ distinction of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which captures the phenomenon even better: Tönnies relates *Gemeinschaft* to what he calls *Wesenswille*, the commitment to a larger whole, with which the individual identifies and towards which she orients her actions. In contrast, he relates *Gesellschaft* to *Kürwille*, in a sense self-interest, which is pursued in a setting of loosely and flexibly related individuals where each uses the other for her own individual aims. Thus, while the concept of *Kürwille* is certainly too strong to adequately describe network-aspects of social relations, Tönnies’ (1887) concept of *Wesenswille* seems to capture one important part of community-aspects: That they are oriented towards a framing social whole with which the actor identifies.

considering. (Others would say that they are ‘fluid’, merely another way of phrasing it.) Instead, I preliminarily define the network- and community-aspects of social conduct or of social institutions as features to be found to a greater or lesser extent in most social relations. Network-aspects are directed towards the establishment and maintenance of concrete links to concrete units or actors or “sites” in the network, while community-aspects are directed towards a greater whole or an abstract principle framing the relations. Network aspects can be short-term and simplex while community-aspects are almost always long-term and multiplex.

Such framing wholes entail a given category of people and accord moral imperatives and social obligations. They may range from: ‘The five we share a room with and whose wives exchange foodstuffs with our wives back in the village’ - over: ‘all traders from the Atush region’ or ‘all Uyghur traders on the bazaar we know’ - to: ‘all Uyghurs’, ‘all Muslims’ or ‘humankind’. Several of them are simultaneously relevant to most social institutions and actions, though those on the smallest scale, on the most personal level, seem to be most salient. Each carries their own moral imperatives and social obligations and thus influences the concrete relations between actors in different ways. Identifying the networks is more straight-forward: here we just follow the kind of transaction/flow/contact we chose to define the network by: business dealings, information flow, gift exchange, commodities, money, ideas/opinions etc.⁸

This paper does not argue for calling anything ‘a community’ rather than ‘a network’. The aim is not to formulate any classification of social systems or institutions. Instead the aim is to develop approaches in the analytical mid-range to better understand the dynamics of social relations and the institutions they are part of. For this it is helpful to distinguish between different aspects of these relations that follow different logics. The analytical tool of identifying ‘network-aspects’ and ‘community-aspects’ in institutions of lasting social relations in Central Asia, may be a way to at least partially balance the contemporary bias towards a certain kind of analytical metaphor (the network), capable of capturing certain aspects of social relations, by adding another analytical metaphor as a supplement (the community), capable of capturing aspects not accessible to the former. As e.g. crucial aspects of the social relations of Atush traders, which makes them so successful in their trade. Networks are supported by communities and vice versa. Castells et al. see a crisis of the patriarchal

⁸ The distinction of network-aspects and community-aspects recalls an old sociological distinction by Emile Durkheim (1997/1893): That of mechanical solidarity versus organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity, to Durkheim, is the social coercion between similar units on the basis of their similarity, as subsistence farmers being connected through living in the same village or belonging to the same descent category. Though they are dependent on each other for labour support and marriage connections, as the units are basically similar, any one unit could replace any other unit. This solidarity is to a large degree enforced by group coercion and sanctions. By contrast, organic solidarity connects heterogenous units on the basis of them being dependent on each other for services they need, but cannot themselves provide. This is the essence of division of labour, and Durkheim applied these two forms of solidarity to the differentiation between traditional societies with a low degree of specialization and modern societies with a high degree of specialization. Mechanical solidarity is thus based upon relations encompassing many aspects of life and are reasonably stable, often supported by local moral rules and social sanctions. They can be said to be framed by an aspect of *Wesenwille* (Tönnies) and tending towards being strongly *wertrational* (Weber) — stressing, in my terminology, community-aspects of social relations or social institutions. Organic solidarity, accordingly, provides for utilitarian relations of interdependence focussed on a narrow area of interaction and little influenced by moral obligations. Such relations can be said to be based on *Kürwille* (self-interest; Tönnies) and tend towards being strongly *zweckrational* (Weber) — stressing, in my terminology, the network-aspects of social relations or social institutions.

family and a weakening of the traditional forms of authority in the surging 'network society' (2007: 141-143). Yet, this dichotomisation of 'networks' and 'the rest of society' or 'traditional' institutions (ibid.: 141) is not adequate for describing social institutions in Central Asia. Here, as seen in the example of the Uyghur traders in Batken, network-aspects and community-aspects of these institutions complement each other and the expansion of networks often leads to the strengthening, not disappearance, of communities.

Developing an analytical tool

Weber would never have categorised the example of the rubber sandals explicated above as being purely *wertrational* rather than *zweckrational* (Weber 1972/1922: 12-13). To the contrary, he stresses that most actions (and institutions) carry elements of both in them. Tönnies, too, similarly to Weber, points out that the clear distinction of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is a distinction of ideal types (*Normaltypen* in Tönnies' terminology) existing only in theory (what he calls a 'pure sociology' (*reine Soziologie*)) and that only intermediate forms are to be found in concrete social reality (what he calls 'practical sociology' (*praktische Soziologie*); Tönnies 2005/1887). The same is true of community and network: almost any social relation and social institution entails aspects of community-orientation and network-orientation; community-aspects and network-aspects. This applies to institutions we initially name 'networks' or 'communities' alike. Both are legitimate designations, depending on which aspects are predominant but neither is in itself sufficient to grasp the complexity of social institutions. 'Network' and 'community' should not be seen as fixed total forms of societal organisation belonging to 'modern' or 'traditional' societies (*Gemeinschaft*//*Gesellschaft* etc.) but instead should be used complementarily as analytical aspects of a given social context or field, which highlight certain parts of this context or field respectively. 'Network' and 'community' are not categories of social organization but complementary tools to better understand this. Combining the two tropes, we look at networks embedded in communities as well as at communities crisscrossed and transgressed by networks. This analytical approach is particularly helpful when looking at social institutions of lasting personal contacts in Central Asia.

Yet, these two aspects are of course not all there is to be said about social relations or social institutions - by far not! Social institutions and social relations have a complexity beyond what we can describe or grasp in analysis. When analysing, we invariably deduct aspects to reduce the complexity of reality. By doing this we necessarily apply analytical models — however explicitly we chose to phrase it and however conscious we are of the process. Such models can be expressed and comprised in metaphors; according to Max Black, "the peaks of sunken models" (1996: 396). The much used network metaphor focuses on certain aspects: those stressing the relations between two social units/actors or nodes in a network, while the currently less popular community metaphor can be used to approach aspects that stress the relation to larger framing wholes. But there are many other aspects, too, some approachable using other metaphors.

This also means that the analytical tool of paying complementary attention to community-aspects and network-aspects of social institutions offers no coherent model which when be applied to empirical settings in itself provides a satisfactory analysis of these. It is rather an analytical tool to be used as a supplement to other approaches. It could for instance supplement Charles Tilly's concept of "trust networks" (2005) or Norbert Elias' concept of "figurations" (1970: 141-142). This analytical tool can be of use in any analysis of social institutions or social relations, by posing following questions:

- 1) "What is the network-aspect? Which parts of it are oriented towards the direct relations

between individual actors?”

2) “What is the community-aspect? Which parts are oriented towards framing wholes and its moral imperatives and social obligations? And, which are these wholes and which are the imperatives and obligations?”

This can be especially helpful to reintroduce the trope of ‘community’ into a social science discourse very much focussed on the ‘network’ trope, and thus primarily dealing with network-aspects. Especially since our daily life experiences place ‘network’ much more readily at hand than ‘community’. According to Castells we increasingly live in a ‘network society’, by which he means a society increasingly organised in network structures — showing many parallels to Tönnies’ concept of ‘*Gesellschaft*’.⁹ Whether we agree with this or not, we certainly live in a society that increasingly sees itself through the network metaphor and its according models. Like so many socio-cultural concepts before it, this trend enters into the theory-construction of the social sciences resulting in a biased sensitivity for network-aspects of social relations and a neglect of community-aspects. Network is much more attractive to the modern and post-modern analyst. “Community,” as Raport puts it, “is said to characterize a stage in social evolution which has now been superseded, and the problems of definition arise from the fact that what is seen as ‘community’ now is a residue and a throwback to a mode of relating and interacting which was once the norm but has now all but been eclipsed by more modern notions of contractual relations in complex society” (Raport 2002: 175). In this paper I have aimed to reflect critically this network-bias in our theoretical approaches and suggested a way of countering a part of it without losing the theoretical advances that have undeniably been added by the network-approach. A way of contributing to this process could be to employ an analytical tool that uses the tropes of ‘network’ and ‘community’ as mutually complementary when addressing social institutions of enduring personal relations in Central Asia. This tool entails asking for the community-aspect and the network-aspect of such institutions. This paper has been an attempt to outline and preliminarily develop such a tool.

Appendix: Examples

I will now venture to demonstrate how the analytical tool here developed can be further employed in a few short examples. I will draw on scholarly writing and my own field work, to identify community-aspects and network-aspects in small scenarios. I hope to show how the situations are better understandable by being viewed from these complimentary perspectives.

Li’s Gift

The first example derives from Yan Yunxiang’s excellent monograph ‘The Flow of Gifts’ from 1996. Yan examines gift giving at life cycle rituals in the village of Xiajia in the very north-western Chinese province of Heilongjiang. Here, she describes the case of a villager, Li, who by the ‘socially superior’

⁹ Collins, who uses the concept of ‘networks’ extensively, in a footnote states that self-interest and rationality “based on subjective calculations of self-interest” is to her the universal basis of human agency (2006: 28).

When contrasted to Weber, Tönnies and Durkheim’s categories and analytical distinctions from the late 19th century, this clearly demonstrates how closely sociological theoretising is interrelated with the social context of the sociologist and, secondly, how much Western societies in the past century has moved further towards the end of the spectrum characterised by *zweckrational*, *Gesellschaft* and organic solidarity. It also demonstrates the interrelation of the network approach, and thus in my terminology the network-aspect, with an individualistic, utilitarian or at least non-holistic philosophy.

Gao is invited for Gao's daughter's wedding (1996: 85-87). Gao and Li used to be friends, but Gao advanced in the administrative hierarchy while Li at one point fell from grace. Following this Gao did not attend Li's sons wedding, nor give the gifts expected of him. This hurt Li's feelings and their relations cooled down. They lost contact for many years and now, years later, when Gao presumably attempts to reinvigorate their friendship through the invitation to his daughter's wedding, Li neither wants to go nor give any gift to Gao. He discusses the matter with his wife who argues that this would look bad in front of the community, who would accuse Li of stinginess. The solution to the problem ends up being that Li does not go, but instead sends someone with a gift. He thus signals his dissatisfaction and unwillingness to revive the friendship to Gao, while at the same time complying with the social obligations of gift giving in the village (ibid.: 87). This example offers itself quite perfectly for applying the analytical distinction of community-aspects and network-aspects: His giving of a gift is directed towards a framing whole of the village community and thus makes up the community-aspect of this social institution of gift giving. This community-aspect entails obligations he is reluctant to ignore, despite his unwillingness to comply with the obligations a re-instated friendship to Gao would entail — or that would performatively signal his agreement to such a friendship. His not going to the wedding is therefore directed towards the individual connection to Gao and thus makes up the network aspect of this social institution. Li can seemingly neglect this formal duty, in order to send out a personal signal of antipathy to Gao, without damaging his relation to the village community.

Ashar in Kyzyl Üngkür

Similar dual obligations become apparent in the village of Kyzyl Üngkür in southern Kyrgyzstan, where I conducted fieldwork in 2007 and 2013. Here every household in the neighbourhood is expected to contribute labour for the most labour intensive part of the house building — the sealing of the roof with mud and clay — in the so called *lampa ashar*. Belonging to the neighbourhood (*a'il*)¹⁰, which is a spatially defined unit broadly corresponding to administrative borders within the village, obliges each household to contribute labour support. This obligation is collectively framed and does not depend on direct links between these households, which would call for this kind of involvement or on reciprocation of this help already received. Any new household in the village also receives this kind of assistance just by virtue of belonging to the neighbourhood. Here the commitment to the neighbourhood as a whole and the imagination of 'the neighbourhood' as a concept is what the contribution of labour is aimed at. This would not be graspable by focussing only on the individual relations between the households. Similar relations and obligations become relevant at life cycle rituals (*toy*). These likewise, besides being relations between individual households and persons, are directed at the neighbourhood, or the kinship group as a whole. The institutions of *toy* and *ashar* are likewise interrelated, as they each constitute and reconfirm the very same structures of mutual obligations that both depend on.

Of course, the labour help in the *ashar* is not given equally to any household, and some may chose to give much more or not to contribute at all out of reasons very connected to the individual relations between the two households, that is, to the network-aspect of the relation or the transaction. This includes how much labour is invested and who contributes it — whether the father, mother, eldest or youngest son of the family — is quite related to the individual household connections.

¹⁰ The same term is used to describe the whole village.

During my visit to the village in summer 2007, the truck driver Ulan-aka built a new house for his newly-married son. For the sealing of the roof (the most labour intensive part) he arranged an *ashar* (communal help institution). Many people came to help, since he is the driver of one of the few trucks in the village. The driver of one of the other trucks, whose family has no special connection to Ulan-akas family and live on the other side of the village came to help, too. He worked hard the entire afternoon, as often on such occasions. His contribution to Ulan-aka's *ashar*, given without strong personal ties or dependencies, emphasises the distinct community-aspect of this institution, as it is clearly aimed at the more general community and moral framework. At the same time, I was told that the labour contribution to this *ashar* was especially pronounced. The villagers themselves attribute this to the fact that many families will need driving services in the upcoming walnut harvest and hope for Ulan-aka's services. They thus themselves recognise obvious network-aspects in the institution too, directed towards the direct individual relations of households. Still, as the example shows, it would be misleading to account for the transactions taking place and the relations lived and made within institutions like the *ashar* only with reference to this individual relation between two "sites" in a network.

Waters Users Associations

A second and equally telling instance of the community-aspect of the *ashar* appears in Jennifer Sehring's description and evaluation of a Water Users Association project in north Kyrgyzstan (2005). In the wake of the independence of the Central Asian republics in 1991 the irrigation channels of large parts of Kyrgyzstan were suffering from lack of maintenance. To counter this, the Asian Development Bank helped initiate the establishment of Waters Users Associations as local structures of maintenance based on 'traditional' community institutions of labour help (*ashar*). Pre-defined groups of families were as working-groups assigned a certain part of the irrigation network to maintain. Jennifer Sehring (2005) describes the implementation and failure of one such attempt in Chui Oblast. In this case, the groups and families were deliberately chosen across the existing lines of administrative and political loyalties, to not perpetuate existing structures of client-patron relations. The design did not succeed, the work was not done and the hoped for 'community based' sanctions did not take effect. In her evaluation of the project Sehring found one reason for its failure in the resilience of old Soviet power structures. The project had attempted to counter these, but was not able to establish a functioning alternative.

The problem of the project seems to have been the lack of certain elements crucial to other social institutions of mutual labour and economic support, like *lampas ashars* and *toys*: 1) the actors must be able to trust that the institution keeps functioning and that they can rely on it in the future; 2) there must be some kind of moral sanctioning against not complying with the expectations existing within the institution; 3) each actor must somehow identify with a 'framing whole' behind the institution to whom the service is attributed — besides being attributed to a concrete person or unit, too. The people simply did not feel obligated to manage the work. They did not feel indebted (Graeber 2011) to each other in the groups, since they had no lasting multiplex connections between them. This might have been different, if groups had been chosen that corresponded to the former social structures. The example shows that community based institutions of support and exchange cannot be created at will. They are not primarily established as utilitarian solutions to urgent tasks (though, when in existence, they are well equipped to provide such solutions) but are based on long term relations of trust, mutual dependency and loyalty. Institutions of mutual labour assistance depend on deep multiplex relations of long duration, on deeply institutionalised mutual obligations between the

households and on an overarching symbolic structure to focus and collect these obligations to reach beyond the isolated bonds between individual “sites” in these ‘networks’. In other words, they need a strong ‘community-aspect’.

In a pure network-reading of the example, the function of *ashar* stays as obscure, as it obviously must have been to the project workers implementing the WUA Sehring evaluated. Why should a household contribute labour to an undertaking from which they do not profit immediately and no guarantee is given that they will profit in the near future? In this case, a mini-lesson in social engineering, no account was taken of what I would call the ‘community-aspect’. The ‘symbolical force’ of the working-groups assigned by the WUA was by far not enough to command the kind of social coercion and sanctioning needed for the laborious maintenance of the irrigation channels — there were no long term deep relations, no gift giving obligations between the families grouped, no emotional attachment existed to the collectivity of the group; and thus these ‘communities’ commanded no uniting force. In conclusion we may phrase it like this: an attempt was made to establish a labour support institution (*ashar*) primarily based upon network-aspects, while no attention was paid to the community-aspects, which is why the project failed.

Guanxi

In a different area, similar difficulties are met by foreigners doing business in China. They lack crucial knowledge of the forms of gifting when entering the so-called *guanxi*-game of personal relations with Chinese business partners. Even more severely, many mistakenly see this ‘art of social relations’ as a direct short-term exchange of favours-for-favours (a Bourdieuan *do-ut-des*; 1998) or as the opportunity to informally ‘buy’ access and deals, while they neglect the long-term considerations and moral basis this giving and taking is structured by and thus fail to realise their business ambitions (cf. Su and Littlefeld 2001, Vanhounacker 2004). Such *guanxi*-relations are built upon a shared morality as much as they are the result of dyadic direct reciprocity; a morality which provides the basis for an actual moral community. This community is not abstractly named, like Anderson’s imagined communities (1983), but rather figures in the practice — defined by an embodied *habitus* (Bourdieu 1976, 1997) of giving. This reflects clear community-aspects of the institution of *guanxi* the scholarly analysis of which often stresses the direct personal obligations, i.e. the network-aspects.

Both institutions of labour help and business cooperation are based on trust and obligation which require social relations of a lasting and stable type. Such relations are prominently constituted through continuous gift giving and other exchange, organized in a variety of ways and including a polyphony of different objects, modes and spheres of exchange (Gregory 1994). Gifting at life cycle rituals, daily support, money lending, financial support in case of illness, participation in celebrations, political loyalty, employment offerings and business deals are not independent, but highly interrelated phenomena, constituting multiplex relations between social units that uphold direct network-relations within larger community-frames.

Peer groups

Manuel Castells writes of ‘peer groups’ as groups having to some degree an own language and own communication codes and being “constructed through networked sociability” (2007: 143). Within his very network-focused model ‘peer groups’ offer a way of grasping strong community-aspects within the networks. The concept entails both aspects; when looking from an individual perspective, the peer group is a network, while the collective perspective defines it as a relatively bounded community. To stress the dual aspect, Castells calls it a “community of individuals” and claims that

“there will be signs of individualism in each process of communication” (ibid.: 144). This individualist bias and the focus on individual relations, stress the network-aspects while his very use of the concept of peer groups as bounded entities introduces community-aspects into the model.

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Information on the competence network Crossroads Asia

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

- Five sub-projects in the working group **"Conflict"** will focus upon specific localized conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood, and globalization effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena of diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in Crossroads Asia, the sub-projects aim to analyze the logics of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.
- Six sub-projects in the working group **"Migration"** aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within Crossroads Asia as well as figurations extending into both neighboring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organizational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualizing empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans-local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.
- In the **"Development"**-working group four sub-projects are focusing on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, and with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents; secondly, on forms of social mobility, which may create new opportunities, but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

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

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