

national Relations; and Faculty at Harvard International Global Law and Policy Institute) presented a topic which incited a lively plenum discussion. Focused on the famous Ayodhya property dispute, Professor Ratna's analysis showed the increasing influence of the Hindu Right on shaping the contours of secularism in contemporary law in India. The right to freedom of religion is being used to establish and reinforce Hindu majoritarianism through secular law and transforming the very definition and identity of the Indian nation-state.

Another highlight on Friday evening was the buffet dinner at Dozentenfoyer, the roof restaurant of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, providing a great view of Zurich alongside good food. This was only one of several opportunities over the duration of the conference to make contact with the conference participants. Thus, the conference was not only worth attending in order to listen and discuss important research results and new themes, but also for networking – meeting scholars from all over the world working on South Asia made for a really inspiring atmosphere and enabled both very interesting academic discussions and private talks. The 24th ECSAS conference will take place in July 2016 at the University of Warsaw and will surely bring new academic insights and pleasant contacts.

*Ann-Elisabeth Philipp*

### **Crossroads Asia Conference**

#### **Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life: Figurations and Methodology**

Munich, 11 October 2014

On 11 October 2014, Crossroads Asia, a research network funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, held a one-day conference at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. Called *Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life: Figurations and Methodology*, the conference focused on one of the major research foci of Crossroads Asia: conflict. The conference took as its starting point a figurational understanding of conflict (see the Crossroads Asia Concept Paper on conflict, available online at <http://crossroads-asia.de/veroeffentlichungen/concept-papers/concept-paper-conflict.html>). This focused attention less on the content of conflicts – what they are about –

than on the *how* of conflicts: the ways and modes of action and mobilization, the imaginaries and narratives, and the structures and linkages that arise through conflicts. In addition, the call for the conference included methodological issues – the question of how to study conflict. Three of the ten papers at the conference, organized in three sessions, were presented by members of the network.

The conference started with the keynote by Emma Varley (Dept of Anthropology, Brandon University, Canada): “Inhospitable Hospitals: Sectarian Logics of Care and Harm in Gilgit-Baltistan”. Based on comprehensive ethnographic fieldwork, Varley’s address provided a deep insight into the intersections between the Shia-Sunni conflict in Gilgit, Northern Pakistan, and local medical institutions. She showed how the conflict has given rise to sectarian medical economies in Gilgit Town, as a result of which medical services have come to operate as unique sites of both sectarian capital formation and exclusion. She concluded by arguing that sectarian hospitals in Gilgit Town are socially permeable institutions which are simultaneously defined by and generative of novel forms of politico-moral affect, segregated geographies and segregated governance. The discussion that followed addressed mainly the roles of the state and the health care providers in this context.

Khushbakht Hojiev (Center for Development Research, Bonn University) spoke on “Identity Construction and Mobilization in Conflict Processes: A Case Study of Intercommunal Conflict in Batken Province of Kyrgyzstan”. Using a narrative approach, he tried to overcome the often unquestioned division between the instrumentalist and interpretivist approaches to intercommunal conflict. He pointed out that “framing” is one of the most important mechanisms in this regard as it enables the construction of a common identity and the legitimization of action.

In her paper “Invisible Borders: Coping Strategies of Inhabitants in the Aftermath of the Osh Conflict, Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia”, Aksana Ismailbekova (Center for Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin) discussed the conflict between Uzbeks and Kirgiz in the city of Osh in Kirgizstan. As a consequence of recent violent conflict, many areas of Osh have become segregated along ethnic lines. Tensions between Uzbeks and Kirgiz date back to Soviet times. Today, she argued, mutual avoidance and social cohesion can be seen as strategies of dealing with the conflict: her interlocutors presented segregation as a positive development towards a more peaceful future.

Katja Mielke’s presentation “Not in the Masterplan: Dimensions of Exclusion in Kabul” (Bonn University, Center for Development Research) focused on urban development and exclusion on the outskirts of Kabul.

Departing from a figurational approach to urban development, she presented a case study of D 13, a district which is inhabited mainly by Hazaras. As a more recent, informal and unauthorized settlement, D 13 has been left out of the master plan of Kabul and largely ignored in the development projects of the city administration. She showed how, in a context of intersecting conflicts, local representatives struggle to achieve infrastructural improvements, drawing on networks at different levels in order to overcome the gap of exclusion. Pointing out that local actors are part of multiple interdependencies, she concluded that underlying forms of interdependence were determined by socio-cognitive identities, endowment with resources and imaginations about the future.

Nick Miszak (The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva) dealt with “Land Grabbing and the Moral Economy in Afghanistan”. Land is among the most important and conflictual resources in Afghanistan because land is a source not only of wealth, but also of social status. Post-2001 the significance of land has further increased because of growing demand and the influx of capital. Nick Miszak analyzed a particular case of land grabbing in Afghanistan’s eastern province of Nangarhar, where two groups claim a piece of land that is legally state property. Because the claims are thus illegal, the antagonistic parties have not gone to court, but sought to resolve the conflict through negotiation with reference to *shaf’a*, the right of preemption that has its roots in Islamic property law. The parties use *shaf’a* to legitimize their action. Nick Miszak pointed out that although Afghan society is often described in terms of “lacking rule of law”, this does not mean that might is right. On the contrary, actors take pains to enhance the social legitimacy of their action in place of formal legality.

In the next contribution, “Autonomy without Autonomy: Muddling through the Conflict in the Pamir Mountains”, Malgorzata Maria Biczak (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale), analyzed the background of the 2012 fighting in Khorog in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAO). Drawing on the notion of a “frontier” and placing the conflict in a historical perspective, she pointed out that in Soviet times this marginal part of Tajikistan was, compared to Tajikistan’s capital Dushanbe, privileged by Moscow. This furthered the production of two ethnic categories, i.e. Tajiks in the lowlands and Pamiris in the high mountains. The “parasitical economy” of GBAO, which to a great extent depends on foreign NGOs, especially those of the Aga Khan Development Network, underscores this ethnic juxtaposition, which is reinforced by the Tajik state’s encroachment on the ostensible autonomy of the Pamirs.

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

Jan Koehler (Freie Universität Berlin, Collaborative Research Centre 700) addressed the issue of methodology in his presentation on “Institution-Centered Conflict Research – The method and its Application in Eastern Afghanistan”. Drawing on case studies of land conflicts in the sample of a large-scale comparative research project, he analyzed the role of both formal and informal institutions in processing local conflicts. His starting point was the hypothesis that specialized institutions which process a wide range of conflicts via specific procedures are conducive to a dynamic social order, i.e. they make the institutional framework of society more reliable and, hence, enable selective change that is not disruptive. On the basis of his cases, Jan Koehler showed that even in times of violent breakdown of statehood and the fragmentation of society not everything is acceptable. Actors in conflict stick to some rules and do not apply all means at their disposal to further their interest and win. The physical destruction of the opponent, even if possible, remains an exception. He concluded that in Afghanistan local conflict-processing institutions have survived war and social fragmentation.

Lutz Rzehak (Humboldt University, Berlin) approached the field of conflict from a literary and linguistic perspective. In his presentation “‘You, obviously, think I am crazy!’ Arguing out Conflicts in the Literature of the Early Modern Persian Enlightenment”, he analyzed how supporters of modernity and their political or cultural opponents exchanged arguments in literary disputes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rzehak pointed out that in such dialogues arguments were mostly put into the mouths of foreign visitors, probably because the authors expected that they thereby would be more persuasive.

The final presentation was Amélie Blom’s (Science Po/CNRS/EHESS, Paris) “Do Jihadist ‘Martyrs’ Really Want to Die?” Based on biographical interviews with “Jihadists” who had left radical groups before committing a

suicide-attack she analyzed the dynamics of recruitment for Jihad and the motivation of recruits. While most analyses of the motivations of suicide bombers that depend on posthumously published statements depict the “martyrs” as rather hyper-motivated believers, Blom’s interviews with survivors present a very different picture. Distinguishing different trajectories of recruitment and of keeping a recruit within a militant organization, Blom argued that subtle methods of peer pressure and techniques of creating consent within a group that impress ‘malleable’ personalities are actually more significant than ideological radicalization and unshakable belief.

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

*Martin Sökefeld*