SPACES OF CONFLICT IN EVERYDAY LIFE

MARTIN SÖKEFELD (ED.)

PERSPECTIVES ACROSS ASIA

From:

Martin Sökefeld (ed.)
Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life
Perspectives across Asia

Conflicts are everyday situations and experiences with which people have to cope. Focusing on particularly conflict-prone parts of Asia, the contributions to this book analyze the dynamics of conflicts from the perspectives of the actors involved, and pay particular attention to aspects like mobilization, exclusion, segregation, the role of institutions and the construction of antagonistic identities. The book gathers case studies based on long-term fieldwork from conflicts in Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir.

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Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life: An Introduction

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This volume presents contributions made to a conference hosted and run by the research network "Crossroads Asia," which took place in Munich in October 2014. The goal of the Crossroads Asia network is to enhance the understanding of the geographic area that stretches from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. This part of Asia falls through the cracks of conventionally defined research areas, in that it is not entirely situated in South Asia, West Asia or Central Asia but intersects and partly overlaps these 'disciplinary' regions of area studies. Nevertheless, it makes a good deal of sense to take a cross-cutting perspective, simply because many social and political relations and processes intersect and connect significant parts of these conventionally delimited areas. The world is not a mosaic of containers, and while the critique of methodological nationalism (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002) has become widely accepted in academia, a critique of methodological (and disciplinary) 'regionalism' is equally necessary. Accordingly, Crossroads Asia challenges the validity of the traditional approach of area studies, namely of dividing the world into clearly delimited segments which are then examined by specialised and institutionalised disciplines, for example 'South Asian Studies' or 'Central Asian Studies', without looking much beyond these limits. In contrast, Crossroads Asia's counter-approach proposes to carry out research against the grain of conventionally defined areas, following dynamics that do not necessarily stop at the borders of nation states or areas.

Mobility is a key dynamic in this regard: people, as well as goods and ideas, are extremely mobile in the areas under study, in spite of an envi-

ronment characterised by high mountain systems and deserts, which for outsiders rather seem to inhibit or even foreclose movement. Nevertheless, it is not only physical movements, such as migration, trade, nomadism and other forms of "wayfaring" (Ingold 2009), which are central in this regard. The network also departs from an understanding of the social that is centred on processes and emphasises social mobility and movement. Processual dynamics and social movements are, in most cases, intimately connected with conflicts; indeed, the area studied by the Crossroads network is one of the most conflict-ridden parts of the world. For instance, one just has to think of the civil war in Tajikistan, the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan and the insurgency and ongoing protest in the Kashmir Valley against Indian control, the conflict in Afghanistan and the war between the Taliban and the Pakistani army that is so intimately tied to the situation in Afghanistan. Thus, conflict has almost 'naturally' become a central concern of the Crossroads Network, albeit without limiting the focus to macro-level conflicts. However, macro-level conflicts form a significant context for contestations at the meso and micro levels; in fact, all levels intersect. Furthermore, instead of focusing on states and actors, we were interested in the everyday life of conflicts – or rather everyday life in the context of conflicts. While Georg Elwert (2004) maintains that conflicts are socially embedded, we emphasise that in the contexts we studied, social life is always embedded in conflicts.

As Crossroad Asia's basic approach to conflict has been laid out previously in a concept paper (Crossroads Asia Working Group Conflict 2012), I shall only summarise some of the major points here. First of all, conflict is seen as a 'normal' and universal aspect of social life and not as an exceptional occurrence and deviation away from a 'normal' state of social order. Conflicts and the necessity to deal with them are part of everyday social life, and they may have integrative or destructive functions for society; furthermore, they are not restricted to a narrowly defined realm of politics (centring on issues related to the state and security). Departing from an extended concept of politics that draws on a broad concept of power as a significant dimension of all social relations, 'social' conflicts are also 'political'. Given the situation in the areas studied, it is quite obvious that social relations, including relations of conflict, do not stop at the borders of the nation state, and so in order to conceive of the social we took inspiration from Norbert Elias's concept of figurations, to which I shall return below.

Emphasising conflicts as processes, we are of the opinion that the search for the causes (and consequences, for that matter) of conflicts is often not analytically useful. In many cases it is even impossible to identify causes, because conflicts frequently have neither a clear beginning nor an end. Rather, "conflicts follow conflicts," in that they feed into and intersect one another. Distinguishing between the causes of conflict, as well as for the purpose of analytical categorisation ('ethnic conflicts', 'resource conflicts', 'religious conflicts', etc.), often runs the danger of simplifying highly complex situations regarding intersecting antagonisms. This implies that in the endeavour to understand conflicts, emic perspectives have to be taken seriously and must not be obscured by the imposition of macro-perspective categories like, for instance, the distinction between 'Taliban' and 'civilians' in Afghanistan. Furthermore, conflicts are not simply about 'objects of conflict' but have a significant communicative dimension. Often, the discursive construction of a conflict is itself disputed, so we need to take not only symbolic action, including rituals surrounding conflicts, into account, but also non-communication, silence and discursive taboos.

CONFLICTS AS FIGURATIONS

The approach to conflicts suggested herein takes the conflicting actors seriously. Norbert Elias was one of the first social scientists to focus on individuals as social actors. He refused to privilege or reify 'society' or 'the social' – or 'structure', we could say – or to separate it from the individual human being; rather, he emphasised the necessity to think about both together: the individual human being/actor embedded in social relationships and the social composed of individual human beings and resulting from their interaction. Elias can be seen as a precursor to later practice theory. For him, neither methodological individualism nor methodological holism was a viable option for sociology. He suggested the concept of *figuration* in order to refer to the 'middle ground' of social formations that come into being through the interaction of individuals and which in turn strongly influence individual action. Elias takes the example of a game of cards – or rather of individuals *playing* cards – in order to explain what he means by figuration (Elias 2009: 141f). The people playing form a figuration. Their interaction is interdependent, i.e. the acts of each of these individuals depend on the acts of others, to which they respond and which set certain

conditions to which they re-act in turn. The game is not an abstraction or an ideal type but a concrete event and process. The game is also not reducible to a set of rules; it is rather the enactment and interpretation of these rules in the particular event of playing. The game does not exist independently of the playing individuals and vice versa, i.e. the individuals are not independent of this situation, as they become and are players only through their interaction. Such a figuration has no fixed boundaries. While we can limit our view to the players, we could also take into consideration the larger space in which they are playing, perhaps a pub or a living room. Again, we will discover concrete interdependencies with other actors in this room and beyond, discovering larger networks of interaction. However, even if we follow these interdependencies of interaction further, we trace a specific and concrete figuration and do not arrive at the abstraction of 'the social' or 'society'. Through tracing the figuration we learn about interdependencies and are able to discover connections which in the beginning might have been out of sight. Elias emphasises that figurations are changeable patterns that implicate individuals, not only intellectually, but also as 'whole persons' (ibid. 142) – with their bodies and senses, we should add. He further points out that two or more groups composed of interdependent individuals may be intertwined in a figuration. He takes the example of two football teams that play against one another. The interdependencies and interactions of the players within each of the teams can only be understood with reference to their interactions with the opposing team. To this figuration we can add the spectators and fans, who in turn respond to the unfolding of the game on the field. We could also extend this notion by taking into account other football teams and their followers and arrive at the larger figuration of a football league – a figuration of the figurations of individual teams and games. Figurations are not clearly bounded but extend in space and time, and they cannot be defined by drawing limits but rather by pointing out core events and issues. The connectedness of figurations – which also implies specific closures and disjunctions – corroborates Crossroads Asia's emphasis of mobility and trans-border relations.

Taking inspiration from Elias's conceptualisation, we consider conflicts as figurations or as significant nodes of larger figurations where multiple networks of interaction and interdependency collide. Just like Elias's example of the football game, conflicts come into being through interacting individuals that form oppositions and/or alliances. Also, conflict figurations

branch out and extend over time and space; they have particular histories and connect with other issues and figurations.

Following Latour, we cannot limit the analysis of figurations to the acting individuals involved – we also have to take *things*, objects, into account. Elias overlooked that the players in his game of cards actually needed a material deck of cards, without which they would be engaged in a very different activity. Similarly, objects such as a ball, goals, a field and, perhaps even a stadium are necessary elements for the figuration of a football game. Just as Elias refused to strictly separate 'the social' from 'the individual', Latour refuses to separate 'human beings' from 'non-human beings'. This is highly relevant for the analysis of conflicts, as they have their own material conditions and paraphernalia. Take Latour's famous example of the gun: a human being with a gun is not the same as a human being without a gun. Although the gun does nothing by itself (shoot people), the possession of a gun transforms the human being; it changes the range of action (Latour 2002: 214ff). People carrying guns and who interact with one another form a quite different configuration than people without guns. Yet the significance of material things for conflicts is not limited to the obvious case of weapons. Other things such as roads, mobile phones and cars equally play significant roles in figurations, figurations of conflict included, and they enable different ways to perform the action, extend the range of action and transform actors in various ways. Many such things in particular transform the relation of actors and agents with space, in that they enable the bridging of distance and facilitate the connection between distant places, or they reduce the time needed to do so. Thus, they enable the extension of figurations.

Given the particular emphasis of the Crossroads Asia network on questions of mobility and space, I will focus on these issues in the rest of this introduction, departing from the discussion of a conflict which I have followed, more or less continuously, over the last two and a half decades, namely the conflict between Sunnis and Shias in Gilgit, the capital city of the high mountain area of Gilgit-Baltistan, to which Emma Varley's chapter in this collection also refers. This conflict can be viewed as a local figuration that overlaps with other figurations in time and space and which also has strong effects on local space, transforming, in fact, spatial organisation.

CONFLICT, SPACE AND MOBILITY: SHIAS AND SUNNIS IN GILGIT

Everyday life in Gilgit is strongly affected by Sunni-Shia violence. Since the late 1980s, periods of violence, which are known locally as *tensions*, have occurred every few years, or sometimes even more frequently. In 2012, for instance, there were three periods of tensions. In contrast to earlier cases, the events of violence that produced tensions did not happen in Gilgit town itself, but Shia passengers were attacked on buses coming from or going to Gilgit on the Karakorum Highway (in February and May 2012) or near the Babusar Pass (in September 2012). Nevertheless, these attacks had strong repercussions in the town. Because counter-violence is expected after such attacks, curfews are imposed on the town which often last for several weeks. Life in Gilgit comes to a halt. Traffic on the Karakorum Highway, the lifeline on which Gilgit-Baltistan depends for the supply of food and other essentials, is closed or strongly restricted. The bazaar is closed and people have to live for days on whatever they happen to store in their houses. Even when, after some time, the curfew is relaxed or lifted, movement remains restrained, as people fear further violence. The atmosphere in the town remains very tense, and often it takes weeks or even months until life becomes 'normal' again.

The conflict between Shias and Sunnis in Gilgit does not have a definite beginning, although in local discourse 1988 is often given as the year in which the troubles started. Nonetheless, this year marks the escalation of Sunni-Shia violence rather than the actual beginning of the conflict. Of course, the Shia-Sunni issue originates in the dispute about the succession of the Prophet Mohammad and is therefore almost as old as Islam itself. Shia-Sunni antagonism is a global concomitant of Islam that has diverse local manifestations. In Gilgit-Baltistan, for instance, the two sects are unevenly distributed area-wise. This spatial distribution of Shias and Sunnis (and Ismailis, the third Muslim sect in Gilgit-Baltistan, which is not directly involved in the antagonism) originates from the differential Islamisation of the region. Roughly, Sunni missionaries came from the south, Shias from the East and Ismailis from the North. Thus, very roughly, the south of Gilgit-Baltistan, Diamer District, is purely Sunni, while to the east, Baltistan, is mostly – though not exclusively – Shia, while the northern part of the area, Hunza, is mostly Ismaili. Gilgit town is mixed and surrounded by villages populated by members of all sects. 'Mixed' does not mean that the

sects are evenly distributed throughout the town; rather, Shias and Sunnis are concentrated in particular areas, and mixed neighbourhoods are actually the great exception. This spatial configuration of Shias and Sunnis living in close proximity, and yet in separate – and often spatially opposed – neighbourhoods of the town, is probably one significant precondition that has been highly conducive to the escalation of the conflict. Increasing spatial separation, however, is also a significant outcome of conflict.

In local discourse, people mostly emphasise that there was no conflict "in the past," that Shias and Sunnis were closely related, marriages included, that they lived amicably side by side and that in many cases one even did not know whether a person was Shia or Sunni. Two dichotomies (beside the Shia-Sunni dichotomy itself) dominate the discourse about sectarian conflict in Gilgit, both of which support one another: past vs. present and inside vs. outside. While the past was peaceful, the present is violent. Similarly, it is said that people from Gilgit are peaceful, and it was in fact outsiders who brought conflict and violence to the area. Taken together, both dichotomies rather exonerate the local people of Gilgit, in that they are not responsible for Sunni-Shia violence that has befallen the town over the last decades. When I first started fieldwork in Gilgit, in 1991, I was told that Shias and Sunnis had even prayed together in the same mosque. The beginning of the separation of Shias and Sunnis in ritual gatherings was attributed to Sardar Mohammad Akbar Khan, who was the *Wazir-e-Wazarat* (Governor) of the Maharaja in Gilgit in the first decade of the 20th century. I was told that the same mosque in Gilgit's bazaar was used by Shias and Sunnis for prayer, but that the governor initiated the construction of a Shia Imambarga, a hall which Shias use especially for the commemoration of the martyrdom of the Imam Hussain during Muharram, the month of mourning. Thus, separate places were allocated to Sunnis and Shias, though they still often shared mosques until the 1970s.

The first incidents of violence occurred in the 1970s. On Ashura, the 10th of the month of Muharram, Shias mourn the martyrdom of the Imam Hussain in Kerbela in 680 in a public *julus* (procession). Ashura mourning practices include self-flagellation (*zanjiri matam*). The *julus* used to end in a reunion at the central bazaar of Gilgit, in front of the Sunni *jama masjid* (main mosque). In 1972, the Qazi of the Sunni protested against the assembly in this place, arguing that the *julus* disturbed prayer in the mosque and that the blood of the Shias defiled the space around the building. The Shias, however, refused to change the course of the Ashura *julus*. The dispute con-

tinued over the following years. In 1975, the Shia *julus* was shot at from the Sunni mosque. The Sunni Qazi was arrested, following which armed Sunnis from Kohistan and Diamer marched towards Gilgit, in order to free the Qazi. Similarly, armed Shias started out from Nager, in order to defend Shias in Gilgit. Both groups were stopped by local paramilitary troops, the Gilgit Scouts, before they reached the town. In the following years, the administration did not allow the Shias to assemble in front of the Sunni mosque. As the Shias refused to gather at another place, the *julus* was prohibited for the next two years, until the Shias gave in. Muharram remains a very tense time in Gilgit up to today. The bloodshed that was prevented in 1975 occurred in 1988. In this year, Shias ended Ramadan, the month of fasting, a day earlier than the Sunnis. While Sunnis were still fasting, young Shia men rejoiced in the main bazaar, by smoking and eating. The Sunnis felt deeply offended, there was a local fight and when the news of this reached the Sunni areas of Diamer and Kohistan, armed *lashkar* ('warriors') again made their way toward Gilgit. This time they were not stopped, as the Gilgit Scouts in the interim period had been disbanded and the regular army would take no action. The Sunni *lashkar* did not enter Gilgit town but devastated Shia villages, such as Jalalabad and Sakwar, close to the town.

Why did the dispute over the *julus* develop in the 1970s? Many people in Gilgit – Shias, Sunnis and Ismailis alike – draw a line from politics to religion. In early 1971, the town saw a brief but massive uprising against the Pakistani domination of the area. A minor dispute between a local teacher and a Punjabi army officer grew into the open expression of discontent with the area's political status: having been part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir before the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, Gilgit-Baltistan was (and still is) under Pakistani control and administration, yet it was not a constitutional part of the country and lacked any representation in the Pakistani political setup (Sökefeld 2005). There was a huge demonstration. In order to free a political leader who had been arrested, the police station in Gilgit was stormed and then set on fire. The Gilgit Scouts refused to use force to control the situation, and finally troops from outside were called in to put down the insurgency. Thereafter, Sunni *ulema* from outside came to Gilgit and started to preach against Shias, calling them 'apostates' and 'non-Muslims'. For many people in Gilgit it made perfect sense that these *ulema* were brought in by the government in order to execute a divide-and-rule strategy, that is, to pit Sunnis against Shias, in order to prevent further

united mobilisation against Pakistan's control. Although this allegation cannot be proven, it is a clear indication of mistrust vis-à-vis the government of Pakistan. In any case, since the mid-1970s, alienation between Shias and Sunnis has grown into inter-sectarian violence.

The events of 1988 ruptured Shia-Sunni relations and had long-lasting effects. While before, Shia-Sunni relations had been one issue among others in the town, the sectarian antagonism now became a premise for social life in Gilgit. Segregation, spatial as well as social, between both groups increased, and Shias living in villages close to the town or in parts of the city where they were in a minority position – and therefore allegedly vulnerable to further attack by Sunnis – moved to other places that were inhabited by a Shia or Ismaili majority and which felt safe. Similarly, Sunnis also concentrated in Sunni areas. In effect, villages and neighbourhoods became unmixed, and nowadays, in periods of tension, people will often, for weeks, refuse to go to their workplaces if these happen to be in a majority area of the other sect. In her contribution to this volume, Emma Varley vividly describes the grave effects of these dynamics of vulnerability and separation on the health sector in Gilgit. A similar dynamic applies to schools, whereby parents send their children to institutes that they consider safe because they are situated in a neighbourhood dominated by their own sect. Thus, many schools become increasingly homogeneous in terms of the sectarian affiliation of their students. In acute periods of tension, people even avoid moving through areas dominated by the other sect. Moreover, in 2012, after the bus attacks mentioned earlier, public transport in Gilgit was separated according to sect, although this was stopped by the government after just a few days (Grieser/Sökefeld 2015). Together with this increasing spatial separation of Shias and Sunnis comes a growing social distance between the two sects, due in part to the fact that for almost three decades no cross-sectarian marriages have been concluded. Many people have relatives in the other sect, yet social contact has decreased greatly. Everyday life is increasingly sectarianised, meaning that sectarian affiliation becomes significant in more and more areas of life (Grieser/Sökefeld 2015: 83).

The social dynamics of sectarianisation can be described succinctly through Leo Kuper's concept of polarisation. Kuper uses the concept for

"an intensification of conflict by aggressive action and reaction. Polarization, then, is a process of increasing aggregation of the members of the society into exclusive and mutually hostile groups, entailing the elimination of the middle-ground and of

mediating relationships. Episodes of conflict accumulate. There are corresponding ideologies […] presenting simplified conceptions of the society as already polarized into two antagonistic groups with incompatible and irreconcilable interests, rendering inevitable the resort to violence." (Kuper 1977: 128)

Although sectarian violence is not a daily affair in Gilgit, in the sense that somebody is attacked or killed every day, events of violence and conflict have mounted up due to growing antagonism and separation. Both groups rely on (religious) ideologies that legitimise this antagonism and interpret the violent action of the other group as a validation of their own position. Most importantly, the 'middle-ground' has been largely erased in Gilgit – both spatially and in terms of intermediate social relations. In fact, few places are left where Shias and Sunnis interact on a daily basis. To some extent the central bazaar is one such place, although customers tend to frequent 'same-sect' shops if they are not looking for specialised goods. Nonetheless, the bazaar is also seen as a very dangerous area, and it is the first place that people vacate unanimously when violence occurs. Another place of cross-sectarian interaction is Gilgit's university, the Karakorum International University (KIU), which struggles to keep sectarianism out of its precincts, and not always successfully. In 2012 and 2013, for instance, Shia students celebrated *yom-e-Hussain* (the day of the Imam Hussain) in commemoration of the martyrdom of the third Shia Imam at the university, in reaction to which Sunni students protested. In 2012, clashes followed, and in both years the KIU was closed for a number weeks, in order to prevent further escalation. A 'sectarian logic' is forced on the university and on other institutions. In an article, Nosheen Ali describes how the university is pressurised into maintaining a 'sectarian balance' in terms of employment or prizes awarded, whereby all three sects, Ismailis included, have to be considered on equal terms, in order to avoid protests (Ali 2010: 744f). This sectarian logic has become a premise for social life, an a priori notion that shapes the perception of events, so that every incident of violence that occurs is first interpreted within the Shia-Sunni framework: if the victim is a Shia, it is assumed that the perpetrator is a Sunni, or the other way round, until it often turns out that the incident was perhaps a family issue completely unrelated to sectarianism.

The sectarian logic is pervasive. Although most inhabitants of the town regret this state of affairs, and only a few people in Gilgit are die-hard partisans in relation to their own sect, they cannot escape the separating dy-

namics of polarisation. Sectarian 'un-mixing' is not produced by bureaucratic efforts or by the coordinated use of violence for this purpose, as in cases of "ethnic cleansing" (e.g. Hayden 1996) – it occurs rather as a kind of self-organisation that is driven by sentiments of fear and insecurity. In spite of the strong dynamics of polarisation, there are always actors who try to overcome the sectarian divide and who exert great effort in working towards reconciliation; yet, they often also succumb to sectarian logic. Thus, Nosheen Ali points out that it was a peace *jirga* (peace council) that forced the 'sectarian balance' on KIU and demanded that members of all sects have to be equally represented in the awards process. Interestingly, it is especially the 'nationalists' of Gilgit-Baltistan, i.e. those political groups that strongly criticise Pakistan's control over the area and that demand real autonomy or even independence, that most openly reject sectarian logic. For them, the imposition of sectarian logic is a nefarious strategy of control that goes way beyond 'divide and rule' tactics, as violence and insecurity provide a convincing legitimisation to tighten the surveillance, control and militarisation of the area further (Ali 2013).

SECTARIANISM IN GILGIT AS FIGURATION

Sectarianism in Gilgit can be read as a figuration in which many issues overlap and interconnect. It is of course a much more complex figuration than Norbert Elias's simple example of the games of cards or football, as sectarianism draws on a long history of Shia-Sunni antagonism in Islam, though it is not reducible purely to this particular issue. Shia-Sunni antagonism is not a pre-existing coercive structure that leaves individual actors no choice but to fight each other; rather, sectarian logic, which today indeed has acquired a certain coercive power – especially as a cognitive framework of interpretation –, developed over time as a consequence of the accumulation of conflict interaction and experience. Individual actors act in response to the actions of members of their own and of the other sect, including their expectations of the actions of others. Thus, the un-mixing of Shias and Sunnis is a consequence of the experience of insecurity and the expectation of further violence. It had the consequence of erasing a middleground where members of both sects could meet and interact beyond the premise of antagonism. The dynamic of polarisation, once triggered, is difficult to stop.

Also, in the figuration of Sunni-Shia violence, material things are a significant part of the game. This is most obvious in the case of automatic weapons, which are used in events of violence and without which the escalation of the antagonism would have been impossible. Since the 1990s, Sunni-Shia resentment has been linked discursively to the so-called 'Kalashnikov culture' that prevailed in many parts of Pakistan. Nowadays, one could speak instead of a 'bomb culture' that haunts the country, and recently grenades have also been used in Shia-Sunni violence in Gilgit. Besides weapons, infrastructure and means of transportation also play a significant role, both as transport for attackers – the violence of 1988 would not have been possible without cars – and as targets for attack. Thus, in 2012, Shias were assaulted on buses while passing through Sunni areas. Perhaps the most important implements for the conflict today are mobile phones, as attacks are coordinated through mobile communication. Young men especially, who have to pass through areas dominated by the other sect, are highly suspicious of mobiles: when they see somebody starting to talk on the phone while they are passing by, they often change their route or even abort their trip altogether, because they fear that someone might have been alerted of their approach, in order to shoot them. Furthermore, mobile communication enables the easy circulation of news and rumours that may trigger further violence. The attack on Shia passengers travelling on buses on the Karakorum Highway by people of Chilas, the Sunni town in the south of Gilgit, in April 2012, was triggered by the rather exaggerated 'news' spread by text messages that many Sunnis had been killed at a demonstration in Gilgit. When violence occurs, the authorities therefore usually shut down mobile services, just as they close down or at least strictly control traffic on the Karakorum highway. Such measures, however, add to the atmosphere of insecurity, as it becomes more difficult to get reliable information and also because the supply of provisions is stopped and becomes precarious.

Importantly, the figuration of Sunni-Shia conflict in Gilgit intersects and overlaps with other issues, most significantly with the dispute about the political status of the area. While any involvement of state and government in the triggering of violence cannot be verified, the discursive intersection of politics and the Shia-Sunni issue has very practical results. Local elections, for instance, generally follow the sectarian logic, and often candidates quite explicitly use sectarian affiliation as a means of mobilising support. Furthermore, as I pointed out previously, governmental efforts to curb Sunni-Shia violence add to the militarisation and control of the area by all

kinds of 'security' agencies, which strongly add to a widespread feeling of insecurity, marginalisation and disenfranchising domination by Pakistan.

It noteworthy that the Shia-Sunni figuration emerges not only from the action of those who somehow actively take part in the antagonism, as perpetrators of violence or as producers of sectarian discourse as preachers in mosques, for instance, but also the figuration creates a 'space of conflict' in Gilgit in which everyday life takes place – a space of conflict in the dual sense of *physical space*, as a series of places in which people live and through which they pass, and of *social space*, made up of social positions and relationships that people occupy and spin through their interaction. In their daily action, in most realms of life, people in the town have to take into account the conflict and the pervasive logic of sectarianism and reproduce it accordingly. People's actions are not determined, but their choices are limited by the conflict in regards to where they move in the town, to which school they send their children, which doctor they see in case of illness, where they look for possible marriage partners – all of which is affected by sectarian considerations. To allude to Georg Elwert again, social life in Gilgit is embedded in this space of sectarian conflict.

Nevertheless, the Shia-Sunni figuration in Gilgit goes beyond the local space of conflict and connects with sectarianism in other places in Pakistan. Politics in Pakistan, most importantly the politics of Islamisation that was executed by General Zia ul Haq after 1979 and which solely promoted a specific Sunni interpretation of Islam, have strongly fostered Gilgit Shias' self-perception of being marginalised and being constantly under threat. In Pakistan, anti-Shia violence is not limited to Gilgit-Baltistan. In recent years, for instance, especially Shias in Baluchistan, most of them Hazaras originating from Afghanistan, have become victims of merciless massacres. In November 2013, clashes emerged around the Ashura procession in Rawalpindi, which resulted in severe violence in which at least eight persons were killed and many more injured. Often, people in Gilgit-Baltistan react to such incidents. After the Rawalpindi attacks, there was a huge demonstration in the Sunni town Chilas protesting against Shia attacks on a Sunni mosque and madrasa in Rawalpindi. At the same time, Shias in Gilgit condemned attacks on a Shia *imambarga* in Rawalpindi. Both a Sunni and a Shia party called for a "shutter-down strike," and bazaars in Gilgit and Chilas were closed. The authorities also blocked traffic on the Karakorum Highway, in order to prevent retaliatory violence.

Furthermore, Shias and Sunnis in Gilgit are embedded in far-reaching religious networks. This is not a new development; in fact, the ideological separation of Sunnis and Shias is largely the consequence of the increasing translocal connection of their *ulema* (religious scholars) to their respective centres of learning. Sunnis in Gilgit are today almost exclusively followers of the School of Deoband – a relationship which dates back to the 1920s when, for the first time, two Sunnis from the Gilgit area went to study at the famous madrasa in the north Indian town of Deoband and subsequently taught their version of Islam in Gilgit. For Shias, the decisive relation is with Iran. In 1937, an Iranian *alim* (scholar) who settled in the town initiated the construction of the present-day Shia *jama masjid* and became its first imam (Sökefeld 1997: 187f). Subsequently, almost all Shia *ulema* from Gilgit have been to Iran for religious studies, and as a consequence of the greater centralisation of Shia Islam, almost all Shias in Gilgit have personal connections to Iran because they are *muqallidun* (followers, implying a relation of personal faithfulness) of a Shia ayatollah in the country. The Shia networks connect what in area studies are usually separated as South and West Asia.

Another overarching context in which the Shia-Sunni issue is embedded is the Kashmir conflict. I have already pointed out that the Shia-Sunni conflict is locally interpreted with reference to the specific political predicament of Gilgit-Baltistan as being controlled by Pakistan, which is based on the Kashmir dispute. Yet, the conflict in Gilgit also feeds back into the Kashmir dispute. Thus, local nationalism that postulates the nation of Gilgit-Baltistan as distinct from Pakistan, as well as from Kashmir, and which is entitled to self-determination, or at least real autonomy, and that thereby challenges the conventional framing of the Kashmir conflict, also derives from the experience of Pakistan's divisive politics of religion. This nationalism proposes to overcome such divisions through the identification with a nation that – unlike Pakistan – is not based on religious affiliation in the first place.

SPACE AND PLACE, MOBILITY AND MOBILISATION

The sectarian figuration in Gilgit is linked intimately and in multiple ways with issues of space and mobility. Sectarianisation is first of all the sectarianisation of *places*. This started with Wazir-e-Wazarat Sardar Mohammad

Akbar Khan in the early 20th century, who assigned separate places for Shia and Sunni ritual gatherings. Conflict over the Ashura *julus* in the 1970s was essentially over movement and space, whereby Sunnis considered the movement of the Shia *julus* near to their mosque an infringement on their space, while Shias insisted on their right to move across the city space. Nonetheless, through the ongoing dynamics of polarisation the urban space of Gilgit has become increasingly subject to sectarian division. Polarisation implies sectarian place-making and the increasing congruence of group boundaries and spatial boundaries. Many parts of the city have become marked as either Sunni or Shia space, in which the movement of members of the respective other group is considered unsafe. This is not only crucial for quotidian movement, since many people have moved house in order to leave places that they consider unsafe. Movement is restricted especially in times of tension, but a considerable degree of (self-)restriction remains effective also when an acute period of conflict is over. Furthermore, violent events are linked directly with movement, as people need to move in order to attack. Accordingly, the authorities try to control space and movement through a dense network of checkpoints and the imposition of curfews, i.e. prohibiting people from moving outside of their house, in periods of violence. The loss of the middle-ground in the process of polarisation means that neutral sites have become reduced and contested; antagonists try to mark neutral places as their own space. Beyond literal movement in physical space, the Shia-Sunni issue is also linked with issues of mobilisation in social and political space. On the one hand, actors have to be mobilised in order to side with the antagonists in one way or the other, but on the other hand this inter-sect bitterness is also employed as a means of mobilisation in other affairs such as elections.

The close linkage between space/place and conflict is not accidental; rather, it is the consequence of the fact that all human action 'takes place' in places – even if in virtual ones. Place is a crucial resource for action and is therefore almost necessarily disputed in cases of unrest. Disputes about places can take many forms, such as conflicts about territory and borders, or about the right to move or the right to stay. Thus, the relation between conflict and space/place is of course a dual one: conflicts take place *in* space and at particular places, but they are also *about* space and places that are claimed by the antagonists. Often, conflict is also inscribed in places through symbolic markings or the drawing of physical boundaries. Similar-

ly, movement and mobility are not only significant aspects of conflict action, but they are also affected by conflict.

I think a brief note on the relation of 'space' and 'place' is required here. Tim Ingold (2009) is right, in that there is no 'space' in practice: as soon as action 'takes place', 'space' is converted into concrete places – it is appropriated as particular places. Movement does not take place in space but from place to place. Conceiving of place as 'space' is therefore the philosophers' fallacy – the fallacy of those philosophers who 'take the people out,' to refer to Ingold's beautiful definition of anthropology as "philosophy with the people in" (Ingold 1992: 695-6). Still, I think, we need a word on the abstract condition of space – a kind of pre-social notion. Turning Ingold against Lefebvre (1991), we could suggest that space is never constructed, because as soon as it is constructed, i.e. subject to social action, it becomes a place(s). Consequentially, space is not contested – except in abstract discourse. What are always subject to disputes, though, are particular places.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS IN THIS VOLUME

Issues of space and place, of movement and mobility, are the common denominators for the contributors to this volume, who deal with contested places and movements, including land as the most concrete place as an object of dispute, with the difficulty of mobilising resources in marginalised spaces, and with the effects of displacement from a contested border zone.

Aksana Ismailbekova's contribution, *Shifting Borders: Coping Strategies of Inhabitants in the Aftermath of the Osh Conflict, Kyrgyzstan*, is about the 'ethnic' division of Kyrgyzstan's second-largest city as a consequence of violent conflict. She analyses how Kyrgyz and Uzbek inhabitants coped with the 'ethnic' violence that occurred in 1990 and 2010. Historically, Uzbeks had largely been city-dwellers, while the Kyrgyz lived as nomads; yet, the two groups were not always completely separate, as there were intermarriages, and to some extent 'ethnic' identity was a matter of economic specialisation. Soviet processes of modernisation, which focused especially on the development of cities, brought both groups closer together and separated them at the same time. Driven by Soviet urban planning, Kyrgyz moved into the city, often occupying 'modern' apartment buildings that replaced 'traditional' Uzbek neighbourhoods, while Uzbeks were

pushed towards the margins. Thus, land became contentious and was overtly ethnicised, especially in the post-Soviet period. Complex social relations were increasingly reduced to a Kyrgyz-Uzbek dichotomy, and especially the violence of 2010 triggered the further displacement of Uzbeks – often to neighbouring Uzbekistan – and consolidated the Kyrgyz domination of Osh. For Uzbeks, moving out of mixed neighbourhoods was a kind of survival strategy. Following a Kyrgyz real-estate agent, who took advantage of the Uzbeks' urge to sell their properties in order to move to safer areas, the chapter provides insights into the dynamics behind the spatial separation of Uzbek and Kyrgyz. Besides housing, segregation also affects businesses and even mosques. The city major's attempts to promote ethnically mixed 'friendship houses' could not stop the dynamics of segregation, and both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz felt compelled instead to take the side of their respective groups, in order to avoid further violence. Interestingly, however, these segregation dynamics did not affect all parts of Osh equally, and some neighbourhoods were able to prevent violence – and therefore segregation – by stressing a shared identity of "being from Osh" at the expense of ethnic particularism.

In his article, *Understanding Mobilisation Processes in Conflict through Framing: The Case of inter-communal Conflict in the Batken Province, Kyrgyzstan*, Khushbakht Hojiev analyses the dynamics of a local conflict between Tajiks and Kyrgyz in a village of southern Kyrgyzstan. What started as a brawl between a few young men threatened to escalate into a larger, violent fight in which the antagonists literally opposed one another in space. Nevertheless, efforts made by local elders at mediation, and later the arrival of security forces, prevented this escalation. Hojiev asks why this conflict was considered locally as an ethnic conflict, and he applies framing analysis, derived from social movement theory, to this case. Following Hartmut Esser, he defines framing as an inter-subjective process of definition, perception and identification of a conflict situation and argues that a focus on framing helps to bridge the 'instrumentalist-interpretivist' divide in conflict analysis and to emphasise an action and process-oriented perspective. Framing is an active and constitutive process that draws on broader cognitive models and public sentiments. Both Kyrgyz and Tajiks applied an ethnic frame to the incident in question, relating to the broader model of the titular nation, from the Kyrgyz perspective, and to the model of minority, from the Tajik point of view. Hojiev points out that especially three referencing mechanisms were significant in the process of framing:

the use of the symbolic dimension of violence, othering and alignment with the larger political discourse, especially the ethno-nationalist discourse at the national level of Kyrgyzstan. Here also reference to the violent conflict in Osh plays an important role, though framing is not necessarily uncontested. In this particular case, elders and representatives of the local authorities were able to reframe the incident successfully as an ordinary tussle between young men. Framing is a complex process, the analysis of which helps to improve understanding of conflict situations.

Taking a different methodological and theoretical approach, Jan Koehler asks about the role of social order and social institutions in relation to conflicts. In *Institution-Centred Conflict Research: A Methodological Approach and its Application in East Afghanistan*, drawing on classical contributions to conflict theory from Coser and Dahrendorf about the question whether conflict is disruptive or integrative in the first place, Koehler argues that the institutionalisation of unavoidable conflicts as a constitutive element of society fosters social cohesion. However, while other authors have drawn this conclusion for 'modern', industrialised and state-centred societies, he sets out to test this proposition for the rather volatile social setting in Afghanistan. Asking how conflicts are processed, what role institutions play in conflict and how conflict-processing impacts on social order, Koehler draws on material from a larger, comparative research process but focuses in this contribution on a case of land-grabbing in a district of the Nangarhar province of north-eastern Afghanistan. The dispute is about a piece of land that was owned by a clan but then claimed by a military commander. In the vicissitudes of Afghanistan's political situation, land ownership changed sides several time. The case involves different institutions, such as *jirgas* and formal land titles, and strategies, such as patronage and self-help. The development of the conflict shows that power and force are not enough to secure land: claims have to respect certain rules. Thus, the powerful commander also took steps to secure formal title to the land in question. Koehler reaches the conclusion that local conflict-processing institutions survive war and social fragmentation. The case indicates that violence is constrained even in situations of gross power difference, if in the long run the interests of the more powerful party require acceptance within the institutional context. However, procedures such as *jirgas* legitimate claims rather than contain violence, and so they are more an instrument of those in power than a means to limit and control such power.

Nick Miszak's chapter on *Land-based Conflict in Afghanistan: On the Right of Pre-emption (shuf'a) as 'back-channel' Diplomacy and a Show of Indignation* analyses another case of land conflict. Land is the most important object of dispute in the area, as it is a significant resource for people's social position and power. Furthermore, it is linked closely with the concept of *namus*, signifying properties that men have to defend in order to protect their honour. Land has become particularly conflictual in Afghanistan, as after the beginning of the US-led military intervention the country was literally flooded with international funds and many Afghan refugees returned home. In a case study, again from the province of Nagrahar in Eastern Afghanistan, Miszak focuses in particular on the role of the right of pre-emption (*shuf'a*) in land conflicts. The conflict in question relates to a piece of land close to the Torkham border crossing with Pakistan, the most important entry point for NATO supplies to Afghanistan, which is therefore of particular value for business. Rumours that a township would be constructed in this place further enhanced the value of the plot in question. In 2002, a group of people called *Pekhawal* started to construct shops on this plot overnight, knowing that eviction is difficult once labour and materials have been invested in a piece of land. The next day, a group of Mohmandara went to the location and tried to stop construction work, claiming that the Pekhawals' occupation was illegal. As neighbours of the plot, the Mohmandara claimed to be *shuf'adar*, which meant that they would reserve the right to benefit from the land to them. However, through the intervention of the police, only a kind of standstill between both parties could be achieved. In the changing constellations of power the Mohmandara did not pursue their case through the courts (neither of the groups had a formal title for the land) or a *jirga* but sought rather to influence the executive through roadblocks and other action, thereby arousing public interest by what Miszak calls 'back-channel diplomacy' – a series of meetings with different politicians who the Mohmandaras tried to convince of their own perspective. The Mohmandaras' campaign rested especially on their interpretation of the right of pre-emption, *shuf'a*, an important concept of Islamic property law. Nevertheless, the occupying Pekhawals also produced historical narratives, in order to establish their own right of pre-emption and to reject that of the Mohmandaras. Miszak details how narratives and counternarratives are constructed. Thus, both parties accept the general validity of *shuf'a* and the relation to the land becomes the source of the legitimacy of claims. Although after more than ten years the conflict is still not solved,

Miszak argues that, in spite of all narratives to the contrary, Afghanistan is by no means simply a country where violence and lawlessness reign supreme. Corroborating Jan Koehler's findings, Miszak concludes that while a threat to use force is often present in conflicts, force does not overrule legitimacy, and it is legitimacy in the first place that people attempt to construct for their claims.

Katja Mielke's chapter, *Not in in the Master Plan: Dimensions of Exclusion in Kabul*, takes a different approach. Instead of focusing on a particular conflict, she analyses a conflictual field, namely urban infrastructural development in District 13 on the outskirts of Afghanistan's capital city. "D13" is a rapidly urbanising district, mostly populated by Hazaras, which has been largely ignored by Kabul's infrastructural development. The Hazara inhabitants transfer their identity as a discriminated-against minority in Afghanistan onto the urban district. For them, their state of being disadvantaged and marginalised is epitomised in the fact that D13 has not been included in Kabul's master plan, which in turn is regarded as the reason why the municipality shows little interest in the district's development. The Hazaras' perception of exclusion has been exacerbated by rapid construction of a township of Kuchis in D13 which is well-serviced and supported by international donor agencies. Mielke considers D13 as a 'core figuration' which is part of larger figurations at the scale of the city and beyond. Asking how residents and representatives struggle regarding access to services and resources, she analyses the positionalities and relationships of actors that hinder or enable such access vis-à-vis the at-best disinterested municipality. In particular, she discusses the successful work of a rather young neighbourhood head (*wakil-e guzar*), who has been able to secure a number of projects for his area. Mielke shows that this *wakil-e guzar* is well-connected beyond D13 and can draw on national and even international support. Following Elias she argues that power imbalances cannot be reduced to ethnic differences, and she concludes that dynamics within D13 cannot be understood in an isolated manner: processes in the core figuration do not make sense if the wider figurational context – the social, spatial and temporal interdependencies in which the core figuration is imbedded – is ignored.

With Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra's chapter, *Negotiating Space in the Conflict Zone of Kashmir: The Borderlanders' Perspective*, we enter into a pervasive long-term conflict, namely the Kashmir dispute. Deploring the fact that the discourse on Kashmir centres on security issues and the

state-perspectives of India and Pakistan, Mahapatra turns to the people who live(d) in the immediate vicinity on the Line of Control (LoC) between Indian- and Pakistan-controlled parts of the erstwhile princely state and who are immediately affected by violence, division and insecurity. These 'borderlanders' are not part of the mainstream discourse on Kashmir. Mahapatra argues that the border in Kashmir needs to be problematised and that the perspective of the borderlanders is crucial to this end. The article focuses on borderlanders on the Indian side of the LoC and is based on fieldwork that took place both at the border and in a number of refugee camps. Drawing on Martinez, Mahapatra analyses the border zone of Kashmir as an 'alienated borderland' characterised by most unfavourable conditions for those who live on the border. Based mostly on interviews, he describes the conditions of the borderlanders, focusing especially on the experiences of war, including the fortification of the LoC, as well as (multiple) displacement and life in the camps. In conclusion he points out that Kashmir's borders contradict much of the current border discourse, which focuses much more on the permeability and flexibility of borders than on their divisiveness and rigidity.

Through Emma Varley's chapter *Exclusionary Infrastructures: Crisis and the Rise of Sectarian Hospitals in Northern Pakistan*, we re-enter Gilgit. Varley analyses the effects of Shia-Sunni sectarianism on Gilgit's healthcare system, pointing out how healthcare itself has been sectarianised. She discusses especially events that were the consequence of the assassination of the Shia Imam Syed Zia-ud-din Rizvi in January 2005 and the subsequent retaliatory violence of Shias against Sunnis in the town. This violence also targeted Sunni doctors and patients at Gilgit's District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ), situated in a Shia majority neighbourhood. Although the DHQ theoretically offered its services to all people in Gilgit, Sunnis considered it an insecure place and were practically excluded. Thus, while public healthcare in Gilgit was originally insufficient anyway, access became even worse for Sunnis. Nevertheless, Shia patients also suffered because Sunni medical personnel often refused to work at the DHQ for lack of security. In order to overcome the lack of healthcare for Sunnis, a separate hospital was established in 2005 – on a private initiative – in the Sunni neighbourhood of Kashrote. This Kashrote hospital was subsequently extended and received government funding, yet essential facilities for diagnostics and treatment were lacking. Thus, the medical infrastructure of Gilgit became highly sectarianised, whereby the hospital sites became

strictly associated with one or the other sect. Varley argues that the development of sect-specific medical infrastructure strongly affects everyday life in the town, thus exacerbating insecurity and contributing further to the lack of efficient medical services. This is particularly so after (or rather between) acute periods of tension, and therefore she calls the usual distinction between conflict and post-conflict states into question. The sectarianisation of healthcare demonstrates the state's inability to provide public security, and instead of being neutral sites of service, the hospitals serve as 'sites for identity formation and the emergence of novel forms of sectarian sociality', as Varley concludes.

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