



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

**Max Planck Institute
for Social Anthropology**

Report 2017–2019

**Emmy Noether
Research Group
‘Peripheral Debt’**

**Max Planck
Research Group
‘Alpine Histories
of Global Change’**

**Max Planck
Research Group
‘How ‘Terrorists’ Learn’**



Imprint

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Report 2017–2019

Emmy Noether Research Group

‘Peripheral Debt: Money, Risk and Politics in Eastern Europe’

Marek Mikuš

Max Planck Research Group ‘Alpine Histories of Global Change:
Time, Self and the Other in the German-Speaking Alpine Region’

edited by Annika Lems

Max Planck Research Group ‘How ‘Terrorists’ Learn – Re-considering the
tactical and strategic transformation of violent movements and organisations’

edited by Carolin Görzig

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Structure and Organization of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology 2017–2019

Because questions concerning the equivalence of academic titles that are conferred by institutions of higher learning in different countries have still not been resolved completely, all academic titles have been omitted from this report.

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Introduction

This joint report outlines the work of three independent research groups based at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. Two funding schemes allowed the group leaders to assemble a team of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to work on freely chosen topics of great scientific and societal relevance. The research project led by Marek Mikuš, “Peripheral Debt: Money, Risk and Politics in Eastern Europe”, is funded by the Emmy Noether Programme of the German Research Foundation (DFG). The scheme supports junior scholars in all disciplines in leading their first independent research group and qualifying for a professorship. Mikuš is the second holder of this grant at the Institute, preceded by Dominik Müller, whose Emmy Noether group “The Bureaucratization of Islam and its Socio-Legal Dimensions in Southeast Asia” was hosted by the Institute from 2016 to 2019. The other two research groups fall into the scheme of the Independent Max Planck Research Groups funded by the Max Planck Society. They were selected through an annual competition of the Max Planck Society to identify and foster innovative research ideas and enhance the careers of promising emerging scholars from across the globe. The Max Planck Research Groups enjoy an independent status within their host institutions, meaning that the research group leaders have full autonomy regarding appointment of team members, allocation of funding, and research design. “Alpine Histories of Global Change” was established in April 2019 by Annika Lems and “How ‘Terrorists’ Learn” has been led by Carolin Görzig since its establishment in 2015.

Marek Mikuš previously worked at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology as a member of the Research Group “Financialization” co-directed by Chris Hann and Don Kalb from 2015 to 2019. His research focused on experiences and struggles with household debt in Croatia in the aftermath of the lending boom in the 2000s. This led him to propose a group research project that expands the focus on household debt to four postsocialist Eastern European countries: Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland. Household debt has been rapidly expanding in all these countries in recent years, and this has often taken the form of high-risk and predatory loans in the context of distinctly peripheral patterns of financialization. However, there has been relatively little research in anthropology and other disciplines on the impact of this process on debtors and society at large. “Peripheral Debt” combines ethnographic and historical anthropological approaches in order to understand the social relations of household debt in Eastern Europe in their complexity, including the practices of debtors and lenders, the politics of new debtor movements, and government reforms seeking to manage debt.

Annika Lems’s idea to establish the research group “Alpine Histories of Global Change” was propelled by the seismic shifts in established socio-political terrains around the world since 2015. The group focuses on one of the most pressing issues of contemporary Europe, namely the increasing spread of exclusionary and anti-cosmopolitan attitudes, and looks at the role that local, everyday notions of history

play in this process. Moving beyond the focus on party structures and discourses that characterizes current research on right-wing mobilization, the group turns to the everyday lives of people in rural villages in the German-speaking Alps – communities that are both located at the crossroads of the European project and characterized by long histories of support for exclusionary political ideas. Taking this contested socio-temporal positioning as a starting point, the team addresses potentially dark ideas of history that are often swept under the carpet but, however, have the power to politically mobilize communities. As an institution that has produced some of Europe's most exciting ethnographic research, the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle was Lems' first choice for hosting this undertaking. "Alpine Histories" complements ongoing projects at the Institute, in particular the research initiative "The Challenges of Migration, Integration and Exclusion", which is co-led by Marie-Claire Foblets, Director of the Department 'Law & Anthropology'. It is also in close dialogue with Director Chris Hann and benefits from his longstanding expertise in historical and political anthropology and village ethnography.

With her independent Max Planck Research Group "How 'Terrorists' Learn", Carolin Görzig seeks to contextualise the cognitive and behavioural learning of terrorist groups by examining influences and motivations for change. Terrorists do not operate in a vacuum, and their learning processes are shaped by both group-internal and group-external processes. Internally, terrorist groups learn from their own past failures and successes. In connection with this, the Research Group examines complex organizational processes such as follower-leader dynamics, internal communications, recruitment, and mobilization. Externally, terrorist groups learn through processes of competition with and emulation of both friends and foes. These include, for example, other terrorist organizations: groups which are geographically and ideologically far apart can nevertheless learn a lot from each other. The environment in which terrorist groups move is moreover shaped decisively by their interaction with the state, which frequently takes the form of patterns of violent action and reaction. The Research Group led by Carolin Görzig aims to open up the black box of the terrorist organization and really look at what happens in their inner life and at the same time understand the context in which they move. She and her team have critically engaged with their research subject by means of field research in Spain, Niger, Northern Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Palestine. In addition to the collection of first-hand testimonies and self-reflections of members of terrorist groups, her team also analyses documents and quantitative data. Looking not only at tactical learning but also at the transformation of strategies of terrorist groups, Görzig's team also addresses matters of identity change and thereby builds on insights of the Department 'Integration and Conflict' directed by Günther Schlee at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology from 1999 until 2019. The Research Group "How 'Terrorists' Learn" was initially funded for 5 years from 2016 until 2020 and was granted an extension from the Max Planck Society until 2022. This time will be used to build on the Research Group's findings on ethno-separatist, Islamist, leftist, and right-wing

terrorist groups in the form of comparative analysis. They will also collaborate and share expertise with the researchers of the Department 'Law & Anthropology', for example in the context of their work on migration and integration.

The three research groups not only share a similar status as independent research groups, but also have a lot in common regarding their research approaches and overlaps in their thematic foci. In order to make sense of the complexities of the social realities they investigate, all three research group leaders approach their project in an interdisciplinary manner. While Mikuš draws on relevant scholarship in economics, sociology, and geography as well as anthropology to understand the social relations of household debt in Eastern Europe, Lems deploys in-depth village ethnographies and visual research tools to analyse processes of political micro-mobilization, and Görzig seeks to make sense of learning processes by combining insights from political science and sociology with in-depth field research. Another common element of all three groups is their engagement with pressing issues for science and society. Financial debt, right-wing mobilization, and the learning patterns of terrorist groups all propel social processes that have the power to dramatically shape people's everyday lives around the world. With their projects the three research group leaders hope to find ways to understand these challenges and contribute to tackling them.

Emmy Noether Research Group

**Peripheral Debt:
Money, Risk and Politics in Eastern Europe**

Marek Mikuš

Emmy Noether Research Group
“Peripheral Debt: Money, Risk and Politics in Eastern Europe”

Marek Mikuš

Introduction

The Emmy Noether Research Group “Peripheral Debt: Money, Risk and Politics in Eastern Europe” began its work in October 2019; the 2017–2019 reporting cycle therefore covers only its earliest stages with the Head of Research Group Marek Mikuš as the only team member. At the time of writing of this report in spring 2020, applications for the two PhD positions starting in the fall are being evaluated in accordance with the original work programme, although under the challenging conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic that has also necessitated postponing planned fieldwork for this project to an uncertain future date. Accordingly, this report does not take the form of a classical report and presents, besides an overview of activities in fall 2019, the scholarly and empirical background, objectives, and work programme of the Research Group project as well as already-completed research on which it builds.

The main research objective of “Peripheral Debt” is to produce the first comparative anthropological study of household debt in Eastern Europe with a significant interdisciplinary dimension. Team members will use ethnography to investigate and develop rich accounts of household indebtedness as a set of social relations, documenting the practices of borrowers, lenders, activists, and other actors in four postsocialist countries – Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Drawing on a historical anthropological approach and relevant insights from economics, sociology, and geography, they will further seek to understand these micro-level experiences in the context of larger-scale transformations, most immediately the unprecedented expansion of household debt in and beyond the region. Burgeoning interdisciplinary scholarship theorizes the worldwide growth of debt in recent decades as part of financialization – a transformation of contemporary capitalist societies driven by the increasing scope, power and complexity of finance. Financialization took distinctly peripheral forms in Eastern Europe which were connected with elevated costs and risks for debtors. Despite their social importance and relevance for an understanding of financialization, these processes have been so far the subject of relatively little research in anthropology and other disciplines. Beyond filling this important empirical gap in scholarship, “Peripheral Debt” analyses Eastern European experiences with household debt with the aim of addressing three sets of underdeveloped theoretical issues in anthropological and other social scientific studies on the subject: the role of various money forms and monetary practices in household borrowing and lending; the relationships between household debt and risk; and the full scope and relevance of the contemporary politics of household debt.

“Peripheral Debt” is funded by a grant in the framework of the Emmy Noether Programme of the German Research Foundation (DFG). The programme supports early-career researchers in all disciplines in establishing their first independent junior research groups, typically for a period of six years, and working towards qualifying for a post of university professor in Germany. “Peripheral Debt” is the second Emmy Noether group at the Institute and Marek Mikuš’s successful bid for funding benefitted from the accumulated institutional knowledge and the experiences of Dominik Müller, head of our first Emmy Noether Group “The Bureaucratization of Islam and its Socio-Legal Dimensions in Southeast Asia” (2016–2019). The project builds on and maintains a continuity of earlier research at the Institute, in particular the Research Group “Financialization” led by Chris Hann and Don Kalb (2015–2019) and, more generally, work on the economic and social anthropology of Eurasia, which has been one of the defining foci of the Institute since its inception.

Household Debt and Financialization in and beyond Anthropology

Since the 1980s, debts of households have grown rapidly around the world in response to stagnating real wages, financial deregulation, changing business strategies of banks, and other factors. Scholars in various disciplines analysed this trend as part and parcel of a wider process of financialization, which has been comprehensively defined as an “increasing dominance of financial actors, markets, practices, measurements, and narratives, at various scales, resulting in a structural transformation of economies, firms (including financial institutions), states, and households”.¹ Deepening indebtedness is a key mechanism that extends the reach of financialization into the intimate and domestic sphere and enables financial actors to extract value from a widening population of debtors in the form of interest and fees. It also exposes households and individuals to various risks and, through repayment schedules, credit scoring and risk-based pricing, subjects them to financial calculation and self-discipline, thus financializing the very processes of social reproduction that take place in households. At the same time, overindebtedness, defaults, and debt collection practices have become subjects of intense public debates and targets of challenges from social movements and political parties.

Household debt has emerged as one of two key lenses through which anthropologists observed finance and financialization ethnographically, the other being the “commanding heights” of finance such as stock exchanges and central banks.² A recent wave of ethnographies has thus documented practices and strategies of debtors and

¹ Aalbers, M.B. 2017. Corporate financialization. In: D. Richardson, N. Castree, M.F. Goodchild, A. Kobayashi, W. Liu, and R.A. Marston (eds.) *The international encyclopedia of geography: people, the earth, environment, and technology*. Oxford: Wiley, p. 3.

² Weiss, H. 2020. The anthropological study of financialization. In: P. Mader, D. Mertens, and N. van der Zwan (eds.) *The Routledge international handbook of financialization*. London: Routledge, pp. 92–101.

lenders, the repercussions of debt for families and communities, and the debates and struggles over debt in a wide range of contexts. Much of this literature built on the traditional disciplinary concern with the morality of credit and debt, which can be traced especially to the classic work of Marcel Mauss.³ However, an excessive focus on the themes of morality and reciprocity can result in an impoverished understanding of contemporary household debt.⁴ David Graeber's monograph *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*,⁵ the most visible of the recent anthropological contributions on the subject, is essentially a macro-history of the moralities of debt, money, and the economy with little analysis of contemporary household debt. Graeber sees debt essentially as a monolithic and transhistorical social relation that has evolved into a key technology of domination owing to the hegemonic morality of debt and generalized mathematic commensuration enabled by money. This kind of approach, however, does not sufficiently appreciate the economy, or more appropriately the political economy of contemporary debt in its full complexity.

To bring the political economy of debt back into focus, "Peripheral Debt" will closely study the nitty-gritty of contemporary household indebtedness as a set of diverse social relationships and practices of financial value extraction, transfer, and conversion that connect households, banks, and entire chains of other financial actors. The project further historicizes individual and community experiences of debt by situating them in their time and place. This implies a need to correct the relative neglect of the postsocialist Eastern European experiences with household debt by anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists, which has left research on the subject under the domination of econometrics and financial economics. It deserves more attention in its own right as well as offering a case for thinking through some theoretical issues in anthropological scholarship, to which I return after a brief description of the historical and geographical context of this research project.

Booming Debt and Peripheral Financialization in Eastern Europe

The period from the beginning of the new millennium to the 2007–2008 global financial crisis saw substantial expansion of household debt around the world, but especially in Eastern Europe, where debt had previously been at very low levels as a legacy of the tight regulation of consumer finance under socialism. Between 2000 and 2006, loans to households grew on average 24 per cent a year in Poland, 27 in Croatia, and 46 in Hungary.⁶ The growth of debt came about as part of the processes of postsocialist privatization and marketization, which included a near-total privati-

³ Peebles, G. 2010. The anthropology of credit and debt. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 225–240.

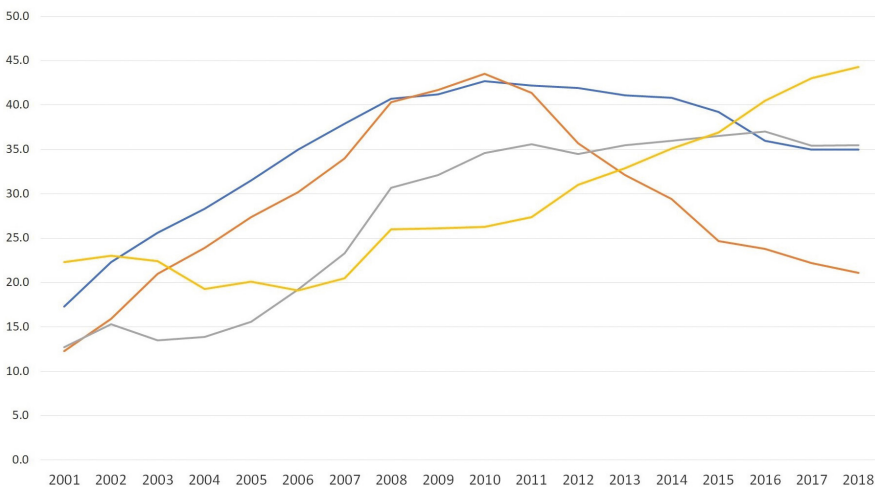
⁴ For a similar argument, see: Mattioli, F. 2019. Debt, financialisation and politics. In: J. Carrier (ed.). *A research agenda for economic anthropology*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 56–73.

⁵ Graeber, D. 2011. *Debt: the first 5,000 years*. New York: Melville House.

⁶ Égert, B., and D. Mihaljek. 2007. *Determinants of housing prices in central and eastern Europe*. BIS Working Paper 236, p. 6.

zation of banking sectors by Western European groups. Most of the new debt had the form of mortgage loans as a result of a lack of public and private alternatives to home ownership. Debt booms fuelled housing booms that made housing ever more unaffordable: in the period 2002–2006 house prices increased by an average of 12 per cent per year in Hungary and 9 per cent in Croatia.⁷ These booms came to an abrupt end in most of Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the global financial crisis as crediting stalled and house prices plummeted, leaving many debtors with “underwater” mortgages (i.e. mortgages with higher principal than the market price of the home). However, the sample of countries to be studied by this Research Group also captures the diversity of trajectories in the region: a deep drop in household debt in Hungary; a more moderate decline in Hungary; stagnation/moderate growth in Poland; and the unique trajectory of Slovakia with a debt boom not before but *after* the global financial crisis, at which time it was the biggest increase in household debt in the EU.

Household debt as a share of GDP (%), 2001–2018



Household debt as a share of GDP in Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, 2001–2018.

Data source: Eurostat.

In addition to volatility, household lending in postsocialist Eastern Europe has been characterized by of high-cost and high-risk forms of credit. To begin with, foreign-currency (FX) loans became much more common in the region than in Western Europe, including in Croatia, Hungary, and Poland. FX loans are to be repaid in national currency, while the value of the principal is expressed in foreign currency.

⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

Since debtors typically received their income in national currency, this exposed them to exchange-rate hikes. Swiss franc (CHF) loans to households, most common in Croatia, Hungary, and Poland, proved particularly problematic as the CHF appreciated sharply against Eastern European currencies after the global financial crisis. Furthermore, household loans usually came with adjustable interest rates, which exposed debtors to interest-rate risk as well. Interest rates were significantly higher than in the rest of Europe, which continues to be the case in those countries that did not adopt the euro. Another problem was unregulated, often predatory subprime lending by non-bank lenders.⁸ All these activities led to an increase in defaults on household loans and debt-enforcement proceedings in legal systems that tend to privilege creditors and provide insufficient protections for debtors. New and existing social movements and political parties responded by contesting these practices while governments rolled out policies to manage the consequences of the debt boom.

Political economists have analysed household debt booms in Eastern Europe as features of a distinctly *peripheral* financialization in the region.⁹ The attribute “peripheral” in the title of this Research Group project refers to this concept as well as more generally to an interest in the ways in which core–periphery relations may refract household indebtedness. Financialization in Eastern Europe differs from financialization in core countries in its dependence on foreign capital inflows orchestrated by Western European banking groups that came to dominate local banking sectors. Central bank policies of high interest rates and rigid exchange rates created an optimum environment for “carry trade” – profit-making on cross-border interest-rate differentials. Western-owned banks conducted carry trade by borrowing from their parent banks or interbank money markets and lending at higher rates in the East. In addition, they introduced FX loans as a form of lending that conveniently transferred exchange-rate risk to debtors. Such practices enabled financial actors originating in the core to extract resources from households in Eastern European peripheries in particularly intensive ways.

Preliminary Work and Issues in the Anthropology of Debt: Money, Risk, and Politics

“Peripheral Debt” builds on Marek Mikuš’s earlier study “Household Debt in Post–Credit Boom Croatia” (2015–2018), which he undertook as a member of the “Financialization” Research Group co-directed by Chris Hann and Don Kalb. This project led Mikuš to propose “Peripheral Debt” as a comparative study that scales up this research topic to include a sample of Eastern European countries with partly

⁸ Burton, D. 2017. Credit inclusion and the home credit market in post-communist member states of the European Union. *Critical Social Policy* 37(3): 444–463.

⁹ Becker, J., J. Jäger, B. Leubolt, and R. Weissenbacher. 2010. Peripheral financialization and vulnerability to crisis: a regulationist perspective. *Competition & Change* 14(3–4): 225–247.

shared, partly divergent experiences of recent household debt booms. The preliminary analysis of the Croatian case also resulted in identification of three theoretical areas in the anthropology of credit and debt, money, and finance that could be illuminated by the distinct Eastern European experiences with household debt.

The first of these areas is what has so far been an inadequate analysis of the role of money in household debt. Anthropologists of debt and finance rarely engage with theories of money, despite their obvious relevance. Recent anthropology of money, for its part, privileges the empirical study of the materiality, pragmatics, and symbolism of money, mostly in its historical, exotic, and cutting-edge forms rather than its mundane incarnations in financializing capitalism. The concept of money in this literature remains largely theoretical and its nature is largely taken for granted. Alternatively, some anthropologists and sociologists, including David Graeber, have revitalized state and credit theories of money but have not elaborated the implications of these approaches for the study of contemporary household debt. Politically, they seem to assume that popularizing the “true” nature of money as expressed by these theories – as abstract units of account devised by states – will make the hegemonic morality of debt lose its power over the masses. However, these theories offer little in terms of instruments for analysing the ways in which actors of contemporary household debt relations understand and manipulate money. In an already published paper, Mikuš developed the Marxist notion of the fetishism of money to analyse Eastern European lending practices such as FX loans as financialized accumulation strategies that capture profit-making opportunities based on conversion between two basic forms of money fetishism: money as capital traded in globalized financial markets and money as means of payment lent in localized and segmented retail credit markets.¹⁰ This is an example of how “Peripheral Debt” will investigate and theorize the roles of money as a special kind of commodity embedded in unequal social and geographic relations.

Second, the focus on Eastern European household debt invites a novel engagement with the issue of risk, which has been so far marginal in the anthropology of debt. Anthropologists have instead studied the ways in which elite professionals in financial markets construct and act on risk, for example, by developing risk-management tools. This research project is interested in the pragmatics of risk in the context of debt relations. A feature specific to Eastern European household lending has been the “mainstreaming of predatory lending”: the marketing of high-cost and high-risk forms of credit to subprime and prime borrowers alike.¹¹ Regulation of consumer lending has been insufficient and lenders have been keen to test the boundaries, while debtors lacked experiences that would prepare them for the risks of new credit products. What is more, debt was booming while risk-management

¹⁰ Mikuš, M. 2019. Contesting household debt in Croatia: the double movement of financialization and the fetishism of money in Eastern European peripheries. *Dialectical Anthropology* 43 (3): 295–315.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 297, 307–308.

devices such as credit registries and infrastructures such as land registries were still at the early stages of being developed. Governments and the EU responded by reforms intended to improve such technologies and limit risk in household lending. While the macro effects of the delegation of risk to households and its subsequent re-regulation can, to some extent, be read from statistics, little is known about the unfolding of these processes at the micro and meso scales and the changing ways in which Eastern European debtors, creditors, and regulators interpret and act upon risks associated with household credit.



Eviction obstruction in Zagreb, Croatia, 2017. (Photo © Živi zid)

The final theoretical issue in the anthropology of debt concerns the uneven treatment of the politics of debt. Influential authors such as Graeber have emphasized the nature of debt as a relationship of domination underpinned by hegemonic moralities and forms of subjectification, from which followed an analytical and political focus on the ideologies of debt and their deconstruction. Anthropologists have studied highly visible anti-debt movements in the USA and Spain and stressed their radical strategies, such as debt strikes, occupations, and calls for debt cancellation, and their progressive and/or leftist politics. However, this scholarship has overlooked relevant Eastern European experiences that complicate this established analysis of debt politics. For example, some Croatian debtor movements relied on reformist and institutional frameworks, such as legal activism and party politics, while others

mobilized right-wing narratives and alliances.¹² In Hungary, both activists and the government of Viktor Orbán framed the issues with FX loans in nationalist terms. While they do not do so in radical and/or progressive ways, such politics respond to the dominance of foreign actors and predatory practices in Eastern European household lending. In addition, debt collection practices, which so far are barely visible in the anthropology of debt, emerged as a significant issue in Croatia, Slovakia, and possibly other countries.¹³ “Peripheral Debt” will therefore seek to broaden and deepen the anthropological enquiry into debt politics in several ways: it will study all forms of contestation; it will go beyond the focus on ideologies to map strategies, constituencies etc.; and it will attend to both contestations and public and private policies seeking to manage debt, such as financial education or personal bankruptcy proceedings, in the context of broader political shifts underway in contemporary Eastern Europe, such as the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism and the crumbling of the postsocialist liberal hegemony.

Objectives and Work Plan

The overarching question of “Peripheral Debt” is how various actors – debtors, creditors, regulators, activists and so forth – relate to and act upon household debt in the four studied countries and at the EU level. The question is deliberately broad in order to capture the entire range of debt relationships, actors, and practices, the ways in which they intersect, and the processes of their reproduction and transformation. It can be disaggregated into the following three more specific questions:

1. How do households and individuals use and cope with debt? This includes debtors’ motivations for getting indebted, their debt-based projects, and coping practices such as cutting consumption, “juggling” multiple lines of credit, declaring bankruptcy, etc.
2. How do individuals and groups contest household debt relations and practices? This includes all forms of activism, litigation, party politics, etc.
3. How do governments, financial regulators, the EU, lenders, courts, international organizations, and NGOs seek to govern debt and the problems that it produces? This includes financial education, regulation of household lending and debt enforcement, personal bankruptcy proceedings, etc.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mikuš, M. In press. Making debt work: devising and debating debt collection in Croatia. In: C. Hann and D. Kalb (eds.). *Financialisation beyond crisis: connections, contradictions, contestations*. New York: Berghahn, pp. 241–265.

By addressing these questions, “Peripheral Debt” aims to meet the following four objectives:

1. To produce three book-length accounts of household debt in the four Eastern European countries as well as a number of journal articles and book chapters;
2. To systematically compare the project case studies and other relevant case studies;
3. To explore the implications of Eastern European household debt for anthropological scholarship on credit and debt, money, and finance, and less directly also for the literature on the state, social movements, hegemony, and governmentality;
4. To produce five open-access reports for policy-makers, activists, experts, and the general public in order to contribute to an informed and critical public debate on consumer finance.

The project is based on four case studies to be developed by two PhD students and the Head of Research Group in Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, mainly in the capital cities, which tend to have highest levels of indebtedness and which are also the seats of relevant state agencies, the headquarters of private banks, and the foci of debtors’ movements. These cities are socially heterogeneous, inhabited by different categories of debtors, and host to many housing development projects that offer opportunities for studying the effects of housing financialization on the built environment. In terms of methodology, researchers will combine (participant) observation, interviewing, surveying, and analysis of a wide range of secondary sources.

Project Activities October – December 2019

- “*Peripheral Debt: Money, Risk, and Politics in Eastern Europe*”, talk by Marek Mikuš, Werkstatt Ethnologie/Anthropological Workshop Lecture Series, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, 12 November 2019
- “*From Boom to Bust to ... ? Household Indebtedness in Croatia, ca. 1999–2019*”, presentation by Marek Mikuš, Workshop “Household Debt on the Peripheries of Europe: New Constellations since 2008”, Budapest, 22–23 November 2019
- “*Peripheral Debt: Money, Risk, and Politics in Eastern Europe*”, presentation by Marek Mikuš, 3rd International Scientific Conference Financialization and Society, University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, 6–7 December 2019

Publications

Since the Research Group only began its activities in October 2019, it has not yet produced any published work. However, a number of relevant publications produced as part of my activities in the Research Group “Financialization” are listed in the report for the Department ‘Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia’, and a complete list of my publications on financialization and other topics is available on my personal profile on the Institute website.

Max Planck Research Group

**‘Alpine Histories of Global Change:
Time, Self and the Other in the
German-Speaking Alpine Region’**

edited by Annika Lems

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Understanding the Everyday Meaning-Making Processes Underlying Europe’s Reactionary Backlash

Annika Lems

This report sketches the conceptual and empirical contours of the newly established independent Max Planck Research Group “Alpine Histories of Global Change: Time, Self and the Other in the German-Speaking Alpine Region”. My motivation to respond to the Max Planck Society’s call for research group leaders and build up a team of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers was driven by an interest in making sense of the increased importance of questions of belonging, attachment to place, and alienation at the crossroads of Europe. My Research Group does so by paying attention to the role of local, everyday engagements with history in rural, “forgotten” places that are frequently denounced as being backward, traditionalist, and “stuck in the past”. Taking this contested socio-temporal positioning as a starting point, we address potentially dark ideas of history that, although often swept under the carpet, have the power to politically mobilize communities. By looking at mountain communities in the German-speaking Alpine region that are characterized by long histories of global interconnection on the one hand, and support for reactionary political movements on the other, and studying the ways the inhabitants of these communities experience, narrate, perform, struggle over, and live with the past, we attempt to shed light on the role of local, everyday histories in an era of accelerated change and insecurity.

Understanding the role of temporality and place in the production of anti-cosmopolitan sentiments is of particular importance in the current political climate in Europe, where a growing number of people are turning their backs on liberal democratic values such as inclusion and progress – often in favour of alternative, intensely exclusionary readings of the past and belonging to place. Commentators have been quick to point fingers at residents of periphery towns, whose nostalgic longing for a heroic past is seen as distorting their ability to live in a modern, cosmopolitan, and globalized here and now. Yet, while the question of global fragmentation is ever more pressing, little credence is given to the people living in such towns and villages and how they experience and make sense of global and historical transformations. What propels individuals and groups living in rural places to call upon idealized, exclusionary versions of history? How are relationships between proximity and distance, Self and Other negotiated in such everyday engagements with the past? And what do local, exclusionary readings of history have to say about the anxieties of living in a globalized, “overheated”¹ present?

¹ Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2016. *Overheating: an anthropology of accelerated change*. London: Pluto.

The Research Group explores these questions by turning the production of exclusionary everyday histories in rural places into explicit objects of inquiry. Based on in-depth village ethnographies in the Austrian state of Carinthia, the municipality Berchtesgaden in Bavaria, Kastelruth in South Tyrol, and the Bernese Oberland in Switzerland, the Research Group aims to provide crucial insights into the hitherto understudied lifeworlds of ordinary people who support reactionary ideas on the ground.

By comparing local cultural practices in Alpine regions that are frequently described as heartlands of the European right but are characterized by very different historical, political, and economic positionings within Europe and the broader world, we aim to understand the socio-cultural dynamics propelling exclusionary engagements with the past and belonging to place. Focusing on the production of history through in-depth participant observation in amateur historical clubs, in heritage organizations (*Traditionsvereine*) and at commemorative events as well as in village life more generally, we investigate the political and experiential ways by which the communities negotiate their placement in time. Juxtaposing these shared/communal histories with individual life histories as well as with historical accounts about the regions, we will explore the ways official, collective, and personal histories form and transform each other.

In paying attention to the seemingly mundane, intangible moments when exclusionary narrative and practice gets caught up with day-to-day interactions and woven into the texture of social life, the Research Group aims to move the study of the European right into areas that have so far been little explored. By shedding light on the vernacular cultural practices driving political mobilization on the ground, I hope that my Research Group contributes to filling an important research gap at a moment of critical importance.

This report provides an overview of the conceptual, empirical, and methodological framework the Research Group has established during its first eight months of operation. In the first part of the report I establish our research questions, locate our work within broader intellectual landscapes, and shed light on the epistemological and methodological ideas that will guide us as we start fieldwork. While I will periodically refer to my ongoing fieldwork in Austria, the second part of the report will showcase some of the empirical foundations of the Research Group. By elaborating some of the core questions group members Antje Berger and Christine Moderbacher have developed in relation to their research in South Tyrol and Bavaria, we aim to empirically flesh out some of the theoretical, socio-political and epistemological conundrums the Research Group addresses.



Flock of deer captured on a surveillance camera. (Film still: Christine Moderbacher, 2019)

Composition of the Research Group

The Research Group officially started work in April 2019. It is headed by Annika Lems, who conducts research in the Austrian state of Carinthia. In June 2019, two researchers joined the group: postdoctoral researcher and visual anthropologist Christine Moderbacher, who conducts ethnographic research in South Tyrol, and doctoral student Antje Berger, whose dissertation research focuses on the Berchtesgaden area of Bavaria. At a later stage two more postdoctoral researchers will join the group: Danae Leitenberger, who will contribute her ethnographic expertise on exclusionary social processes in the Berner Oberland in Switzerland, and Paul Reade, a filmmaker and anthropologist who will assist the group in establishing visual research tools. Given the politically charged content of our research, we believe that it is crucial that the knowledge we produce does not remain confined to academic channels of debate. By fostering creative forms of collaboration, we hope to also establish a dialogue with wider society, including the communities we work with.

From Political Structures to Everyday Processes of Micro-mobilization

Annika Lems

Europe is experiencing a period of dramatic social and political change. Financial and immigration crises combined with the intensification of social inequality have caused discontent to grow to such an extent that political leaders speak of an “existential crisis”² or express fear of Europe returning to its “dark past”.³ Leading intellectuals argue that we are entering an age of regression⁴ or anger.⁵ The Brexit referendum in the UK set in motion an avalanche of events that revealed how many people living in liberal democracies yearn for a return to an idealized, imperial past – a past they believe holds a stronger sense of community and social cohesion.⁶ Reactionary anti-immigration and neo-nationalist sentiments are spreading like wildfire throughout the world – particularly in peripheral, “forgotten” places that form the backwaters of globalized, capitalist societies.⁷ Commentators have been quick to denounce the small towns and villages forming the support base of right-wing parties as backward, traditionalist, and stuck in time, speaking of a “revenge of the countryside”.⁸ Yet not much is known about the local, vernacular versions of the past circulating in these places and what they have to say about the ways people experience and make sense of accelerated global change in the everyday.

² Rankin, Jennifer. 2016. EU is facing existential crisis, says Jean-Claude Juncker. *The Guardian*, 13 September 2016, retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/13/jean-claude-juncker-eu-is-facing-existential-crisis>. Accessed 27 April 2020.

³ Chan, Sewell. 2016. A future haunted by ghosts of the past. Commentary in the *New York Times*, 22 September 2016, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/23/world/europe/a-future-haunted-by-ghosts-of-the-past.html?_r=0. Accessed 27 April 2020.

⁴ Nachtwey, Oliver. 2016. *Die Abstiegsgesellschaft: über das Aufbegehren in der regressiven Moderne*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp; Geiselberger, Heinrich (ed.). 2017. *The great regression*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press.

⁵ Mishra, Pankaj. 2017. *Age of anger: a history of the present*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

⁶ Thorleifsson, Cathrine. 2016. From coal to Ukup: the struggle over identity in post-industrial Doncaster. *History and Anthropology* 27(5): 555–568.

⁷ Cramer, Katherine. 2016. *The politics of resentment: rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American Right*. New York: New Press; Feischmidt, Margit, and Kristóf Szombati. 2017. Understanding the rise of the Far Right from a local perspective: structural and cultural conditions of ethno-traditionalist inclusion and racial exclusion in rural Hungary. *Identities* 24(3): 313–331.

⁸ De Gruyter, Caroline. 2016. The revenge of the countryside. Commentary article on the website of the think-tank European Council on Foreign Relations, 21 October 2016, retrieved from: http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_revenge_of_the_countryside7156. Accessed 27 April 2020.

Throughout the past two decades there has been a wealth of research across different disciplines on right-wing party structures, strategies, and leadership,⁹ the *longue durée* of twentieth-century authoritarian movements,¹⁰ the circulation of right-wing populist discourses and narratives fostering fear and resentment,¹¹ the psychosocial factors driving authoritarian leadership and/or the desire to be lead,¹² and extremist sub-cultures such as neo-Nazis, skinheads, or religious fundamentalists.¹³ While these studies give crucial insights into the various factors driving political radicalization, not much is known about the lifeworlds of ordinary people supporting such ideas. They are part of a rapidly growing proportion of the population in liberal democratic societies which no longer wants to adhere to the rules of the “liberal game”,¹⁴ and openly rejects its ideals of diversity and tolerance.

Sociologist Wolfgang Streeck recently suggested that social scientists’ shock and bafflement over the level of grassroots support for right-wing populist parties in Europe and the United States throughout the past years exemplifies how little they know about the ways extremist ideas circulate on an everyday, local basis.¹⁵ Andre Gingrich and Marcus Banks attribute this knowledge gap to anthropologists’ reluctance to engage with political ideologies they cannot sympathize with.¹⁶ Susan Harding sees this reluctance as directly linked to the power of the liberal intellectual tradition in Western academia that has based its self-identification as a modern, progressive force on the portrayal of the figure of the reactionary as the “repugnant cultural other” whose backwardness and bigotry places him/her outside the project of modernity.¹⁷ As a result of this hesitation, anthropological studies of right-wing cultural practices are few and far between, or, as Hugh Gusterson puts it,

⁹ Betz, Hans-Georg, and Stefan Immerfall (eds.). 1998. *The new politics of the Right: neo-populist parties and movements in established democracies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan; Rydgren, Jens. 2005. *Movements of exclusion: radical right-wing populism in the Western world*. New York: Nova Science Publishers; Bornschier, Simon. 2010. *Cleavage politics and the populist Right*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

¹⁰ Neumann, Klaus. 2003. *Shifting memories: the Nazi past in the new Germany*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

¹¹ Wodak, Ruth. 2015. *The politics of fear: what right-wing populist discourses mean*. London: Sage.

¹² Ottomeyer, Klaus. 2010. *Jörg Haider: Mythos und Erbe*. Innsbruck; Wien: Haymon-Taschenbuch.

¹³ Harding, Susan Friend. 2000. *The book of Jerry Falwell: fundamentalist language and politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Blee, Kathleen M. 2007. Ethnographies of the Far Right. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36 (2): 119–128; Shoshan, Nitzan. 2016. *The management of hate: nation, affect, and the governance of right-wing extremism in Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁴ Illouz, Eva. 2017. From the paradox of liberation to the demise of liberal elites. In: H. Geiselberger (ed.). *The great regression*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, p. 49.

¹⁵ Streeck, Wolfgang. 2017. The return of the repressed as the beginning of the end of neoliberal capitalism. In: Geiselberger, *The great regression*, p. 164.

¹⁶ Gingrich, Andre, and Marcus Banks (eds.). 2006. *Neo-nationalism in Europe and beyond: perspectives from social anthropology*. New York: Berghahn Books, p. 6.

¹⁷ Harding, Susan Friend. 1991. Representing fundamentalism: the problem of the repugnant cultural Other. *Social Research* 58 (2): 373–393, p. 374.

“still embryonic”.¹⁸ In the light of Trump and Brexit, however, anthropologists have woken up to the fact that they can no longer afford to overlook the socio-cultural processes driving the current backlash against established political and cultural norms. A growing number of scholars emphasize the urgent need for more studies on the social worlds of the ordinary people forming the support base of the current backlash against liberal democracy.¹⁹ Established research on right-wing populism that analyses its causes and effects from afar thus needs to be complemented by ethnographic studies that shed light on social processes of micro-mobilization. Kathleen Blee, one of the very few scholars to conduct ethnographic research into the lifeworlds of far-right extremists, stresses that we can only understand the increased spread of anti-cosmopolitan thought if we study the actors from up close. She argues that in order to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the emergence of far-right groups in specific local and socio-economic contexts, scholars need to analyse “individual and collective identities, the ways in which people come to see right-wing extremism as a means of exerting claims based on these identities, and the processes by which far-right groups recruit members and supporters”.²⁰

My research group aims to do precisely this. In direct response to the recent calls for more micro-studies into the motives and causes of reactionary engagement, we will focus on the lifeworlds of ordinary men and women supporting exclusionary political ideas on the ground. In doing so, we aim to move beyond simplistic portrayals of the people living in rural strongholds of right-wing parties as an undifferentiated mass of backward, bigoted, and uneducated consumers of extremist discourse. By focusing on socio-cultural processes underlying village life, we hope to show villages and their residents as individuals and collectives with their own histories and experiences that need to be taken into account if we want to understand the radicalization of politics that is taking hold.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the ways that people expressing anti-cosmopolitan sentiments experience and make sense of notions such as tradition, belonging, and estrangement – themes right-wing parties have successfully turned into their main concerns – the Research Group has a particular focus on local, everyday engagements with the past. By delivering four in-depth empirical studies based on the experiences and perspectives of people living in villages at the crossroads of Europe, the group tries to make sense of the contradictory and potentially violent social and cultural practices that form the underbelly of modern, globalized democracies.

¹⁸ Gusterson, Hugh. 2017. From Brexit to Trump: anthropology and the rise of nationalist populism. *American Ethnologist* 44(2): 209–214, p. 2.

¹⁹ See for example: Thorleifsson. From coal to Ukip; Pasięka, Agnieszka. 2017. Taking far-right claims seriously and literally: anthropology and the study of right-wing radicalism. *Slavic Review* 76(S1): S19–S29; Hann, Chris. 2019. Anthropology and populism. *Anthropology Today* 35 (1): 1–2.

²⁰ Blee, Kathleen M. 2007. Ethnographies of the Far Right. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36(2): 119–128, p. 120.

Placing Self and Other in Time

Annika Lems

One of the core theoretical tensions the Research Group addresses is the potential of history as a “social glue” that binds communities together and serves as a means of excluding “others” by placing them outside of a shared, communal time. In doing so, we can build on landmark publications at the intersection of anthropology and history that have shown the ways history has been used to construe spatial and temporal proximity or distance between the Self and the Other.

In the 1980s anthropology went through a historic turn, bringing the question of how people, nations, and communities use time to create social bonds in relation with wider global historical and postcolonial processes. Eric Wolf’s *Europe and the People without History*²¹ was a crucial stepping-stone in this turn towards history and temporality. Moving against clichéd descriptions of non-Western societies as temporally and spatially isolated, he used historical analysis to show that the world has been globally interconnected for a long time. Following Wolf’s book former colonial societies that had been treated as temporally removed from a Western, “modern” here and now began entering historical frameworks with great force.²² In a similar vein, in *Time and the Other* Johannes Fabian launched a major critique of the ways anthropologists had treated the communities they studied as frozen in time.²³ He showed the dynamics whereby anthropologists came to lock the people they studied in an eternal “ethnographic present”, thereby creating spatial and temporal distance between themselves and their interlocutors. Through these processes of temporal distancing, the people and communities that anthropologists worked with were kept outside the time of the anthropologist, thereby construing them as profoundly “other”. Although three decades have passed since the publication of these two books, Wolf’s focus on processes of global interconnection through European histories of capitalism and colonization and Fabian’s emphasis on the politics of time are once again highly relevant: they bring peoples and places that have been consigned to the periphery back into the centre of global processes.

Finding the conceptual tools to address these dynamics will be of particular importance for my Research Group, as the communities we focus on show historically ingrained practices of being placed, and placing “others”, outside a shared here and now. In my own research site in the Austrian state of Carinthia this tension is apparent

²¹ Wolf, Eric R. 1982. *Europe and the people without history*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²² See for example: Sahlin, Marshall. 1985. *Islands of history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Comaroff, John L., and Jean Comaroff. 1992. *Ethnography and the historical imagination*. Boulder: Westview Press.

²³ Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the other: how anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press.

in the local population's treatment of the Slovenian-speaking minority that has been living side-by-side with German-speakers in the border region for many centuries.²⁴ By placing them in a different, less "modern", less "civilized" time, German speakers exclude Slovenian speakers from a shared here and now. Much like the processes Eric Wolf describes in his work, these dynamics, as studies have shown, are historically constituted in the centuries-long othering of non-German groups within the Habsburg Empire. Through processes of "internal colonization"²⁵ or "frontier orientalism"²⁶ in the Habsburg Empire, Slavic, Muslim, and other non-German speaking groups came to be treated as less civilized, backwards, and non-European.²⁷ Excluded from a shared social past, members of the Slovenian minority were literally pushed out of time. The explosive potential of these dynamics became tragically apparent during the 1930s and 1940s, when the state of Carinthia formed a stronghold of Nazi support.²⁸ During these years, members of the Slovenian minority living in the border region were subject to dispossession, expulsion, torture, and murder. Although the armed resistance movement led by Slovenian partisans was crucial to the victory of the allied troops in Austria,²⁹ in Carinthia they continue to be described as traitors and deserters. Indeed, animosity towards the Slovenian minority is so ingrained that they have not only been denied a space within official narratives of the past,³⁰ but even the basic right of bilingual street signs. As the three-decade stand-off between heritage clubs such as the *Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund* (Carinthian League of Defence Fighters) and politicians in Vienna shows, the question of who is and is not included in history is a highly contested issue.

These struggles are also evident in the municipality of Millstatt, where my research is situated. Despite not living directly in a multi-ethnic area, many people in these mountain communities imagine themselves to be on the frontline of a historical battle against *Fremdbestimmung* (heteronomy). The Carinthian League of Defence

²⁴ Sommer, Birgit. 2015. *Der Graben / Grapa: zwei Volksgruppen, ein Tal, eine Geschichte*. Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag.

²⁵ Feichtinger, Johannes. 2003. Habsburg (post-)colonial: Anmerkungen zur inneren Kolonialisierung in Zentraleuropa. In: J. Feichtinger, U. Prutsch, and M. Csáky (eds.). *Habsburg postcolonial: Machtstrukturen und kollektives Gedächtnis*. Innsbruck: Studienverlag.

²⁶ Gingrich, Andre. 1996. *Frontier myths of orientalism: the Muslim world in public and popular cultures of Central Europe*. Piran: Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School Vol. II.

²⁷ Feichtinger, Johannes, and Johann Heiss (eds.). 2013. *Geschichtspolitik und "Türkenbelagerung"*. Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag.

²⁸ Retzl, Lisa, and Gudrun Blohberger (eds.). 2014. *Peršman: eine Dokumentation der Geschichte der slowenischen Minderheit in Kärnten im 20. Jahrhundert mit den Schwerpunkten Verfolgung, Deportation und Widerstand*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag.

²⁹ Pirker, Peter. 2017. British subversive politics towards Austria and partisan resistance in the Austrian-Slovene borderland, 1938–45. *Journal of Contemporary History* 52 (2): 319–351.

³⁰ Retzl, Lisa. 2006. *PartisanInnen Denkmäler: antifaschistische Erinnerungskultur in Kärnten*. Innsbruck: Studienverlag.

Fighters plays an influential role in local politics, and the village's most important heritage club, the *Bürgergarde* (civil guard), is based on similar ideas of a historically constituted right to defend one's "blood and soil" from foreign infiltration. The club traces its roots back to the fifteenth century, when the region was under attack by the Ottoman Empire and local farmers organized themselves to protect the village from foreign occupation. The *Bürgergarde* forms an integral part of community life in Millstatt. During the most important village festivities members of the club dress up in old military uniforms and recreate the historical battle against the "Turks". Given that former Turkish guest workers and their families are the most politically contested migrant group in Austria, these historical re-enactments are anything but innocent.

Preliminary fieldwork conducted by Christine Moderbacher in South Tyrol and Antje Berger in Berchtesgaden reveal similar ambiguities. During our first six months of research we found that heritage clubs have been regaining popularity throughout the entire German-speaking Alpine region, with a significant number of youths joining associations that not long ago were frowned upon as clubs for old people stuck in the past. The heritage clubs some of us collaborate with demonstrate the ambiguous potential of history. On the one hand, they allow village inhabitants to express their attachment to place. On the other hand, whilst aiming to preserve traditions, many of these clubs carry a strong exclusionary undertone: they aim to defend the community from the socio-cultural infiltration of outsiders or from the spread of cosmopolitan ideals threatening to destroy their "indigenous" cultural ties.

My own and Antje Berger's research will specifically address the role of such heritage clubs in the socio-political fabric of rural communities. By looking into the ways the members of heritage clubs in our research sites use historical narratives to actively invent³¹ and re-enact³² traditions, we aim to discover under what circumstances historical narratives, performances, and imaginaries become a means for creating social closeness or, by contrast, a means to exclude and "other" groups and individuals. While some team members have other empirical foci (such as farmers, fans and local performers of pop music, village politicians, or self-organized women's groups), all the individual research projects are driven by the shared desire to capture and analyse the circulation, articulation, and performance of everyday histories of belonging to place. By reading these vernacular histories in the context of the ways global economic and political transformations affect rural life, the research group engages with both a politics and an experience of time.

³¹ Hobsbawm, Eric J., and Terence O. Ranger (eds.). 1983. *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

³² Agnew, Vanessa. 2007. History's affective turn: historical reenactment and its work in the present. *Rethinking History* 11 (3): 299–312.

History as a Social Practice

Annika Lems

In trying to understand the ways the inhabitants of four Alpine communities actively create their own versions of the past, the Research Group looks at history as a *social practice*. In doing so, we are in conversation with a growing body of research in anthropology that uses ethnography to shed light on forms of relating to the past that are commonly overlooked by the canons of standard historiography.³³ We are also in dialogue with historians and philosophers of history who suggest that it is necessary to better understand the links between historiography and the ways history is lived, made, and unmade on the ground.³⁴ In this vein, David Carr has launched a critique of the idea that the representation of the past and its meaning for the present belongs solely to the historical profession.³⁵ He argues that this view ignores the fact that we have, indeed, a “very full and concrete sense of that past in our own lives and in that of the communities we belong to”. He urges for a focus on “everyday history”, on people’s connection to the past as it is experienced prior to and independently of historians’ interest in it.³⁶ It is exactly this *everyday history* – the ambiguous and often non-chronological ways the past enters into our lives and is experienced, narrated, and performed – that this Research Group engages with.

In looking at the ways the past is lived and made sense of in the everyday lives of people living in South Tyrolean, Swiss, Bavarian, and Austrian mountain villages, the Research Group engages with a current shift in anthropological approaches to history. While the historic turn in anthropology led to the acknowledgement that in non-Western cultural contexts people often deploy experiential, non-narrative ways of relating to the past,³⁷ in recent years a growing number of anthropologists have argued that we need to go a step further and apply the same focus on lived history

³³ Hirsch, Eric, and Charles Stewart. 2005. Introduction: ethnographies of historicity. *History and Anthropology* 16(3): 261–274; Knight, Daniel M. 2015. *History, time, and economic crisis in Central Greece*. New York: Palgrave; Palmié, Stephan, and Charles Stewart. 2016. Introduction: for an anthropology of history. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6(1): 207–236.

³⁴ Koselleck, Reinhart. 1983. *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time*. New York: Columbia University Press; Samuel, Raphael. 1994. *Theatres of memory: past and present in contemporary culture*. London: Verso.

³⁵ Carr, David. 2014. *Experience and history: phenomenological perspectives on the historical world*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁷ Lambek, Michael. 2002. *The weight of the past: living with history in Mahajanga, Madagascar*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.



Imaginaries of the villagers' historically ingrained relationship to the land painted onto the façade of a Bavarian house. (Photo: Antje Berger, Berchtesgaden 2020)

to Western societies as well.³⁸ In this vein, Stephan Palmié and Charles Stewart recently called for a shift from historical anthropology to an anthropology of history.³⁹ While the historical anthropology that developed from the 1980s onwards was mainly concerned with representing the past within the framework of Western historiographical conventions, an anthropology of history focuses “foremost on the principles, whether ideological, cosmological, or scientific – call them broadly cultural – that underpin practices of inquiry into the past, as well as the forms and modes in which the past is represented to others”.⁴⁰ Anthropologists of history thus move beyond Western frameworks of historiography and look at history as a social practice and a lived experience.

³⁸ Stewart, Charles. 2012. *Dreaming and historical consciousness in island Greece*. Harvard: Harvard University Press; Hodges, Matt. 2013. Illuminating vestige: amateur archaeology and the emergence of historical consciousness in rural France. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55(2): 474–504; Knight, Daniel M. 2015. *History, time, and economic crisis in Central Greece*. New York: Palgrave.

³⁹ Palmié, Stephan, and Charles Stewart. 2016. Introduction: for an anthropology of history. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6(1): 207–236.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 209–210.

Building on these ongoing debates in the anthropology of history and historicity, the Research Group aims to understand how history enters people's everyday lives, how it becomes embedded in the social world, and how it connects to wider global and political processes. We are guided by the following research questions:

- How do people living in rural villages actively claim ownership over history and what social work do such local, everyday histories perform?
- Under what conditions do they become a means for creating social closeness and under what conditions are they used to exclude and “other” individuals and groups?
- How do local exclusionary readings of the past become woven into the texture of the everyday and normalized? And how do they link up with wider genealogies of anti-cosmopolitan thought and practice?

Village Ethnography

Annika Lems

Driven by the question of how to methodologically accommodate the tension between local histories and global transformations, the Research Group will deploy village ethnography as a core methodological approach. The aim is to brush off the image of village ethnography as dusty and outdated and reinvigorate it as a crucial method for researching global phenomena. In doing so, we take our cue from Thomas Hylland Eriksen's famous suggestion that “small places” do indeed have the power to shed light on “large issues”.⁴¹

During the formative years of the discipline, village ethnography formed a core tool of anthropological inquiry. While studies tended to focus on communities in non-European countries, in the 1980s there was a surge in ethnographic research focusing on rural, remote, and small villages in Europe conducted by some of the most prolific anthropologists of the time.⁴² The work of John Cole and Eric Wolf has been of particular interest in developing our approach⁴³: their comparative study

⁴¹ Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 1995. *Small places, large issues: an introduction to social and cultural anthropology*. London: Pluto.

⁴² See for example: Hann, Chris. 2019. Anthropology and populism. *Anthropology Today* 35(1): 1–2; Strathern, Marilyn. 1981. *Kinship at the core: an anthropology of Elmdon, a village in north-west Essex in the nineteen-sixties*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁴³ Cole, John W., and Eric R. Wolf. 1974. *The hidden frontier: ecology and ethnicity in an Alpine valley*. New York: Academic Press.

of a Tyrolean and an Italian mountain village lay the grounds for other studies that used Alpine village ethnography as a crucial tool for understanding the interplay of small-scale political and historical processes with large-scale ones.⁴⁴ Yet, while village ethnography proved to be a useful method for examining processes of global change “through the looking glass”,⁴⁵ in recent decades the focus of scholars studying globalization has shifted more towards urban settings. Following from Arjun Appadurai’s suggestion that classic village ethnographies tend to “incarcerate natives” in places,⁴⁶ anthropologists of globalization began to look for alternative methods – methods that would not, by default, root people in places. As a result, they began to loosen the fixation and boundedness of the field. The methodological focus shifted to urban ethnographies and mobile methods.

The Research Group re-engages with village ethnography as a core method of understanding global processes. Following Michael Herzfeld’s suggestion that we should approach villages as both bounded *and* open,⁴⁷ we attempt to move away from the treatment of them as socio-geographical isolates that brought village ethnography into disrepute. In order to methodologically accommodate this tension, we approach the Alpine communities we work with not as internally uniform microcosms, but rather as dynamic social and physical entities that are marked by many fissures, ambiguities, and internal incoherencies. Like the village, the different people making up the social fabric of the research sites do not fit in one uniform mould. They come from different socio-economic backgrounds and have different political positions; some are deeply embedded within village life, while others have weaker links or are even consciously left outside. Addressing these dynamics is key to the methodological framework of the Research Group. Rather than looking at our research sites as uniform entities, we will actively work with the breaks and ruptures that are part and parcel of village life.

In the remainder of this report Christine Moderbacher and Antje Berger offer initial empirical insights into the ways these ambiguous dynamics manifest themselves in the Alpine communities where their research is based. Based on preliminary research in South Tyrol and Bavaria, they will sketch some of the methodological, epistemological, and theoretical questions the group will have to address as it moves into the research phase.

⁴⁴ See for example: Viazzo, Pier Paolo. 1989. *Upland communities: environment, population, and social structure in the Alps since the sixteenth century*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press; Heady, Patrick. 1999. *The hard people: rivalry, sympathy and social structure in an Alpine valley*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.

⁴⁵ Herzfeld, Michael. 1987. *Anthropology through the looking-glass: critical ethnography in the margins of Europe*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ Appadurai, Arjun. 1988. Putting hierarchy in its place. *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1): 36–49, p. 37.

⁴⁷ Herzfeld, Michael. 2015. The village in the world and the world in the village: reflections on ethnographic epistemology. *Critique of Anthropology* 35 (3): 338–343, p. 338.

Fieldwork Preparation Workshop

“Conducting Research in Alpine Communities: Social, Ethical and Epistemological Challenges and Innovations”

On 26 September 2019 the Research Group held a fieldwork preparation workshop at the MPI in Halle. It brought together anthropologists and historians who shared their expertise in conducting research in Alpine communities in Austria, Switzerland, and northern Italy. The workshop was structured so as to offer ample opportunities for the Research Group members to discuss and evaluate their plans and initiate conversations with key scholars in Alpine research. It also lay the groundwork for a number of future collaborations, for example with the historian Markus Wurzer from the University of Graz, who will coach the group in their use of historical tools, as well as the idea for a special issue on contemporary anthropological research in the European Alps co-edited with Herta Nöbauer from the University of Vienna.



(Photos:
Max Planck Institute for
Social Anthropology, 2019)

Contested Soil: Everyday Histories of Belonging to, Losing, and Defending Place on a South Tyrolean Alp

Christine Moderbacher

My sub-project “Contested Soil” explores the notion of “attachment to the soil” and how this is experienced and made sense of in everyday practices by South Tyrolians living in Europe’s largest high plateau, the Seiser Alm/Alpe di Siusi. Through ethnographic and archival research, it aims to explore processes of inclusion and exclusion and question the role of local political mobilization. The project pays special attention to the region’s historical context, and particularly to the socio-cultural traces of the history of a group known as the optants (*Optanten*).

In 1939, as a result of an agreement between Hitler and Mussolini, the German-speaking population of South Tyrol was asked to either resettle in the German Reich and become German citizens or remain in South Tyrol and consent to Italianization. This procedure contradicted the general politics of Nazi leadership, which demanded that territories occupied by “ethnic Germans” were to be “brought home to the Reich”.⁴⁸ The widespread notion of the inseparability of “blood and soil” is reflected in many poems written and published in leaflets in the months leading up to the Option Agreement and figures as a central topic in poems and letters from those who opted to leave South Tyrol, the optants:

*“Der Blick umfängt vom Schloß Tirol,
Wie Mutteraug’ ihr liebstes Kind:
Das deutsche Grenzland – Südtirol,
Weil Volk und Land unteilbar sind.”*⁴⁹

“The gaze from the castle of Tyrol
Like a mother’s eye watching over her favourite child,
Enfolds the German borderland – South Tyrol,
Because people and land are inseparable.”
(my own translation)

Most of them were farmers and left the country after being promised more fertile land in the “Reich”. Yet, the promise of resettlement to these fertile grounds was lost along with the war. Facing economic hardship and social exclusion, after World

⁴⁸ Grote, Georg. 2004. Gehen oder bleiben? Die Identitätskrise der deutschsprachigen Südtiroler in Optanten- und Dableibergedichten der Optionszeit. *Modern Austrian Literature* 37 (1/2): 47–69, p. 50; Pergher, Roberta. 2018. *Mussolini’s nation-empire: sovereignty and settlement in Italy’s borderlands, 1922–1943*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁹ Leipert, Karl, cited in: Grote, Gehen oder bleiben, p. 50.

War II the optants were temporarily settled in specifically built South Tyrolean housing estates in present-day Austria and Germany. The majority hoped to return to South Tyrol. But largely due to slow processing by the Italian authorities these re-optants (*Rückoptanten*) had to wait many years. And those who did return found themselves socially excluded once again. The disappointment about Hitler “selling” South Tyrol has not only given rise to a strong emotional connection of German-speaking South Tyrolians to their soil, but also a long-lasting scepticism towards political decision-makers, equally reflected in poems and folk songs. The historically ingrained importance of ideas of soil, belonging, and betrayal was recently taken up by right-wing populist parties, manifesting itself in language addressing the scepticism towards political decision-makers and the fear of South Tyrolians being “sold off again”. Italy’s far right party Lega Nord gained significant ground in the area (growing from 2.5% to 11.1% within the last five years). Media commentators have observed a need for nationalism in an era that is characterized by “an overbearing EU, globalization and out-of-control immigration”.⁵⁰ “I can trust in him” (*Di lui mi fido*, referring to Salvini, the Lega Nord’s popular leader), “No right of soil. Because Italy is not for sale!” (*No ius soli. Perché L’Italia non è in Vendita!*), and “Stop Invasion” (*Stop Invasione!*) were only some of the prevailing slogans during the election campaign in the fall of 2018.⁵¹

Considering this historical background and current political discourse, my contribution to the Research Group involves evaluation of the notion of attachment to the soil through an anthropological inquiry into the daily life of people in South Tyrol who actually work this contested soil: farmers. By working with individual stories, I aim to question assumptions of homogeneity that consider farmers as a group with similar economic capacity, income, modes of production, and social structure.⁵²

Having faced exclusion and questions of belonging many decades ago, the project aims to give insight into the inhabitants’ everyday engagements with history and how these everyday histories play into the active exclusion of people marked as “other” or threats to their soil. In October 2019 I conducted preliminary field research in the municipality of Kastelruth/Castelrotto, which is home to Europe’s largest

⁵⁰ Stille, Alexander. 2018. How Matteo Salvini pulled Italy to the far right. *The Guardian*, 9 August 2018, retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>. Accessed 30 October 2018.

⁵¹ Stacul has shown how the local political sphere promoted the “necessity of preventing the land from being alienated to non-residents” in the region of Trento in the 1990s. See: Stacul, Jaro. 2006. Neo-nationalism or neo-localism? Integralist political engagements in Italy at the turn of the millennium. In: Andre Gingrich and Marcus Banks (eds.). *Neo-nationalism in Europe and beyond: perspectives from social anthropology*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 162–176, here: 167.

⁵² See: Seiser, Gertraud. 2006. ‘Healthy native soil’ versus common agricultural policy: neo-nationalism and farmers in the EU, the example of Austria. In: Andre Gingrich and Marcus Banks (eds.). *Neo-nationalism in Europe and beyond: perspectives from social anthropology*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 199–217.

high Alpine meadow, the Seiser Alm/Alpe di Siusi. I will return to the community for more extensive ethnographic research between April and December 2020. The small town of approximately 7,000 inhabitants consists mainly of farmers, 80.9% of whom are German speakers. Amongst them are many *Rückkehrer* (returnees) of the Option Agreement, or their descendants. Kastelruth/Castelrotto is part of the South Tyrolian province of Bozen/Bolzano, where the Lega Nord received 27.8% of votes in the national elections in October 2018 (compared to an average of 11.1% in the entire province). Since 2015, it is also one of the few South Tyrolian Alpine communities that has accommodated refugees – some of whom have been working as farmhands on Alpine pastures.⁵³ This unique socio-cultural constellation makes it possible to also shed light on the interaction of farmers and refugees working the “contested soil” together.

Whereas significant anthropological research has been undertaken in nearby Alpine regions⁵⁴ as well as historical research on the Option Agreement,⁵⁵ there is a lack of anthropological studies that focus on narrated histories and interactions of individuals in everyday life and contribute to a more detailed understanding of how history is lived and negotiated in the light of the contemporary rise of the far right. To address this gap, I investigate the following questions: How do people living in the South Tyrolian Alpine region negotiate, narrate, and make sense of the historically ingrained idea of attachment to the soil (or belonging to a specific soil) and what larger conclusions about processes of inclusion and exclusion can be drawn from an engagement with lived and narrated histories of belonging to place and displacement? Who and what is perceived to be historically entitled to lay claims to belonging to the soil or is seen as “soil threatening”, and how does this play out in everyday life and discourse, as well as in media representations, political campaigns, and state discourse? To what degree do these exclusionary narratives of indigeneity allow for a better understanding of local political mobilization?

My contribution to the Research Group is grounded in in-depth ethnographic research focusing on everyday histories, mostly based on participant observation and storytelling. However, the topic also requires an engagement with archival

⁵³ According to online publications of Caritas and the local parish, the refugees living in the village are mostly Syrian men.

⁵⁴ See for example: Cole, John W., and Eric R. Wolf. 1974. *The hidden frontier: ecology and ethnicity in an Alpine valley*. New York: Academic Press; Grasseni, Christina. 2009. *Developing skill, developing vision: practices of locality at the foot of the Alps*. New York: Berghahn Books; Heady, Patrick. 1999. *The hard people: rivalry, sympathy and social structure in an Alpine valley*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers; Membretti, Andrea, and Pier Paolo Viazzo. 2017. Negotiating the mountains: foreign immigration and cultural change in the Italian Alps. *Martor* 22: 93–107; Stacul, Jaro. 2003. *The bounded field: localism and local identity in an Italian Alpine valley*. New York: Berghahn; Stacul, Neo-nationalism or neo-localism?.

⁵⁵ See for example: Pergher, Roberta. 2018. *Mussolini's nation-empire: sovereignty and settlement in Italy's borderlands, 1922–1943*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Pfanzer, Eva (ed.). 2013. Option und Erinnerung, special issue, *Geschichte und Region / storia e regione* 22 (2).



Inside the fan shop of the band Kastelruther Spatzen. (Photo: Christine Moderbacher, Kastelruth 2019)

material (letters, historical documents, etc.) as well as analysis of dominant political discourses in the media. Participant observation allows for a deep engagement with the everyday life of and interactions between South Tyrolian farmers (and refugees) on their soil. This involves taking part in the daily life and work of people working the soil, including communal gatherings such as informational evenings on how to continue farming activities under new EU and regulations as well as attending yearly events like the selection of the most beautiful meadow and the concert of the town's popular Schlager band Kastelruther Spatzen.⁵⁶ The concert offers an opportunity to explore notions of “performed nationalism” on stage.⁵⁷

Due to my emphasis on “attachment to the soil”, the practice of walking the landscape together with individuals like farmers and shepherds will form an important additional methodological approach. Based on the findings by a growing number of researchers who deploy walking as a research tool,⁵⁸ I aim to deploy walking as a sensual, non-narrative means of understanding issues relevant to people's lived experiences rather than adhering to a set of standardized research questions. In addition, visual anthropological methods will form an essential component of the project:

⁵⁶ The band has recently increased their popularity in the region due to Salvini's appearance at their yearly concert in the summer of 2018.

⁵⁷ See for example: Banks, Marcus. 2006. Performing ‘neo-nationalism’: some methodological notes. In: Gingrich and Banks, *Neo-nationalism in Europe and beyond*, pp. 50–65.

⁵⁸ Ingold, Tim. 2010. Footprints through the weather-world: walking, breathing, knowing. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16(1): 121–139; Irving, Andrew. 2017. New York stories: narrating the neighbourhood. *Ethnos* 82(3): 437–457; Vergunst, Jo. 2017. Key figure of mobility: the pedestrian. *Social Anthropology / Anthropologie Sociale* 25(1): 13–27.

I use the visual medium as a means of directing my own attention by looking through the viewfinder, as Christina Grasseni has suggested,⁵⁹ as a means of evocation, and as a collaborative mode of representation through which the research participants will be invited to tell their stories and experiences on film.

In recent decades, creative and visual methods have become significant tools for anthropological research as well as for the transmission of findings to a broader audience. The development of new sensorial, narrative, and collaborative strategies has contributed to the revitalization of the discipline. While some anthropologists put particular emphasis on the merits of text,⁶⁰ and others the merits of film⁶¹ or sound,⁶² I side with George Marcus, who writes that:

“A new arena of debate is needed in which the differences between these two media of representation and their relative possibilities in re-constituting the idea of what anthropological knowledge is, or should be, can be discussed from a starting position which recognizes a certain identity between them as well as an equality of intellectual standing.”⁶³

Marcus’s claim was taken up by Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart, who insist that if we are ensure the viability of anthropology in the future, we should talk not about “what we are *against*, but what we are *for*”.⁶⁴ They suggest that the strength and creative force of anthropology lies within its “more flexible, constructive approach to learning about the world”.⁶⁵ More recently, the discussion was taken up by Carlo Cubero, who also mentions the potential shared by different modes of presenting

⁵⁹ Grasseni, Christina. 2007. Introduction. In: Christina Grasseni (ed.). *Skilled visions: between apprenticeship and standards*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 1–23.

⁶⁰ See for example: Hastrup, Kirsten. 1992. Anthropological visions: some notes on visual and textual authority. In: P.I. Crawford and D. Turton (eds.). *Film as ethnography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 8–25.

⁶¹ MacDougall, David. 2006. *The corporeal image: film, ethnography and the senses*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press; Mead, Margaret. 2003 [1975]. Visual anthropology in a discipline of words. In: Paul Hockings (ed.). *Principles of visual anthropology*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 3–13; Pink, Sarah. 2006. *The future of visual anthropology: engaging the senses*. London, New York: Routledge.

⁶² Cox, Rupert. 2010. *Military aircraft noise and the politics of spatial affect in Japan*. Online: <http://www.sensorystudies.org/wordpress/>. Accessed 20 May 2018; Feld, Steve. 1982. *Sound and sentiment: birds, weeping, poetics, and song in Kaluli expression*. Durham: Duke University Press; Feld, Steve, and Don Brenneis. 2004. Doing anthropology in sound. *American Ethnologist* 31 (4): 461–474.

⁶³ Marcus, George E. 1990. The modernist sensibility in recent ethnographic writing and the cinematic metaphor of montage. *Visual Anthropology Review* 6 (1): 2–12 and 21–40, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Grimshaw, Anna, and Keith Hart. 1994. Anthropology and the crisis of the intellectuals. *Critique of Anthropology* 14 (3): 227–261, p. 257 (italics in the original).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

findings.⁶⁶ Cubero suggests that we should concentrate on making visible the process of gaining knowledge rather than following specific theoretical and methodological protocols. Approaching anthropology as a creative practice, he proposes a common ground “from where anthropologists can engage with ethnographies made in different media”.⁶⁷ While the Research Group’s findings will be disseminated in publications in peer-reviewed academic journals and edited volumes, we will also pursue alternative channels for communicating our research findings. In conversation with my colleagues, I am therefore developing modes of representation that reach beyond academia and have the potential to enhance the visibility of ethnographic research. This could be in the form of a short film or a radio show that brings locals into dialogue with refugees, drawing on letters of optants whose writings about being removed from their soil inevitably recall the current situation of refugees in South Tyrol.

Conducting research with the camera does not just raise methodological questions, it also brings to the fore a conundrum that has not yet received much attention within anthropology: how to research the “repugnant cultural Other”⁶⁸ *with the camera*. In collaboration with other visual anthropologists in the Research Group, I aim to address this gap by tackling the following methodological questions: How can new methods and forms of visual anthropology combined with artistic approaches bring a new perspective on the topic and its ethical challenges? How can we offer new insights into understanding this contemporary phenomenon, while avoiding turning into the “commentator on a clearly media-fed ‘look-at-the-racist freak show’”,⁶⁹ that Ghassan Hage warned against twenty years ago? How can conducting research with the camera help establish more nuanced, complicated, partial, and local readings of people that challenge the anthropologists’ personal and political convictions, and what are its limitations?

As a trained filmmaker with experience in both anthropological fieldwork and the production of filmic essays or visual performance pieces, I am particularly interested in bringing together the different modes of knowledge production and dissemination. In a participatory arts project I collaborated on with the Austrian artist Iris Blauensteiner in July 2019, I was able to experiment with and evaluate some of these approaches.

⁶⁶ Cubero, Carlo. 2015. Some double tasks of ethnography and anthropology: reflections on audiovisual ethnography. *Social Anthropology* 23(3): 365–373.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁶⁸ Harding, Susan Friend. 1991. Representing fundamentalism: the problem of the repugnant cultural Other. *Social Research* 58(2): 373–393.

⁶⁹ Hage, Ghassan. 2000. *White nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*. New York: Routledge.

Outreach Activities – Collaborative Arts Project “Container”

In July 2019 Christine Moderbacher co-curated the collaborative anthropological arts project “Container” as part of the Viertelfestival in Lower Austria. The participatory workshop was supported by the Otto Mauer Fund and the Golden Pixel Cooperative, Vienna. The project took place in the Austrian village of Berg, which is located five kilometres from the former border between Austria and Slovakia. It combined ethnographic field research (participant observation, storytelling, and visual ethnographic methods) and artistic tools of representation to investigate the interrelationship between inclusion and exclusion.



*Abandoned tollhouse in the village of Berg, at the Austrian-Slovakian border.
(Photo: Christine Moderbacher, 2019)*

The parking lot of the old tollhouse at the former border station in Berg offered a temporary home for refugees in 2015/16. As in many parts of Austria, Germany, and other EU countries, people were temporarily accommodated in containers. They symbolized inclusion and exclusion at the same time. Today, almost all of these temporary villages, including the one in Berg, have been dismantled. Through participatory workshops with the population, the project explored what traces have remained in an area that is marked by the continuous opening and closing of borders. The final exhibition included a reading performed by two actors in Berg. The resulting video installation piece “Moving Ants on a Painted Tree” was screened at the ORF Landesstudio in Graz and at the Transborders festival in Bad Radkersburg (both in Austria). In addition, a selection of the work was exhibited in August 2019 as part of the group exhibition “Spuren” in the gallery KUNST:WERK in St. Pölten (AT) from September to November 2019.

Further information: <https://www.noen.at/bruck/berg-kunstprojekt-schafft-raum-fuers-erinnern-berg-containerdorf-fluechtlingskrise-153293701>

“Des war oiwei so” (It has always been this way): Heritage Performance, Place Attachment, and Belonging in the Berchtesgaden Area, Bavaria

Antje Berger

Contemporary Europe is facing increased fragmentation in the social and political sphere. In this time of perceived crisis, recourses to the past play a major role in constructing identities and belonging to place through performances of heritage. With an understanding of heritage as a process with political, cultural, and social consequences such as social inclusion and exclusion,⁷⁰ it is crucial to analyse how intangible heritage practice and recourses to history and the past in heritage performance relate to questions and makings of identity, belonging, and meaning. Intangible heritage performance as “a set of dynamic and affective practices”⁷¹ is of particular interest when focusing on heritage clubs, which are an essential part of the social fabric in the Berchtesgaden area. With a considerable number of young people joining these heritage clubs and local political parties attempting to strengthen them with reference to emotional bonds to and care for the homeland (*Heimat*), I aim to gain insights into the relation between heritage performance and emotions and affect. The latter can lead people to act: emotion and affect are “action-oriented, [they push] people to do things”.⁷² Intangible heritage practice thus enables us to understand attachments to the past and the fractures that accompany them. In my research I explore the foundations and functions of heritage-making processes that attempt to make use of the past in the present. I will analyse these processes in relation to questions of belonging and identity making.

My field site is located in Upper Bavaria’s area of Berchtesgaden in the south-eastern tip of Bavaria bordering the Austrian state of Salzburg. While my research takes into account all five municipalities (Schönau am Königssee, Berchtesgaden, Ramsau bei Berchtesgaden, Bischofswiesen, and Marktschellenberg) and their social, political, and economic interactions, I will specifically focus on the community of Marktschellenberg/Berchtesgaden.

Marktschellenberg is located between Berchtesgaden and Salzburg and has a population of 1,769⁷³ and around twenty active clubs and associations,⁷⁴ seven of

⁷⁰ Ashworth, Gregory John, Brian Graham, and J. E. Tunbridge. 2007. *Pluralising pasts: heritage, identity and place in multicultural societies*. London: Pluto, p. 4.

⁷¹ Smith, Laurajane, Margaret Wetherell, and Gary Campbell (eds.). 2018. *Emotion, affective practices, and the past in the present*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 19.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷³ Landesratsamt Berchtesgadener Amt: Einwohnerzahl Markt Marktschellenberg. <https://www.lra-bgl.de/t/der-landkreis/gemeinden/markt-marktschellenberg/>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

⁷⁴ Gemeinde Marktschellenberg: Die Marktschellenberger Vereine und Ansprechpartner. <https://gemeinde.marktschellenberg.de/vereine>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

which are *Traditionsvereine* (heritage clubs). Being a member and belonging to local clubs and associations appears to be a significant feature of social life and it is referred to in diverse contexts, such as in campaign pamphlets for local municipal elections, in which the candidates are introduced with reference to their membership in local clubs. In addition, belonging to clubs is connected with village solidarity and a strong valuing of honorary offices. Charity events of clubs and associations in favour of other clubs or the village infrastructure are very common.

Addressing what Peter Geschiere calls the “‘return of the local’ in a world that believes it is globalizing”⁷⁵ in his study about re-emerging narratives of autochthony, I will concentrate on narratives of the past and attachment to place among members of a form of heritage club known as the *Weihnachtsschützenverein* (Christmas shooting club).

The roots of these contemporary clubs can be traced back to the sixteenth century, when people, mainly farmers, acquired weapons for defending, firstly their own property (*Lehen*) and later the country (*Landesverteidigung*) during the Spanish and Austrian wars of succession⁷⁶ in response to local fears that the wars would spread to the area.

The historical records show that during this time, local armed groups split into what are today known as the *Weihnachtsschützenvereine* (Christmas shooting clubs) and the *Fronleichnamsschützenverein* (Corpus Christi shooting club),⁷⁷ with the latter developing into the *Bürgergarde* (civil guards) to maintain the defence of the country, whereas the former continued to exist exclusively for ritualistic reasons such as performing “noise rituals” during the time of the winter solstice.

Rudolf Kriß, the former mayor of Berchtesgaden and honorary member of the head association of the Christmas shooting clubs, has written a book about these clubs that is widely read in the area.⁷⁸ He outlines the recurring prohibitions of the shooting club activities over time. To avoid bans and prohibitions, the shooters sought ties with the Catholic Church around 1800, starting to carry out their shooting events only on religious high festivals like Christmas and Corpus Christi. Today the clubs are tightly linked with the religious and social sphere of the villages, for example, serving as escorts at country weddings (*Bauernhochzeiten*) or funerals.

⁷⁵ Geschiere, Peter. 2009. *The perils of belonging: autochthony, citizenship, and exclusion in Africa and Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Arbeitskreis Ortschronik 1998. *Marktschellenberg: Aus der Geschichte der Marktgemeinde*. Berchtesgaden: Berchtesgadener Anzeiger.

⁷⁷ There are currently three active Christmas shooting clubs and one Corpus Christi shooting club in Marktschellenberg.

⁷⁸ Kriß, Rudolf. 1994. *Die Weihnachtsschützen des Berchtesgadener Landes und ihr Brauchtum*. Berchtesgaden: Berchtesgadener Anzeiger.

Currently there are seventeen shooting clubs consolidated under the head association *Vereinigte Weihnachtsschützen des Berchtesgadener Landes e.V.* which submitted a successful application for the organization's inclusion in the 2018 Bavarian list of intangible cultural heritage. As part of their application, the historical ambivalence of the head association was discussed and examined by a historian.

Due to their strong ties with the Catholic Church, during World War II the clubs were perceived by the National Socialists as associations of resistance and opposition. At the same time, the National Socialists were fascinated by the shooting performances and the strong connections and references to a perceived pure homeland (*Heimat*). In 1933 Hitler was named an honorary member of the Christmas shooting club head association and was saluted by club members on various occasions. Around this time many of the local clubs introduced National Socialist guidelines and accepted members of the NSDAP as active members. However, in its historical records the Christmas shooting club head association claims to have resisted appropriation by Hitler and the National Socialists.⁷⁹

Taking Peter Geschiere's argument of autochthony as the "most localizing variant" of belonging⁸⁰ as a point of discussion, I aim to trace the narratives of belonging to place and of feeling rooted and *einheimisch* (autochthonous, native) that are often referred to in relation to claims about the past within heritage clubs. These feelings of rootedness (*verwurzelt sein*) are strongly tied to ideas of the homeland (*Heimat*) and being native (*einheimisch*) and reverberate in historical and contemporary narratives among the members of Christmas shooting clubs. Kriß states:

*"Denn im Gegensatz zu den rasch wechselnden geistigen Modeströmungen der Stadt ist ja der ländliche Volksbrauch gerade das Bleibende, das Beharrsame, das nur langsam und wenig Wandelbare. Nur die in ihn Hineingeborenen, die in ihm zutiefst Verwurzelten, wissen um seinen im ahnungsvollen Dunkel schlummernden Sinn, wie um seine im Verborgenen webende Stärke."*⁸¹

("In contrast to the quickly changing intellectual styles of city dwellers, the rural custom is indeed one of continuity and persistence, one that is only slowly and sparsely changing. Only those who were born into the custom, those who are deeply rooted in it, know about its meaning slumbering in a darkness full of presentiment, or its hidden strength.")

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Geschiere, Peter. 2009. *The perils of belonging: autochthony, citizenship, and exclusion in Africa and Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. ix.

⁸¹ Kriß, Rudolf. 1994. *Die Weihnachtsschützen des Berchtesgadener Landes und ihr Brauchtum*. Berchtesgaden: Berchtesgadener Anzeiger, p.181.

Exploring intangible heritage-making processes and the ways narratives of the past are entangled with local ideas of rootedness and primordial belonging, I will analyse potential underlying mechanisms of exclusion that challenge other people’s rootedness. In doing so, I aim to gain insights into the foundations and functions of a shared understanding of the past and recourses to it and consider dissonances within social lifeworlds by paying close attention to multivocality within the clubs and as well the broader sphere of the village.

Exploring ruptures and dissonances within the scope of intangible heritage can be seen in relation to what Sharon MacDonald calls *past-presenting*:⁸² how the past is negotiated in the present to discuss cultural and social ambitions for the future. The 2018 listing of the tradition of Christmas shooting in the Bavarian list of intangible cultural heritage and the 2020 application for inclusion in Germany’s *Bundesweites Verzeichnis des immateriellen Kulturerbes* (Nationwide Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage), both strongly tied to the UNESCO framework can be regarded as a stage for divergent voices among the clubs and association members about ambitions for the future. For many communities inclusion in any of the UNESCO lists acts as a tool to promote heritage tourism. This stands in contrast with those who claim to perform not for the *tourist gaze*⁸³ meaning the images of local life which visitors see and capture while seeking an authentic heritage experience and which are then compared with the images reproduced on websites and photographs. Instead, they argue that their performance is exclusively grounded in a feeling of rootedness (*sich verwurzelt fühlen*) and a deep religiosity. These expressions of feelings are accompanied by aspirations to pass on their locally rooted tradition to the next generation, stating that it forms a basis for social cohesion in a changing world.

These observations open up room for further inquiries into multivocality within the village sphere as well as into the entanglements of heritage-making processes with economic or political spheres and possible strategic uses of it, which I will also consider in my research.

The methodological mainstay of the research will be participant observation in the village and within the club activities, performances and interactions with other heritage clubs, and the broader social sphere of village life. To engage with biographies and trace the heterogeneous voices of the community, I will employ life stories of club members as well as of non-members.

Another potential strand will be the analysis of the process for the 2018 listing of the tradition of Christmas shooting in the Bavarian list of intangible cultural heritage and the 2020 application for inclusion in Germany’s Nationwide Inventory of

⁸² MacDonald, Sharon. 2013. *Memorylands: heritage and identity in Europe today*. London: Routledge.

⁸³ Urry, John. 1990. *The tourist gaze: leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. London: Sage Publications.

Intangible Cultural Heritage. I plan to interview decision-makers and individuals who promoted the registration process as well as members of the tourist board, which strongly promotes heritage tourism and the tradition of Christmas shooting. Subsequently, a further methodological component will be the examination of private historical material as well as grey literature.



Local heritage club posing for a photoshoot. (Photo: Antje Berger, Roth-Kirchanschörling, 2020)

Following preliminary research in October 2019, initial findings point towards the significance of club life and honorary offices. I also encountered ambivalence towards owners of vacation homes in the area and towards plans for future economic developments, which often relate to tourism. These ambivalent attitudes were mingled with references to local identity. During field research starting in February 2020, I will trace these ambivalences and references to the local in the community of Marktschellenberg and within heritage-making processes.

Taking Stock: What the German-speaking Alps Reveal about Modernity and Its Discontents

Annika Lems

As these brief snapshots from two of the research sites show, the communities that the Research Group will focus on share many similarities: although located in remote Alpine regions, they have long histories of interconnection across Europe and are heavily dependent on global networks of exchange. All of our research sites developed into their modern form through reliance on tourism, and as such their identities have in many ways merged with their marketing images as the keepers of "pure", "authentic", and "traditional" values and ways of life. While all of them have a long history of supporting xenophobic parties, they have not experienced a significant influx of migrants or refugees. This deeply contradictory positioning between strong reliance on, and fierce opposition to, global, cosmopolitan influences make the communities particularly interesting places for undertaking a comparative study of the complex and at times paradoxical ways people create a sense of temporal continuity amidst the realities of a fast-changing world.

Importantly, a focus on Alpine communities that have often been described as hotbeds of reactionary politics in Europe⁸⁴ will allow the Research Group to make nuanced observations about the socio-historical trajectories of anti-cosmopolitan cultural practices. Rather than reverting to simplistic explanatory models that portray the current political backlash as abnormal deviance from a liberal order of things, our empirical focus will allow us to embed the current backlash against liberalism in wider histories of anti-cosmopolitan thought.

The German-speaking Alpine region has a long history of anti-Enlightenment thought and practice, as has been noted by several scholars, most prominently social theorist Isaiah Berlin⁸⁵ and anthropologist Douglas Holmes.⁸⁶ They have shown the crucial role this tradition played in the region's support for twentieth-century authoritarian movements. This distinct intellectual and cultural movement in Europe is based on a critique of the liberal, cosmopolitan ideas proposed by modernist projects of future-making. It found its strongest manifestation in German Romantic literature and thought. In this tradition the notion of alienation (*Entfremdung*) occupies centre stage, as it emphasizes the deep sense of uprooting that is believed

⁸⁴ D'Amato, Gianni. 2003. Ursachen des Rechtsextremismus: eine Programmatik für die sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung in der Schweiz. *Swiss Political Science Review* 9 (2): 89–106; Skenderovic, Damir. 2009. *The radical Right in Switzerland: continuity and change, 1945–2000*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.

⁸⁵ Berlin, Isaiah. 2000. *Three critics of the enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁸⁶ Holmes, Douglas R. 2000. *Integral Europe: fast-capitalism, multiculturalism, neofascism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

to be the effect of the “emptiness of cosmopolitanism” characterizing modernist and progressive ideals. The German-speaking Alpine region, and particularly the figure of the rural mountain peasant who is forced to break with his traditional cultural practices, played a crucial role in these anti-Enlightenment narratives. This sense of being displaced from one’s “natural territory” does not necessarily entail any form of physical dislocation. It is often purely figurative – a commonly shared sense that liberal, cosmopolitan agendas force people to break with their enduring traditions and attachments to a place in exchange for “rootless” lifestyles. Right-wing parties in Europe successfully tap into this tradition of counter-Enlightenment thought and the alternative political projects it presents. In the four Alpine communities studied by my Research Group these narratives play a crucial role in inhabitants’ projects of place-making and have contributed to the long-term success of right-wing parties.

In anthropology, such reactionary political projects are frequently placed outside modern time. As Ghassan Hage has argued, there is a long and strong liberal tradition in academia that treats the supposedly “sudden” spread of anti-cosmopolitan practices as a crisis.⁸⁷ A similar tendency can be found in much of the current analysis of the rise of the right across Europe. Here, anti-cosmopolitanism is, to use Hage’s words, “imagined as an aberration of an assumed nice, racism-free, democratic, and egalitarian normality”.⁸⁸ My decision to focus on the German-speaking Alpine region was propelled by the conviction that if we are to understand the current backlash against liberal and cosmopolitan ideas we need to stop treating it as an aberration and pay attention to the socio-cultural *genealogies* of exclusionary practices. In the communities studied by my Research Group, exclusionary and anti-cosmopolitan future imaginaries are not antithetical to modernity. They are inextricably linked to their modern manifestation.

By conducting in-depth ethnographic research in four regions with long traditions of anti-cosmopolitan thought and practice, my Research Group aims to produce more nuanced knowledge about the appeal of the right. A focus on communities that show great support for xenophobic, anti-immigrant ideas whilst not being confronted with significant numbers of migrants or refugees allows for a close examination of what Arlie Hochschild so poignantly describes as “the great paradox”:⁸⁹ the contradictory and deeply emotional motives that propel rural populations’ fear of cultural demise. Whilst studying the versions of the past that the inhabitants of these places seek out to combat this sense of estrangement, our task in the next phase of the project will be to carefully examine the production and social function of such exclusionary narratives.

⁸⁷ Hage, Ghassan. 2017. *Is racism an environmental threat?* London: Polity Press.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁹ Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American Right*. New York: New Press, p. 12.

Publications

Since the Research Group only began its activities in April 2019, it has not yet produced any published work. The publications listed below were produced as part of Annika Lems’ previous research activities at the University of Bern. While these publications have a different research focus (refugee youth), they discuss processes of social exclusion and othering that also form crucial points of departure for the Research Group.

Edited Volumes and Special Issues

- Lems, Annika and Jelena Tošić (eds.). 2019. *Special section: African-European trajectories of im/mobility; exploring entanglements of experiences, legacies, and regimes of contemporary migration*. *Migration and Society* 2(1).
- Lems, Annika, Kathrin Oester, and Sabine Strasser (eds.). 2019. *Children of the crisis: ethnographic perspectives on unaccompanied refugee youth in and en route to Europe*. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(2) ePub ahead of print.
- Tošić, Jelena and **Annika Lems** (eds.). 2019. *Stuck in motion: existential perspectives on movement and stasis in an age of containment*. *Suomen Antropologi* 44(2).

Chapters in Edited Volumes

- Oester, Kathrin and **Annika Lems**. 2019. Recht auf Bildung? Unbegleitete Minderjährige zwischen Inklusion und Exklusion. In: Anja Sieber Egger, Gisela Unterweger, Marianna Jäger, Melanie Kuhn, and Judith Hangartner (eds.). *Kindheit(en) in formalen, nonformalen und informellen Bildungskontexten: ethnografische Beiträge aus der Schweiz*. 1. ed. Kinder, Kindheiten und Kindheitsforschung 20. Wiesbaden: Springer, pp. 239–258. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-658-23238-2_12.

Articles in Thomson ISI (Web of Science) Listed Journals

- Lems, Annika. 2019. Being inside out: the slippery slope between inclusion and exclusion in a Swiss educational project for unaccompanied refugee youth. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(2) ePub ahead of print: DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2019.1584702.

- Lems, Annika, Kathrin Oester, and Sabine Strasser. 2019. Children of the crisis: ethnographic perspectives on unaccompanied refugee youth in and en route to Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(2) ePub ahead of print: DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2019.1584697.
- Chase, Elaine, Laura Otto, Milena Belloni, **Annika Lems**, and Ulrika Wernesjö. 2019. Methodological innovations, reflections and dilemmas: the hidden sides of research with migrant young people classified as unaccompanied minors. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(2) ePub ahead of print: DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2019.1584705.
- Loher, David, Sabine Strasser, Daniel Monterescu, Esra Dabağcı, Ester Gallo, Cris Shore, Akhil Gupta, Chandana Mathur, Lorena Anton, Rodica Zane, **Annika Lems**, Shahram Khosravi, Zeynep Sariaslan, Noel B. Salazar, Ainhoa Montoya, Marta Pérez, Uroš Kovač, Alice Tilche, Giacomo Loperfido, Patricia Matos, Kiri Santer, Eli Thorkelson. 2019. On politics and precarity in academia. *Social Anthropology* 27: 97–117. DOI: 10.1111/1469-8676.12695.

Articles in Journals

- Lems, Annika. 2019. Existential kinetics of movement and stasis: young Eritrean refugees' thwarted hopes of movement-through-education. *Suomen Antropologi* 44(2): 59–80. DOI: 10.30676/jfas.v44i2.77715.
- Lems, Annika and Jelena Tošić. 2019. Preface: Stuck in motion? Capturing the dialectics of movement and stasis in an era of containment. *Suomen Antropologi* 44(2): 3–19. DOI: 10.30676/jfas.v44i2.77714.
- Tošić, Jelena and **Annika Lems**. 2019. Introduction: African-European trajectories of im/mobility; exploring entanglements of experiences, legacies, and regimes of contemporary migration. *Migration and Society* 2(1): 1–11. DOI: 10.3167/arms.2019.020102.

Max Planck Research Group

‘How ‘Terrorists’ Learn –

**Re-considering the Tactical and Strategic Transformation
of Violent Movements and Organisations’**

Carolyn Görzig

co-authored by:

*Michael Fürstenberg, Florian Köhler, Imad Alsoos,
Regine Schwab, Almadan Orozbekova, Katharina Siebert*

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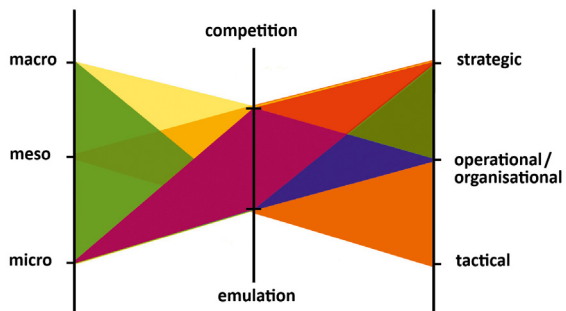
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Point of Departure

Carolin Görzig

Since its establishment in 2015, my Research Group has sought to understand the learning processes of so-called “terrorist” groups. Our departure point was a heuristic frame that I designed in order to fill a notable gap in the research. Specifically, while existing research has so far predominantly focused on factors influencing whether terrorist organizations are able to learn and innovate, this has distracted from what we argue is the more pertinent question of how they learn. In order to systematically study different aspects of learning, the project thus used a framework structured along three interrelated dimensions, covering (I) the context (from whom and what do they learn?), (II) mechanisms (how do they learn?), and (III) outcomes of the learning process (what do they learn?).

We started from the assumption that learning does not occur in a vacuum and identified the sources of terrorist groups’ learning. We distinguished between several contextual levels (I), ranging from the micro to the meso and macro level: Organizations can capitalize on their own experiences, whether successes or failures (micro level), as well as those of other non-state groups (meso level), for instance through training. Lastly, transformations are shaped in crucial ways by relationships to states that seek to repress violent movements or, alternatively, may sympathize with them (macro level). (II) The learning process can be described as driven mainly by mechanisms of emulation and competition; (III) learning outcomes take the form of changes in tactics, operational procedures, and overall strategies. We visualized this framework using parallel coordinates, which provide an overview of the different dimensions of learning (contextual levels, mechanisms, and outcomes – from left to right in the graph below). The different sub-projects of the Research Group (visualized with different colours) cover the different dimensions in a complementary way and thus collectively contribute to a broad understanding of the different facets of transformation. The following graph illustrates how the different sub-projects overlap and allow for comparative insight.



*The coloured components in the graph visualize the different projects of the Research Group.
(Graph designed by Michael Fürstenberg)*

Our findings are primarily based on the fieldwork that my interdisciplinary team and I have conducted in Colombia, Syria, Egypt, Niger, Palestine, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Spain, and Northern Ireland. Empirical research is invaluable for this endeavour, because direct contact with the research subject is the only way to truly grasp learning processes. Hearing members of terrorist groups reflect upon their activities in their own words enables us to understand the dilemmas they confront as well as their evolving attitudes towards conflict. While the possibilities for a truly ethnographic approach of participant observation are obviously very limited in the context of research on violent groups that operate outside legality, the institutional support provided by the MPI for our Research Group allowed us to follow another ideal of ethnographic research: that of long-term fieldwork over an entire year.

While the individual qualitative projects of our team members thus consider various processes of transformation of groups that use violent tactics, this is supplemented with analysis of (large-N) quantitative datasets about political violence and primary documents. As the work of the Research Group evolved, we also departed from the preliminary heuristic frame and we are currently in the stage of evaluating the findings we have gathered to date. In the following, we will first present the individual projects, followed by a brief summary of an evaluation of the preparation for and supervision of fieldwork that was conducted after team members returned from the field. After their return we also began to conduct comparative analysis of the sub-projects and assessed them in relation to the heuristic frame; this has produced several research findings, which we will present in the subsequent section of this report. In the final section I will give a brief outlook on what lies ahead of us.

Individual Projects

“Let’s fight each other another day”:

How Armed Opposition Groups Managed Challenges to Cooperation and Postponed Conflict in Syria’s Multiparty Civil War (2012–2019)

Regine Schwab

This thesis project explains how armed opposition groups manage the multiple challenges to cooperation in internationalized multiparty civil wars and is based on an in-depth analysis of three case studies of armed opposition group cooperation in the Syrian civil war. Despite the difficult context, I managed to gain access in the form of interviews in Arabic with actors who were or are active in the insurgency; I also collected and analysed thousands of primary documents that allowed me to grasp the inner workings of relationships between armed opposition groups.

In the interviews I conducted with members and commanders of major Syrian armed opposition groups I noticed that they were aware of both the incentives to

cooperate and the problems that impede cooperation. In order to achieve their joint goals under the uncertainty of war, they created cooperative institutions that reduce commitment problems. In order to limit violent conflict between groups, they relied on pre-existing local conflict management practices and institutions that were adapted to their new purpose in the context of large-scale violence. These findings differ from how classical institutionalist theories in international relations account for cooperation, since it does not work through formalization, but through a range of informal agreements¹ pertaining to cooperation in the military, judicial, and administrative domains. In line with a range of institutionalist approaches, I find that cooperation is also fostered by interdependence. Most importantly, rebels secure cooperation through disregarding the future – that is, sacrificing long-term organizational survival and rebel success for short-term military gains. This mechanism is particularly relevant in the most intensive type of cooperation which I call *partnership*. It also constitutes what I call the dilemma of cooperation: the necessity of cooperating with exploitive or internationally shunned actors such as jihadist groups in order to achieve (short-term) success, which, as was the case in Syria, can have negative long-term consequences for the rebel movement as a whole.

Through *inductive iteration* – that is in a recurring and transparent dialogue between data and theory² – I developed a typology and a preliminary typological theory of cooperation in multiparty civil wars that distinguishes three distinct types of relationship between armed opposition groups: *alignment*, *alliance*, and *partnership*. They are based on different starting conditions, implying a path dependence in terms of internal stabilization and the context and consequences of their transformation and potential breakdown.

Alignments occur in one place and in one or more domains of cooperation (military, administrative, judicial). Alliances occur mostly in the military domain in multiple places. Partnerships are types of relationships that occur in multiple places and domains, often over an extended period of time. As we can see from this, two dimensions characterize the type of cooperation: place and domain. An additional dimension relates to the quality of cooperation. I distinguished between high-scale and low-scale forms of cooperation based on the timeframe and the sacrifices organizations have to make concerning organizational identity, structures, and decision-making. This distinction proved highly relevant in the three types, with more low-scale forms such as defensive military operations being more prevalent in alignments, and more high-scale forms such as offensive operations and joint military and administrative bodies appearing in alliances and especially in partnerships.

¹ Lipson, Charles. 1991. Why are some international agreements informal? *International Organization* 45(4): 495–538.

² Yom, Sean. 2015. From methodology to practice: inductive iteration in comparative research. *Comparative Political Studies* 5(48).

The three types of relationship are represented empirically in my case study by the alignment between the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Syrian Islamist groups, and the Kurdish PYD; the alliance between the FSA, Syrian Islamist groups, Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), and ISIS; and the partnership between the FSA, Syrian Islamist groups, and JN. All of them occurred in an overlapping territory in northwestern Syria and to a lesser extent northeastern Syria. The alignment with the PYD and the alliance with ISIS ended completely, and the groups turned from temporary friends into foes. In contrast, the partnership with JN has survived by transforming into an alliance. The alignment with the PYD and the partnerships with JN also witnessed limited amounts of infighting. The alliance with ISIS is the only type that has experienced extended military confrontation on a massive scale. In fact, according to the UCDP definition of war as an armed conflict resulting in at least 1,000 deaths per year,³ one can speak of a war within a war, since casualties between ISIS and its former allies in 2014 had already exceeded 1,000 by mid-January. I show that the specific forms of conflict we observe are related to the nature of the preceding cooperation. In line with this, little infighting occurs in alignments, with a moderate amount in partnerships, and significant infighting in alliances.

***Collective Identity in Social Movement Organizations:
The Cases of Fatah, Hamas, and PFLP***

Katharina Siebert

In my research project, I focus on the collective identity of social movement organizations and specifically, how the nature of an organization's collective identity affects its actions. In this context, three Palestinian nationalist organizations serve as case studies: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah), and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). By comparing their collective identities and tracing the development of each group, my project sheds light on how differences in collective identity among social movement organizations translate into differences with regard to their behaviour, especially flexibility and change – a question which has not been sufficiently answered by the existing theoretical research on social movement organizations and the movements they support. My project addresses this gap by identifying the causal effects of collective identity on the actions of a social movement organization. To this end, I have developed a theoretical instrument to systematically assess the collective identities of social movement organizations, thus identifying their variations and making them comparable.

³ Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Department of Peace and Conflict Research. Definitions: War. <https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>. Accessed 16 April 2020.

My overall method of data collection was qualitative and characterized by a strong ethnographic approach, which included a one-year period of field research. Field research is understood here as “research based on personal interaction with research subjects in their own setting”.⁴ I was able to conduct interviews with activists and experts, observe the political landscape, collect documents, and gain a broad understanding of the context. My field research not only provided me with invaluable data and many insights, but also allowed me to learn about fieldwork itself. As Adam Dolnik points out, field research in the context of terrorism research “is about so much more than data collection. In fact, it could be argued that it is the process itself that plays the more crucial role of educating the researcher and deepening his or her knowledge about the context, and everyday realities in which the perpetrators, supporters and victims [...] operate”.⁵ I am planning to finish my thesis by the end of 2020 and it is therefore too early to formulate definite results. Nevertheless, on a theoretical level, two preliminary hypotheses can already be formulated: (1) The more congruence exists among members of a social movement organization regarding its collective identity (i.e., the more the individual members are in agreement with each other about the goals of the group), the more likely its actions will be based on its identity. Conversely, the less congruence a group has, the more likely its actions will be based on interests. (2) If a group perceives congruent parts of its identity as not recognized or even as threatened by its environment, it will act based on identity. A group will act based on interest only if the decision does not concern or threaten congruent aspects of its identity.

The Making of Foreign Fighters: The Case of Kyrgyzstan

Almakan Orozobekova

The presence and development of the Islamic State and other violent Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq resulted in the arrival of foreign fighters in great numbers. More than 40,000 individuals from more than 100 countries ended up in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.⁶ Numerous foreign fighters came from Central Asia, but so far there is a lack of primary data and analysis of these fighters. This research project

⁴ Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2009. Field research. In: Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 123.

⁵ Dolnik, Adam. 2011. Conducting field research on terrorism: a brief primer. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 5 (2): 3–35, p. 7.

⁶ El-Said, Hamed, and Richard Barrett. 2017. *Enhancing the understanding of the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon in Syria*. UNOCT Paper, New York, p. 3; Barrett, Richard. 2017. *Beyond the caliphate: foreign fighters and the threat of returnees*. The Soufan Center Report, New York, p. 9–13; Meines, Marije, Merel Molenkamp, Omar Ramadan, and Magnus Ranstorp. 2017. *Responses to returnees: foreign terrorist fighters and their families*. Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence Manual, Amsterdam, p. 6.

focuses on foreign fighters from one country in this under-explored region, namely Kyrgyzstan. Specifically, the project asks: Why did individuals from Kyrgyzstan join violent Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq? The fieldwork showed that although the main research question was concerned with people's motivations, a range of other aspects of this phenomenon were equally relevant, such as who these individuals were and how they managed to get to the conflict zones and join the militant groups. With this in mind, the following sub-questions were formulated to supplement the main research question: What are the profiles of the people who became foreign fighters? How did this profiles influence the decision to go to the conflict zones? What is known about these individuals prior to their travel to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq? Specifically, what happened to them before their departure? How did they arrange to go to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq and make contact with violent Islamist groups? In sum, this study attempts to understand the contemporary phenomenon of foreign fighters based on analysis of individual fighters from a particular region.

Official reports indicate that more than 800 Kyrgyzstanis were recruited to and joined various violent Islamist organizations operating in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.⁷ My PhD thesis is based on empirical data that I collected during fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, specifically the analysis of 40 cases involving a total of 101 men, women, and children. Observation and semi-structured interviews were the main methods of data collection. I interviewed the respondents in free settings; in the case of returnees, these were individuals who had already been released from imprisonment and were on probation. Research of this kind required permission from state institutions in Kyrgyzstan. I selected the returnees and families/relatives according to their willingness to share their stories. Additional interviews were conducted with local experts such as imams, scholars, journalists, and public officials. Given the topic and personal concerns of the respondents, great care was taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

An exploratory approach served as the basis for this study. The analysis of the empirical data showed that (1) a majority of those who went to the conflict areas had worked as labour migrants either in Russia or in Turkey and (2) had been recruited via kinship and friendship ties. Some of them (3) gave religious reasons to explain their choice, and in several cases, there were (4) additional factors that intersected with the previous explanations and also shed light on their reasons for going to Syria and Iraq. The local experts' narratives did not necessarily contradict the ones of the returnees and families/relatives, but they were somewhat different when it comes to their assessment of role of religious reasoning and of general processes of recruitment.

With regard to the processes of recruitment, the research revealed a variety of different contexts, mechanisms and motivating factors, notably recruitment in the

⁷ Matveeva, Anna. 2018. Radicalisation and violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan: on the way to the caliphate. *The RUSI Journal* 163 (1): 30–46, p. 32.

context of labour migration, recruitment through social networks (kinship and friendship ties), and religiously motivated recruitment.⁸ With regard to labour migration, the data did not indicate a clear causal link between labour migration and foreign fighting. However, in more than half of the cases out of the total of 40 who became foreign fighters, individuals had been labour migrants, either in Russia or Turkey. Although labour migration causes certain vulnerabilities, it was not the main factor behind individuals' decision to go to the conflict zones. Life as a labour migrant can rather be considered a social space where there is a higher chance of being recruited or mobilized for violent Islamist organizations abroad. Another important finding is that social networks are a major element that can be both a cause for travelling to the war zones and a means of facilitating travel. In slightly less than half of the cases, people were recruited through kinship or friendship networks. Interestingly, a few of the individuals who were recruited via social networks were labour migrants. Generally speaking, the social network model of recruitment was based on chain reactions, i.e. it involved one person after another and depended on the level of trust between individuals. Another motivating factor was religion, and increasing religiosity before travelling to the conflict zones was cited in several cases. A few of the respondents who referred to religious reasoning were also part of a social network pattern of recruitment, and in some cases, they were also labour migrants. Some respondents cited religious motives for going to the combat zones, such as having a great desire to help suffering Muslims, or being blessed by Allah and going to heaven. However, a close look at the profiles of the respective individuals showed that they did not have an advanced understanding of Islam and that they had not previously been affiliated with religious radical or violent extremist groups before travelling to the war zones. It is important to note that in a majority of cases, kinship and friendship relations were still involved even when religious reasons were put forward as the motivation.

Finally, I identified various additional factors that are either directly or indirectly related to those mentioned above. Thus, the Internet played a certain role in the recruitment process in most of the cases, albeit more of a supporting role than a primary one. In some cases, individuals ended up in the conflict areas following earlier travel to Turkey, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, and there are examples of parents who made a trip to Syria to get their grown-up children back, yet in the end were themselves unable to get back out of the conflict zones. In other cases, becoming

⁸ Forest, James. 2006. Exploring the recruitment of terrorists: an introduction. In: James Forest (ed.). *The making of a terrorist: recruitment, training, and root causes, Volume I: Recruitment*. London: Praeger Security International, p. 2; Rahmonova-Schwarz, Delia. 2012. *Family and transnational mobility in post-Soviet Central Asia: labour migration from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to Russia*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 16, 72–75; Holman, Timothy. 2016. 'Gonna get myself connected': the role of facilitation in foreign fighter mobilizations. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10 (2), p. 3; Louw, Maria. 2013. Even honey may become bitter when there is too much of it: Islam and the struggle for a balanced existence in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. *Central Asian Survey* 32 (4), p. 515.

a foreign fighter was not an entirely voluntary decision: individuals got job offers in Turkey, but shortly after arrival were trafficked to Syria. Finally, in a few cases it was not clear why and how individuals were recruited to Syria or Iraq, and they claimed to have been recruited by somebody “unknown”. All these cases indicate how actively violent Islamist groups were involved in making individuals come to the combat zones, either by force or by convincing and supporting them. In sum, my thesis contributes to addressing knowledge gaps regarding the making of foreign fighters from Kyrgyzstan. Although no single profile of foreign fighters exists and the findings cannot be generalized to all fighters from Kyrgyzstan, these cases help to explain the process of recruitment and mobilization to Syria and Iraq and show that there are certain interrelated patterns or categories that can explain why and how individuals end up in the combat zones.

PhD Thesis Defence Almakan Orozobekova

“The Making of Foreign Fighters: The Case of Kyrgyzstan”

5 March 2020



*Almakan Orozobekova (second from the right) with her PhD defence committee at the University of Freiburg.
(Photo: Philipp Schröder)*

*Doctoral cap presented
by the Research Group
“How ‘Terrorists’ Learn”.*



***The Menu of Political Violence:
Strategic Choices and Learning of Terrorist Groups***

Michael Fürstenberg

Political violence is not incidental, random, or involuntary, but a product of human agency. Militant actors have specific reasons to consider, decide upon, and carry out acts of violence – they expect a certain result or outcome that is related to particular needs, desires, or preferences. Political violence in general, and terrorism in particular, is a means to an end, even if this relationship may not always follow a classic rational choice logic but instead fulfils other functions, like social integration. While terrorism can therefore be considered a specific form of political violence, it is not categorically different from other forms and, hence, should be considered in the larger context of armed conflict in general. In my work I concentrate on conflict constellations in which organized militant challengers confront state powers; such constellations can most accurately be classified as “insurgencies”.⁹ A variety of technologies and forms of violence can be employed to wage insurgencies, akin to a “menu” or “repertoire” from which actors can choose given certain constraints.¹⁰ This menu includes terrorism – and in choosing that option, actors are still in a fundamental sense insurgents, even if the label “terrorist” may be applied in addition.¹¹ Thus, the questions of why and how these actors choose to employ or refrain from terrorism, and what consequences these choices entail, are important to understand larger processes of learning and change.

Unfortunately, the study of political violence has long been hampered by disciplinary divides, both between the disciplines themselves, be it political science, anthropology, organizational sociology, or psychology, and between different approaches within disciplines. Most of the literature treats terrorism and (guerrilla) warfare as different phenomena, coinciding but following distinct logics. As Ekaterina Stepanova argues, however, terrorism and armed conflict “do not merely overlap” – rather, terrorism is “integral to many contemporary conflicts and should be studied in the broader context of armed violence”.¹²

⁹ Moghadam, Assaf, Ronit Berger, and Polina Beliakova. 2014. Say terrorist, think insurgent: labeling and analyzing contemporary terrorist actors. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8(5): 2–17.

¹⁰ McCormick, Gordon H. 2003. Terrorist decision making. *Annual Review of Political Science* 6(1): 482–483; Tilly, Charles. 2004. Terror, terrorism, terrorists. *Sociological Theory* 22(1): 5–13.

¹¹ Phillips, Brian J. 2015. What is a terrorist group? Conceptual issues and empirical implications. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27(2): 225–42.

¹² Stepanova, Ekaterina. 2008. *Terrorism in asymmetric conflict: ideological and structural aspects*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 1; Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan. 2013. Rebel tactics. *Journal of Political Economy* 121(2): 323–57.

The endeavour to relate ends to means is what we commonly define as strategy.¹³ Terrorism can be a tactic within a larger strategy of armed violence as well as a strategy in its own right.¹⁴ The latter is usually employed only by weak, underground groups as a way to jumpstart their violent campaign when they have few alternative capabilities and thereby to ensure their survival and achieve important process goals that ideally allow them to grow into a more potent threat.¹⁵ However, terrorism has also important drawbacks, most importantly in that it elicits revulsion in the population and delegitimizes the perpetrators both at home and in the eyes of the international community. Moreover, from a strategic point of view, terrorism's "very affordability undermines its value as a credible signal".¹⁶ For groups that grow stronger and are able to choose from a wider repertoire of violence, therefore, terrorism should become an increasingly unattractive option. Neumann and Smith call this the "escalation trap", which describes the point after which the negative effects of a terrorist strategy begin to outweigh its advantages.¹⁷ However, statistics show that many strong groups *do*, in fact, fall into this trap, as the bulk of terrorism is actually employed and directed by comparatively strong non-state actors who are also engaged in more conventional warfare.¹⁸

In order to look at the effects of the escalation trap, I undertook a quantitative study on the willingness of governments to enter into negotiations with insurgent groups that use terrorist tactics.¹⁹ In spite of the oft-repeated mantra that governments "do not negotiate with terrorists", there is ample evidence that this is in fact not always the case.²⁰ However, most studies have looked at terrorism in isolation, rather than as

¹³ Till, Geoffrey. 2008. The evolution of strategy and the new world order. In: Craig A. Snyder (ed.). *Contemporary security and strategy*. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 95.

¹⁴ Neumann, Peter R. 2013. The trouble with radicalization. *International Affairs* 89(4), p. 878; Duyvesteyn, Isabelle, and Mario Fumerton. 2011. Insurgency and terrorism: is there a difference? In: Caroline Holmqvist-Jonsäter and Christopher Coker (eds.). *The character of war in the 21st century*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 27–41; Neumann, Peter R., and M.L.R. Smith. 2008. *The strategy of terrorism: how it works, and why it fails*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.

¹⁵ Abrahms, Max. 2012. The political effectiveness of terrorism revisited. *Comparative Political Studies* 45(3): 366–93; Findley, Michael G., and Joseph K. Young. 2012. Terrorism and civil war: a spatial and temporal approach to a conceptual problem. *Perspectives on Politics* 10(2): 285–305.

¹⁶ Fortna, Virginia P. 2015. Do terrorists win? Rebels' use of terrorism and civil war outcomes. *International Organization* 69(3): 519–556, p. 527.

¹⁷ Neumann and Smith, *The strategy of terrorism*, pp. 76–93.

¹⁸ LaFree, Gary, and Laura Dugan. 2016. Global terrorism and the deadliest groups since 2001. In: David A. Backer, Ravi Bhavnani, and Paul K. Huth (eds.). *Peace and conflict 2016*. New York: Routledge, pp. 67–78; Polo, S.M., and K.S. Gleditsch. 2016. Twisting arms and sending messages: terrorist tactics in civil war. *Journal of Peace Research* 53(6): 815–29.

¹⁹ Fürstenberg, Michael. 2017. A technique, not a policy? Negotiations in internal armed conflicts under the shadow of terrorism. Paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, Oslo, 6–9 September 2017.

²⁰ Neumann, Peter R. 2007. Negotiating with terrorists. *Foreign Affairs* 86(1): 128–38; Thomas, Jakana. 2014. Rewarding bad behavior: how governments respond to terrorism in civil war. *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4): 804–18.

part of a larger arsenal used by insurgents. This can be misleading, as negotiations could be mainly the result of more conventional military pressure. By combining data on terrorism and armed conflict, the analysis confirmed that the interplay between tactics should not be ignored: While the extent of terrorist violence on its own neither clearly enhances nor reduces the likelihood of negotiations, looking at the combined effect of violence against civilians and government soldiers reveals that military means become less effective in securing a seat at the table as terrorism increases. In accordance with the literature suggesting that terrorism is actually counterproductive for groups capable of exerting pressure in other ways,²¹ insurgents that are strong enough to escalate fighting to higher levels actually reduce their chances of entering negotiations when they also engage in deadly terrorist activity.

Militant groups are, as I hinted at above, usually not fanatics using mindless violence as an end in itself. Rather, they are in principle able to reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of various strategies and tactics and adjust their choices accordingly. For example, there is evidence to suggest that stronger insurgents are conscious of the counterproductive effects of terrorism and learn to change their tactics in order to avoid them.²² Of course, such learning processes take time and not all groups adapt successfully. One common argument is that transformations are harder for organizations with radical ideologies.²³ To assess learning in such "hard cases", we looked at strategic transformations of the Al-Qaeda network from the perspective of an organizational learning approach.²⁴ We carefully traced the evolution of the central leadership in its interaction with its local affiliates, using primary and secondary sources that we viewed through the prism of "double-loop learning", a concept developed in the field of organizational studies.²⁵ The analysis revealed a local turn that married a more conciliatory approach towards Muslim civilians and independent armed actors with a renewed focus on anti-regime insurgency. In essence, while not totally abandoning terrorism, jihadist leaders explicitly recognized and partially remedied the negative consequences of this tactic.

As these examples show, terrorism as a strategy-based phenomenon can only be understood within the larger context of political violence and insurgencies. Militant groups evaluate their choices in a particular situation – even if this often happens imperfectly and slowly and not always successfully – and they are able to learn strategically.

²¹ Fortna, Do terrorists win?.

²² Sederberg, Peter C. 1995. Conciliation as counter-terrorist strategy. *Journal of Peace Research* 32(3): 295–312; Stanton, Jessica A. 2013. Terrorism in the context of civil war. *The Journal of Politics* 75 (04): 1009–22.

²³ McCormick, Gordon H. 2003. Terrorist decision making; Hafez, Mohammed M. 2018. Fratricidal jihadists: why Islamists keep losing their civil wars. *Middle East Policy* 25(2): 86–99.

²⁴ Fürstenberg, Michael, and Carolin Görzig. 2020. Learning in a double loop: the strategic transformation of Al-Qaeda. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14(1): 26–38.

²⁵ Argyris, Chris, and Donald A. Schön. 1978. *Organizational learning: a theory of action perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Mobilization Strategies: Discursive and Organizational Analysis

Imad Alsoos

While I initially focused my investigation on processes and strategies of Hamas's mobilization in Gaza and the West Bank, I also conducted fieldwork on the Basque left-nationalist movement ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, "Basque Homeland and Liberty") in 2019. My comparative approach enabled me to observe organizational mechanisms in two geographically and ideologically distant groups, specifically an Islamist and an ethnoseparatist group. My main premise is that a critical perspective cannot be developed simply by analysing external factors of mobilization. Therefore, I focus particularly on intra-group dynamics.

Taking Hamas as an example of how an Islamic group organizes itself and frames its discourse in order to survive in a highly volatile environment, remain cohesive, and maintain its mobilization potential, I applied discourse analysis and frame analysis to its statements and organizational dynamics since its inception in 1987.²⁶ My empirical analysis showed that Hamas's discourse was characterized by three stages of framing processes: (1) a framing discourse around a certain interpretation of Islam (1987–1993); (2) the de-framing of religious conditionality (1993–2000); and (3) a reframing discourse around the concept of *muqawama* (resistance) and its transformation into a floating signifier (2000–present). "Floating signifiers" appear in times of "crisis" when demands are non-achievable.²⁷ When Hamas achieved political representation in the Palestinian government but failed to fulfil electoral promises, the concept of *muqawama* transformed to frame the inability of meeting promises.

With regard to organizational dynamics, my three central questions are: (1) how does Hamas mobilize, educate and train its own activists, (2) how do these activists then go on to form their internal organizational structures, and (3) how do they mobilize the public within their own local communities? I examine the three principal structures of Hamas: First, the *Da'wa* Apparatus crystallizes the centralized hierarchy which runs all activities. Second, the Families of the *Da'wa* internally educate and train activists. Finally, the Family of the Mosque illustrates how these qualified activists externally mobilize the people in their local communities. The interaction between internal and external forms of organized mobilization illuminates Hamas's organizational resilience and its continuously successful mobilization in a highly

²⁶ Lindekilde, Lasse. 2014. Discourse and frame analysis: in-depth analysis of qualitative data in social movement research. In: Donatella Della Porta (ed.). *Methodological practices in social movement research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 195–227.

²⁷ Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and socialist strategy: toward radical democratic politics*. London: Verso, p. 136.

volatile environment. To frame Hamas's capacities for mobilization through the three aforementioned bodies, I built on the concept of "organizational strength".²⁸

I conclude that (1) the focus on organizational strength does not presuppose that religion, ideology, loyalty, and social services are inconsequential; rather, it recognizes *ceteris paribus* that other traits are also relevant. Long-term organizational resilience is complex and many organizational factors presumably play a role in achieving it. Most Hamas members are believing Muslims, but their personal differences with regard to organizational capabilities and social credentials are key for explaining members' upward mobility within the movement. Additionally (2), radical and strong religious and ideological identity and personalistic leadership do not always lead to greater cohesion and continuity, but instead sometimes lead to factionalism and rupture. Finally (3), mobilization of the public is not achieved through indirect interaction, but through direct personalized interactions through organized bodies that are able to translate services into political gains such as electoral victories.

For more insight into the dynamics of organizational strength from a comparative perspective, I turned to the ETA, examining its emergence, continuity, and ultimate dissolution between 1959 and 2018. Primary findings show three phases of organizational dynamics. The first is the period between 1959 and 1973, when ETA pushed for various social issues such as women's rights and the labour movement. During the second period, between 1973 and 1981, the Basque group restructured itself to adapt to political realities of democratic transition in Spain. In this process, decision-making was formalized and streamlined, making ETA an inclusive political party rather than a mere military group. Finally, after 1981, ETA restructured the organization by dissolving the political wing and giving absolute power to the military command. ETA thus shifted from a path that provided organizational strength (an inclusive political party) to one of organizational weakness (military rule). The continued control of the group by military personnel weakened the movement's social-political dynamics. Personalistic and military rule, a lack of clear procedures for decision-making, weak communication, and personal loyalty created what I call the organizational weakness of ETA. This resulted in internal demands for the dissolution of ETA and eventually the announcement on 2 May 2018 that it was voluntarily disbanding.

To sum up, I examine and theorize both organizational strength and organizational weakness. So far, Hamas has shown strength and resilience by adapting its internal organization to external changing realities, while ETA, by contrast, had a military rule that resulted in inflexibility and eventual dissolution. Nevertheless, one must take into consideration that ETA lasted for seven decades but Hamas is still at the beginning of its fourth decade – that is, new challenges might lead to organizational weakness within Hamas.

²⁸ Tavits, Margit. 2012. Organizing for success: party organizational strength and electoral performance in postcommunist Europe. *The Journal of Politics* 74(1): 83–97.

*The Boko Haram Crisis and Socio-political Dynamics in Eastern Niger**Florian Köhler*

My project is about the Boko Haram (BH)²⁹ insurgency in the West African Lake Chad region with a focus on eastern Niger. I began studying this region in 2004 and it has been my principal terrain of anthropological research over the past decade; I build on this work as a post-doctoral researcher in the Research Group since 2018. While BH originated in north-eastern Nigeria, the neighbouring region in Niger was affected by spill-over effects from early on, due to the close social and economic ties between the two regions. BH attracted supporters in Niger and when police repression in Nigeria started, Niger – as well as Cameroon and Chad – increasingly served as zones for withdrawal. The porous borders between the four states in the Lake Chad basin constitute a significant tactical asset in this regard.

Building on a well-established network of contacts in the region and on solid background knowledge about the relevant social groups, their interaction, and their conflicts, one important approach in my research has been at the examination of the socio-political dynamics that the Boko Haram crisis has caused in the region. To this end, I conducted one month of field research in eastern Niger in May 2018. An important underlying assumption of this approach is that the local populations, as much as they have been suffering from the violence, are not mere passive victims, but also rational agents who attempt to weigh risks against options and opportunities, and take conscious decisions. With the arrival of BH in the region, a number of pre-existing inter-community conflicts developed new dynamics. Some actors regarded the presence of BH as helpful for their own agendas, which has led to various types of local support and forms of collaboration. BH profits from using and manipulating such local dynamics to its own ends and for forging alliances.

Over time, especially after the IS-affiliated ISWAP faction of BH established its base in the interior of Lake Chad, some areas in eastern Niger have also become an important zone for economic exploitation. While Lake Chad is a complex border area with extremely difficult access and very limited control by any of the surrounding states, the lake also constitutes a crucial resource for the main economic activities of the arid Sahel region, particularly irrigated agriculture, fishing, and pastoralism. By infiltrating the area and building alliances with locals, ISWAP managed to establish

²⁹ Boko Haram is an exonym and rejected by the group, which refers to itself as Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād (JAS, Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad). In 2015, when it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, it also adopted the name al-Wilāya al-Islāmiyya Gharb Afriqiyah (Islamic State West Africa Province, ISWAP). After a split in 2016, one of the major factions returned to using the JAS label, making JAS and ISWAP two distinct groups. In the following, I will refer to the broader movement and the group before the split as BH, while ISWAP and JAS refer specifically to the post-split groups.

control over significant parts of the production chains for the dried fish and pepper trades, thus creating significant sources of financial income.

Since its emergence in the early 2000s, BH has thus established itself as a regional player through a process of integration on the regional social landscape – integration understood not in the sense of acculturation or assimilation, but as interaction in a wider systemic whole that can also be characterized by conflictual relations.³⁰ This implies a view of BH not as a player outside of society, but as one which is part of it and takes part in social processes. The social embedding makes it possible to analyse the learning processes of BH in a broader systemic perspective, thus avoiding a reductive analysis that sees these processes as merely tactical and strategic adaptations for survival. Instead, these developments are understood as the result of processes of social interaction between different groups.

I supplement my field research with the study of primary source material to make sense of internal processes and developments within BH through the lens of learning processes. A split within the movement in 2016 that entailed a strategy change also significantly facilitated closer forms of interaction and economic exchange between locals and BH. Prior to this, starting around 2012 under the leadership of hard-liner Abubakar Shekau, BH had lost much of the popular support that it had enjoyed in its formative years, due to its strategy of extreme violence and intimidation that massively targeted Muslim civilians. Internal documents reveal contentious discussions within BH about this issue, with a group of internal critics arguing for reform towards a more limited use of violence, both on ideological and strategic grounds.³¹ An analysis of the available primary sources reveals that the critics reflected upon organizational action patterns, identified strategically and ideologically problematic elements of organizational practice, and proposed concrete changes in that practice. On this basis, the dispute can be interpreted as part of a process of organizational learning.

While these internal dynamics show how logics of de-radicalization of violent organizations can be triggered internally, they also reveal the limiting factors for such processes of moderation on the organizational level: internal power structures within BH – specifically the autocratic leadership of Abubakar Shekau – blocked the transformation process and impeded implementation of the proposed changes. Eventually, a split was the only way that it was possible for the critics’ faction (now the ISWAP faction) to implement their policy of a more restricted use of violence, which in turn indeed allowed them to better reconnect to the popular support base.

³⁰ See Schlee, Günther. 2003. Integration und Konflikt. *Entwicklungsethnologie* 12(1+2): 74–95.

³¹ *Cutting out the tumour from the Khawarij of Shekau by the allegiance pledge of the people of nobility. By the two brothers, the sons of Sheikh Abu Yusuf al-Barnawi, may God protect them.* Translated by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi. <http://www.aymennjawad.org/21476/the-boko-haram-allegiance-pledge-to-islamic-state>. Accessed 17 April 2020; Exposé: an open letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur. 2018. In: Abdulbassit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa (eds.). *The Boko Haram reader: from Nigerian preachers to the Islamic State*. London: Hurst.

The new forms of interaction with locals that the reforms facilitated also show that BH was quite capable of capitalizing upon weaknesses and errors of the state(s). Like armed social movements, the states that they challenge also face the problem that if the strategies they adopt come with too high costs for the civilian population, they are likely to lose support. Thus, some of the anti-insurgency measures, both in Niger and in the other affected states, were extremely unpopular, as they either hampered economic activities or caused extreme social hardship. For example, markets were closed, the commerce of fish and red pepper forbidden, and the circulation of motorbikes restricted. Even chemical fertilizer was banned on the grounds that it can be used in the production of improvised explosive devices. The most important measure, however, was the restriction of access to crucial economic spaces and their resources, which deprived significant numbers of people of their production base. All this had the effect that the political rulers' already weak moral credibility further eroded and many rural actors were driven to adopt strategies to circumvent state restrictions and to form alliances with the insurgents. In this situation, the strategy change towards a less violence-dominated interaction with rural local populations enabled ISWAP to successfully position itself as a real alternative to the state. In the areas under its control, ISWAP established a form of proto-governance and began to fulfil some of the functions that the states in the Lake Chad basin failed to provide to their citizens. The group thus assumed the role of a would-be state, levying taxes and in return offering access to crucial economic resources that the state prohibited local populations from using. At the same time, this strategy assured the insurgents economic rewards.

After BH's split, ISWAP emerged as the stronger faction, while the other faction, JAS, continued their strategy of violence against civilians but has also managed to remain a relevant, albeit weaker actor. Recent internal turmoil and repeated leadership changes in ISWAP suggest that there is still significant internal strife about the role of the use of violence against civilians, and it remains to be seen whether hardliners or moderates will in the end prevail, and with what results.

Understanding and Influencing Dynamics of Learning and Unlearning Violence

Carolin Görzig

Field research in situations of violence and conflict is characterized not only by practical and security issues, but also by serious ethical challenges. For this reason it is important to note that understanding why terrorist groups employ violence does not mean forgiving violence.³² In my project, I am motivated by a desire to gain

³² Schlee, Günther. 2014. *How terrorists are made*. Research outlook. Annual Report 2014 of the Max Planck Society, p. 23.

insight into dynamics of learning and unlearning violence. From this I aim to draw conclusions about radicalization and de-radicalization as well as the possibilities for influencing these dynamics.

One method commonly employed to try to influence terrorist activities is exerting pressure on terrorist groups – for example, through violent counterterrorism measures. However, how effective can learning under pressure actually be? Researchers from various disciplines have observed that, instead of bringing about a true change in attitude, pressure only leads to changes in routine behaviour and what is learned is not internalized. When people learn under pressure, their main goal is frequently to make the pressure stop; the specific things they learn during this process are of secondary importance to them. Does this mean that terrorist organizations only act and react rather than learn? When terrorist organizations are under pressure and operate underground and in isolation, it is hard to imagine that these conditions are conducive to profound learning, or what is known as double-loop learning. Double-loop learning, a concept developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, implies that not only objectives but also the norms and values underlying objectives are questioned, for example by the leadership of an organization.³³ Double-loop learning thus redefines the rules of low-level or single-loop learning. Whereas the latter describes, for example, a decision within an organization to make a specific change, double-loop learning involves questioning the implicit rules of decision-making. Since leaders within organizations frequently are not aware of these rules, examples of double-loop learning are empirically hard to find. This project will trace such learning processes by analysing the cooperation between terrorist groups, and more specifically by examining how leaders exchange knowledge about rules of decision-making, as exemplified in the inner-Islamist debate between the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya and Al Qaeda, or the IRA's dialogue with the ANC. Moreover, why do terrorist groups that are geographically and ideologically distant – for example the IRA and the Tamil Tigers – learn from each other? Or, to cite a more recent example, what do contemporary right-wing terrorists learn from the nineteenth-century anarchists, from left-wing-extremists, or from Islamists? Moreover, the rules of decision-making of terrorist organizations are also defined by the dynamics of the conflict they are involved in. Processes of learning are linked to integration in conflict structures, a focus that our Research Group shares with the Institute's Department 'Integration and Conflict' led by Günther Schlee from April 1999 to July 2019.

When conditions do not support learning on a meta-level, terrorist organizations still learn within the parameters of the conflict, changing their tactics and strategies. Theoretically, changes in tactics seem like a more likely response to pressure than

³³ Argyris, Chris, and Donald A. Schön. 1978. *Organizational learning: a theory of action perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley; Argyris, Chris, and Donald A. Schön. 1996. *Organizational learning II: theory, method and practice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

changes in strategies, which should be more robust. However, if the idea of making strategic shifts was already present before the introduction of pressure, the pressure may serve as a welcome window of opportunity. Conflict mediators emphasize that in order to bring about moderation of terrorist groups, exerting pressure has to be combined with offering them a way out: without pressure, they do not take the way out, and without a way out, pressure will not work. Hence, I also look at instances of providing a way out – for example, through recognition – as an additional possibility for inducing change. Can external recognition bring about self-recognition of violent groups? What is the result of recognition by allies or enemies? How do pressure and recognition affect moderates in comparison with radicals? Pressure and recognition often serve as arguments or justifications for reinforcing identity and hence support a certain course of action rather than inspiring profound course corrections. This raises the question: how do changes in beliefs come about and under what conditions do organizations question the rules of the game of decision-making, for example by questioning conflict dynamics? In their books on their ceasefire initiative, the Gamaa Islamiya questions the rationality of their previous approach. In their writings they touch upon issues which sound familiar in the context of just war theory. They also ponder intentions and consequences, concluding that they did not have the capability – i.e. the power – to have the intended impact.³⁴ Their further elaboration on the principle of balance in jurisprudence and their re-interpretation of sharia highlight that the analysis of de-radicalization also needs to consider legal elements, topics also relevant to the Institute's Department 'Law & Anthropology'.

As the Gamaa Islamiya put it, a human being does not have two lives, one to have experiences and another to learn from these experiences: rather, both experience and learning have to be accomplished within a single life.³⁵ With this in mind, one desired research outcome of this project would be that the knowledge acquired on radicalization and de-radicalization processes and the mechanisms of (un)learning violence provide a fruitful resource not only for academia, but also for practical application by decision-makers, conflict mediators, and those working with communities at risk of radicalization. The project thus aims to learn from others' experience as well as provide a source for others to experience learning.

The de-radicalization of the Gamaa Islamiya is not a unique process, and movements all over the world have exchanged violence for peaceful processes. The Provisional Irish Republican Army, for example, convinced its followers to support a course of moderation by arguing that they were changing the means rather than the ends, and that the new approach did not equal surrender. The astonishing similarities in the arguments employed by leaders from different movements suggest that it is

³⁴ 'Abd al-Azim, Hamdi 'Abd-al-Rahman, Najih Ibrahim, and Ali Mohammad al-Sharif. 2002. *Taslit al-adwa 'alama waga'fi' al-jihad min akhta'* [Shedding light on errors committed in jihad]. Corrective Concepts Series. Cairo: Maktaba al-Turath al-Islami.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

possible to identify a logic of de-radicalization which might apply to peace processes in Colombia and in Palestine, for example. A longer-term perspective can enhance our understanding of radicalization and de-radicalization patterns over time, thus also contributing to understanding the common logic of the different forms of terrorism.

Evaluation of Field Research: Preparation, Supervision, and Self-reflection

Carolyn Görzig

From February/March 2017 to February/March 2018, three PhD students of my Research Group undertook field research in Palestine, Turkey, and Kyrgyzstan. Not only their field sites but also their research topics demanded intense preparation. Upon their return we started to discuss issues such as the utility of preparatory training, the perception of how communication with the group leader and secretary was handled during field research, and the challenges of sensitive interview data. A brief questionnaire helped to systematize insights on lessons learned and ideas for improvement. In addition to the three PhD students, I sent the questionnaire to two new post-docs who had done research in Niger and Palestine and to the group's secretary who channelled most of the communication. The following is a summary of the collected feedback.

Communication

In preparation for field research we agreed with the departing team members that they would provide regular updates about their fieldwork, including certain types of key information (whereabouts, plans, current contact persons etc.). An underlying assumption was that open communication was essential and that the trust that we had built beforehand would support that communication. For example, in a crisis it is important that the researchers in the field are ready to share information and are neither afraid of being forced to interrupt their field research nor, on the contrary, of being dissuaded from returning home if they feel they need to do so. In the evaluation after field research, the team members provided feedback about their experience of, for example, the character and frequency of communication. Team members indicated that they felt reassured by the regularity of the communication and judged its frequency to be sufficient. They also appreciated that they had the possibility to contact me outside office hours if necessary. An additional conclusion from the field research is the value of what could be called "peer mentoring", i.e. the team members contacted each other during field research with questions and topics to discuss and share. This illustrates the importance of networking among team members for the learning processes of both individual members and the groups as a whole.

Being an Insider versus Outsider

Trusting that the researchers themselves are best able to judge the situations in their field sites relates to the question of their position on the insider/outsider continuum. Especially in times of tension, the supervising group leader is confronted with the task of comparing the information coming through the media or formal channels such as embassies, and the information received by the field researcher. The more time the team members spent in the field, the more they understood how locals perceive security issues. The reliance on locals and understanding their perspective has been important for their physical safety, as they reported. As it happened, that knowledge also influenced the interviews. As one team member concluded, the researcher has to introduce a depoliticized and academic approach in order to conduct fieldwork. Whereas being an insider can have positive consequences for security as well as scientific output, being an outsider can also have its advantages, for example when it comes to questions of security when dealing with authorities and interview partners, because in many contexts outsiders are likely to be considered neutral or unbiased. Although being an outsider can bring certain benefits for our work on violence and extremism, the ethnographic method is also invaluable for the integration of the researcher at the field site and the advantages that this integration yields. However, it also involves the risk of becoming part of local conflict structures.

Red Lines

Sooner or later, the field researcher faces the question of whether his/her research also implies becoming (or staying) part of conflict structures – the question of taking sides in a conflict. Field researching “terrorism” can imply feeding certain discourses, just as ethnographic studies on other topics can imply feeding structural inequalities. For the researchers’ security, it is important to ask where they draw lines that they would not cross. Red lines can help researchers to avoid becoming entangled in conflict dynamics that can directly affect their security. The team members managed trust and boundary setting in various ways. One member trusted local guides and friends about whether to avoid certain regions, since these contacts knew best about the risks involved. Similarly, another member trusted the local research assistant. This member also reports that interview partners were also very cautious and did not burden the interviewer with risky information. All team members were aware that they should not inquire about military or security questions or similarly sensitive matters. One team member also reported that on one occasion, when he corrected the information of a top leader of an organization in an interview, this led to the interview being broken off. It was a lesson learned, he says. He also noted the importance of avoiding misunderstandings. Being an insider, a local, or being supported by a local research assistant can clearly help to read between the lines and avoid or resolve misunderstandings. Another team member pointed to the element

of change. Since conflict situations are frequently changing, researchers might need to adapt their red lines. The timing of the research, as we realized in a group discussion, cannot be underestimated in its impact on both the security of the researcher and the content of the collectable information. The flexibility we sometimes had to develop showed us the benefits and limits of our preparation.

Suggestions for Improvement

As part of preparing the team members for field research, we organized four training sessions. Renate Haas, an anthropologist and instructor with the Institut für Kultur-analyse e.V., prepared the team members for dealing with challenging situations. Another training at the GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) offered simulations of extreme situations. In an internal workshop, Günther Schlee provided the team members with information about basic ethnographic methods. Finally, a workshop with experts who had extensive field experience offered an opportunity to discuss all kinds of questions and concerns. The team members evaluated this last workshop in particular as very useful, while also pointing out the significance of individual time for preparation and reading about the field site. However, they also suggested possible additional training topics that could be useful:

- Preparation for psychologically challenging interviews. Some team members were confronted with highly emotional interviewees. A training in interview methods in challenging situations therefore would have been helpful.
- The team members said they could have benefited from more information about data and online security. The IT department emphasized that we can address them any time and in the future we intend to make full use of their expertise.
- Our group's secretary Vera Wolter suggested that a simulation of internal procedures in case of an emergency, for example reviewing the reporting chain to the MPI, might help to activate responses more quickly. Although we had elaborated an emergency plan detailing all steps of communication, we wonder if we really would have been prepared for all eventualities. The fieldwork of the team members was characterized to a certain extent by learning by doing, and simulating situations could have accelerated our learning process. Before the team members went into the field I had asked them to reflect on the training and describe what they would do in risky situations. I consider such reflections/simulations very useful and we will certainly build on that.

Guest Lecture Series

“Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Political Violence”

In 2018, the Research Group “How ‘Terrorists’ Learn” organized the lecture series “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Political Violence” at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. Three guest speakers were invited for this occasion.



Guest Lecture Series 2018

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Political Violence

May 7, 2018
Irfan Ahmad (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity)
Terrorism in Question: toward an anthropological approach

November 5, 2018
Anne Kandler (Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology)
**Inferring Processes of Social Learning from Cultural
Frequency Data**

December 3, 2018
Harmonie Toros (School of Politics and International Relations, University of Kent)
Al-Shabaab Is Us: appropriation of political violence by local actors

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Research Findings

Carolin Görzig

MICRO LEVEL

Using interviews and primary documents, we analysed profound learning processes on the micro level by investigating the internal dynamics of terrorist organizations. In my project, for example, I have observed how movements all over the world have turned away from violence and adopted peaceful means to better achieve their goals. The leaders of the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya convinced their followers to abandon violence by arguing that they were merely changing their means and not their ends and that the new approach therefore did not equal surrender. Leaders of other movements have employed astonishingly similar arguments, which suggests that there is a logic of de-radicalization that applies to a wide variety of cases, whether historical processes of self-reflection of groups such as the Red Brigades, or current peace processes such as the negotiations with the FARC in Colombia. Taken together, my empirical and theoretical findings on this logic of de-radicalization suggest the following: in the initial stages at least, rather than directly changing their objectives, radical groups tend to question the means and values that define them. Such considerations may arise as a result of a perceived discrepancy between objectives set and objectives achieved. The Gamaa Islamiya came to the conclusion that jihad had become an end in itself and was not compatible with their objective of leading people and was thus counterproductive. The Gamaa Islamiya's leaders solved the dilemma by prioritizing their objectives and deciding that jihad was merely a means to an end, and thus other means could be adopted to achieve the same ends. A crucial point is that the leaders of such groups become aware of the irreconcilability of their objectives. This finding is relevant for researchers and practitioners attempting to develop strategies for negotiation with terrorists. Instead of approaching terrorist groups with the demand that they completely abandon their objectives, which can easily be perceived as a capitulation and tends to reinforce goal conflicts, negotiations should be aimed at changing the means and providing leaders of terrorist groups with the arguments they will need to convince their supporters – or supporters with arguments to convince their leaders: the impulse for addressing the irreconcilability of different objectives and initiating de-radicalization need not necessarily come from the leadership. However, the role of the leadership is crucial for implementing changes on the organizational level. This becomes evident, for example, in Florian Köhler's investigation of Boko Haram. In this case, a group of middle-ranking leaders argued in favour of restricting violence against civilians, yet the leadership did not take up their argumentation and thereby blocked what could potentially have turned into a de-radicalization process. Furthermore, the collective identity of an organization and its degree of fragmentation, a topic addressed in a sub-project by Katharina Siebert based on field research in Palestine, plays a major role in a group's

openness to flexibility and change. The degree to which both followers and leaders identify with their organization has an influence on group cohesion, which in turn affects the implementation of changes.

De-radicalization can also go hand in hand with radicalization. When groups turn away from violence, more radical factions often split off. When the Gamaa Islamiya movement de-radicalized, some members migrated to Al-Qaeda, which regarded the Gamaa Islamiya's turn towards moderation as a capitulation and responded by escalating violence against the "far enemy", culminating in the 9/11 attacks. In the context of radicalization, Almadan Orozbekova's sub-project looks inside organizations, investigating how individuals radicalize and become foreign fighters and how Islamic groups recruit fighters abroad. According to her research, which is based on interviews with foreign fighters and their families, self-radicalization is more prevalent in the UK and France, while top-down recruitment plays a major role in Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. We can link these research insights back to organizational mechanisms of learning and change and address questions about what individual forms of radicalization imply for leader-follower relations and for decisions involving a change of strategy. Complementing this, the project by Imad Alsoos on mobilization in Hamas and the Tunisian An-Nahda movement sheds light on the organizational structures of mobilization, education, and training of group members. Such in-depth insight into the internal life of radical organizations, which often remains a black box for researchers due to the difficulty of gaining access to such groups, fills an important gap in the literature on non-state armed actors.

MESO LEVEL

We also want to better understand how terrorist groups learn from each other, particularly in connection with the contexts in which (de-)radicalization evolves. My field research in Northern Ireland revealed that the IRA learned from both friends and enemies during their shift towards less violent means. They are not unique in this regard: violent groups all over the world have consulted with each other about participation in peace processes. The Gamaa Islamiya recommended to its brothers in arms that they listen to advice from the enemy and "take the pearl even if you do not like the diver".³⁶ Furthermore, transfer of ideas can take place across generations. While there is debate about whether it is the older or the younger generation of members of a terrorist group who initiate strategy changes, a study of the IRA found that it was in fact neither generation alone, but rather the intermingling of older and younger members in decision-making that facilitated the group's openness to peaceful transformation. Generational processes have an impact not only on organizational learning on the micro level, but also on the transfer of ideas on the

³⁶ Zuhdi, Karam et al. 2002. *Al-Qaida's strategy and bombings: errors and dangers (Istratijiyyat wa Taffirat al-Qa'ida: al-Akhta' wa al-Akhtar)*. Corrective Concepts Series. Cairo: Maktaba al-Turath al-Islami, pp. 199–200.

meso level. This transfer of ideas can also encourage radicalization. Observers note, for example, networks among Christian fundamentalists and right-wing extremists. Understanding how terrorist groups learn from each other would provide us with insights into current developments such as the rise of right-wing extremism and its global connections or the rise of splinter groups of organizations like the IRA. In order to gather information on how terrorist groups learn from their friends or enemies and how groups transmit knowledge across generations, I have conducted fieldwork in Northern Ireland, a post-doc in my research group, Imad Alsoos, is currently doing field research on the ETA in Spain, and a PhD student, Regine Schwab, completed field research in Turkey on cooperation and competition among Syrian opposition groups.

The case of Northern Ireland's IRA reveals how learning from enemies differs from learning from friends. The active engagement with enemies and competitors made IRA leaders become aware of their limits. They realized, for example, that their understanding of the Northern Irish conflict was limited and did not take into account the identity of the Unionists. However, once the IRA leaders accepted that Northern Ireland is not Irish and not British, but both, they redefined their understanding of the nature of the conflict. The new insights into reality led to self-recognition, and this altered the group's narrative about itself and its environment. While enemies and competitors contributed to the IRA's self-recognition of their weaknesses and limits, friends and supporters contributed to the IRA leaders' recognition of their options and strengths. These friends and affiliates included groups in other countries like the ANC, the PLO, and the ETA. ANC members, for example, visited prisons in Northern Ireland and taught IRA leaders that it is also possible to win a struggle with non-violent means. While IRA leaders emulated successes of role models like the ANC, they also learned from negative examples: by comparing themselves to less successful groups like the Red Army Faction or the Tamil Tigers they were able to realize their own strengths. This research finding yields insights on how allies and competitors can influence a terrorist group's strategy changes. The impact of alliances with other groups can vary considerably, however: Allies may assert pressure in the form of ideological authority that complicates the implementation of learning and thus blocks de-radicalization processes. Or allies can, on the contrary, be strategically invoked in order to resolve situations in which processes of change are blocked on the internal level. In the case of Boko Haram investigated by Florian Köhler, an interest group in favour of a strategy change pushed for a formal pledge of allegiance to ISIS and in this way finally brought about a leadership change in their favour. As Michael Fürstenberg has shown, in Syria the Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra had to balance between conforming to the ideological guidelines of the central leadership and cooperating with local actors on the ground, navigating complex dynamics on the battlefield and eventually severing ties with Al-Qaeda. While alliance formation can serve a variety of strategies, insurgents also make use of a variety of institutions such as insurgent courts in order to solve conflicts

between groups, as Regine Schwab investigates in her sub-project on Syrian opposition groups. This project is especially relevant to understanding forms of rebel governance in times of conflict where the lines between peace and war, stability and instability are blurred.

MACRO LEVEL

Many researchers study terrorist learning as a way to improve counterterrorism and security measures. However, posing different questions than those asked in the context of a counterterrorism agenda would lead to more productive answers. One such question is: “What makes terrorist learning different?” Terrorist groups operate clandestinely, which means the environment in which they learn is different from that of groups who can act openly. The ability of clandestine terrorist groups to control their environment is severely limited, as they operate in a hostile environment characterized by their belligerent relationship with the state. This forces them to develop capacities to adapt specifically to actions of the state. My research has demonstrated that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has learned tactically from allies (Al Qaeda organizations in the Middle East) and strategically from counterterrorism efforts. This is puzzling, because counterterrorism puts terrorist groups under pressure – a condition which many scholars consider to inhibit learning processes. Nevertheless, AQIM’s learning has been more profound and more directed towards strategic learning when faced with pressure than when cooperating voluntarily.

But the options of terrorist groups are not only shaped by direct interaction with states, they are also affected by broader geopolitical events. For example, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a major blow to Leftist groups all over the world as they lost outside support and legitimacy, forcing them to adapt or reinvent themselves. More recently, as I analysed in collaborative work with Michael Fürstenberg, the events of the Arab Spring facilitated a profound learning process in the Al-Qaeda network. Uprisings in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and other countries demonstrated the weakness of authoritarian secular regimes as well as the importance of mass support. For Al-Qaeda, this precipitated a local turn that married a more conciliatory approach to ordinary Muslims and independent armed actors with a renewed focus on anti-regime insurgency. Instead of trying to impose its version of Islam immediately, Al-Qaeda advised its affiliates to do so gradually; instead of trying to take control of insurgencies and side-line other groups, operatives were to integrate into the local scene, establishing relationships and playing down global connections.

If what sets terrorist learning apart from other kinds of learning is above all the context, then this is what we need to examine. Context has been a central concern of my Research Group during the last four years. Currently, we are broadening our scope to investigate right-wing terrorism in addition to, and in comparison with, other forms of terrorism. The context – ranging from the micro to the macro level – will therefore also be in the focus of our future work.

Is Terrorist Learning Different?

A workshop organized by Carolin Görzig, Imad Alsoos, Florian Köhler, and Michael Fürstenberg; MPI Halle

On 21 and 22 November 2019, the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology hosted the workshop “Is Terrorist Learning Different?”, organized by Carolin Görzig, leader of the Max Planck Research Group “How ‘Terrorists’ Learn”, and post-docs Imad Alsoos, Michael Fürstenberg, and Florian Köhler. Experts coming from Europe, Tunisia, Mexico, the United States, and India discussed whether there are specific characteristics of terrorist actors, how internal and external dynamics shape their learning processes, and in what way different forms of learning – or the failure to learn – relate to successes and failures of terrorist groups. Moreover, a keynote speech by one of the Institute’s founding directors, Günther Schlee, on “Studying Evil” invited participants to reflect on the opportunities and limitations of researching terrorist learning, as well as on the ethical questions this poses.



*Participants in the Workshop “Is Terrorist Learning Different?”, 21 November 2019.
(Photo: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2019)*

Outlook

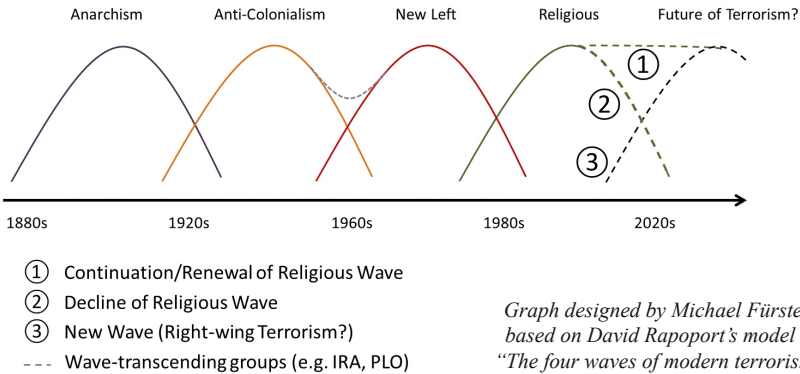
Carolyn Görzig

During the last three years we have been able to gather rare insights into the inner life of organizations as well as into the dynamics between different terrorist organizations. We have thus contributed to taking apart the black box of terrorist organizations and thereby gaining insights on both micro dynamics and meso-level processes. In order to better understand the macro context in which terrorist groups learn, we are increasingly considering their interaction with states in a broader historical frame. We relate (un-)learning processes to David Rapoport's historical work³⁷ in which he identifies four waves of terrorism: the anarchist wave (1880–1920), the anti-colonial wave (1920–1960), the New Left wave (1960–1980), and the religious wave (since 1979). We use this frame to embed our own research in a historical context and as a basis for theory building by uncovering the key mechanisms that explain the continuity and discontinuity of violence. In particular, I plan to address the following questions: how does violence spread in space and time and how are the different waves of terrorism and counterterrorism interrelated – i.e., in what ways does one wave lead to the next?

Given that, according to Rapoport's model, each of the different waves of terrorism lasted approximately 40 years, the current religious wave should be coming to an end and giving way to a new fifth wave. Can past patterns help us to understand and predict the nature of this fifth wave? Since terrorist groups and states respond to each other in a process that can be called co-escalation, it is essential to consider the contexts in which terrorism arises. Therefore, we analysed what terrorist groups often perceive as state terrorism and, corresponding to Rapoport's four waves of terrorism, identified four such contexts to which terrorists react: imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, and neo-colonialism. Projecting this pattern into the future, a possible fifth wave could be a reaction to globalization. There are certain clear similarities between the first and third wave and likewise between the second and fourth wave. Anarchists and the New Left propagated criticism of the dominant system, while the anti-colonial and religious waves pursued territorial ambitions. The socialist activists of the New Left (third wave) can thus be understood as the "grandchildren" of the anarchist revolutionaries, while Islamists understand themselves as fighting for freedom from neo-colonial oppression much like the anti-colonialist movements before them. This suggests that it is possible to speak of a generational pattern in which grandparents pass on their heritage to their grandchildren. Following this pattern, we can predict that criticism of the system will be important in the fifth wave. If the

³⁷ Rapoport, David. 2004. The four waves of modern terrorism. In: Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes (eds.). *Attacking terrorism: elements of a grand strategy*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

fifth wave is a reaction to globalization, its reply could lie in a retreat into the local and national. This hypothesis is supported by the current boom of anti-liberal and right-wing forces (who often rely on appeals to local identity), as manifested in the election of Trump in the US and the rhetoric of Viktor Orbán and others in Europe.



Graph designed by Michael Fürstenberg
based on David Rapoport's model of
"The four waves of modern terrorism".

Does that mean that we are currently witnessing the emergence of right-wing terrorism as the fifth wave of terrorism? Right-wing actors are not just connected to local conditions; they also act in a highly global fashion. The perpetrator of the shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand, explicitly referred to American role models and the Norwegian terrorist Breivik. The terrorist in Halle was not integrated in the local neo-Nazi scene but was well-versed in white supremacists' online culture and explicitly addressed an international audience, modelling the style of his attack on the Christchurch shooter. Yet right-wing actors also co-opt traditions of the local, referring to Germanic paganism (like the recently arrested "Group S."), the American frontier mentality, or Christian fundamentalism, which suggests that a possible right-wing extremist fifth wave shows parallels with the religious wave. At the same time, members of the identitarian movement and the alt-right in the United States understand themselves as revolutionary actors and make use of concepts from the left, lamenting for example about language prohibition as a result of anti-discrimination. The criticism of elites that forms an element of the right-wing narrative of the "Great Replacement" can also be found in other forms of terrorism. How do individuals and members of different forms of terrorist groups learn from each other? Do they resemble each other with respect to their justifications of violence and their tactical and strategic learning, or can we clearly differentiate their ideological reasoning and modus operandi? Our Research Group has been granted an extension until October 2022 and we plan to focus increasingly on right-wing terrorism. The expertise that we have collected on ethno-separatist and Islamist terrorism gives us a rich empirical basis for a comparative approach to right-wing terrorism. These are among the questions that we will be addressing in the coming months.

Media Appearances of the Research Group (Selection)

Article in the science magazine MaxPlanckResearch 4/2019 “Learning”: Patterns of terror

With input by Carolin Görzig, Florian Köhler,
and Michael Fürstenberg



ARD Campus Talks with Carolin Görzig: How do terrorist groups learn?



In October 2019 Carolin Görzig appeared in a twelve-minute talk on the German TV show “Campus Talks” about typical patterns and learning of terrorist groups and the search to determine how terrorism will likely develop in the future.

Radio interview on the terrorist attack in Halle

10 October 2019, MDR Jump
Interview with Michael Fürstenberg,
by Bernadette Hirschfelder



Radio interview MDR Aktuell: Forschung mit und über Terroristen

3 August 2019, Interview with Carolin Görzig

Article in the Mitteldeutsche Zeitung: Zur Recherche bei Terroristen

30 July 2019, Article with input from Carolin Görzig about her research

Interview on “Jung & Naiv”, Episode 407 (YouTube)



31 March 2019, Carolin Görzig talked to Tilo Jung about her terrorism research: What is terrorism anyway? Is there state terrorism? How do we differentiate between terrorists? What do right-wing extremists and jihadists have in common?

Radio interview Deutschlandfunk: Wie lernen Terroristen?

29 July 2018, Interview with Carolin Görzig

Publications

Articles in Thomson ISI (Web of Science) Listed Journals

- Görzig, Carolin. 2019. Deradicalization through double-loop learning? How the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya renounced violence. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*: 1–23. DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2019.1680193.
- . 2019. Terrorist learning in context: the case of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 12(4): 629–648. DOI: 10.1080/17539153.2019.1596623.
- Schwab, Regine. 2018. Insurgent courts in civil wars: the three pathways of (trans) formation in today’s Syria (2012–2017). *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29(4): 801–826. DOI: 10.1080/09592318.2018.1497290.

Article in Journal

- Fürstenberg, Michael and Carolin Görzig. 2019. Im Schatten der Zukunft. *Internationale Politik* 74(4): 104–109.

Miscellaneous Publications

- Alsoos, Imad. 2018. Why Hamas is protesting in Gaza – and why it will continue. *The Washington Post*, April 8, 2018.
- Dunning, Tristan and **Imad Alsoos**. 2019. *The latest violence in Gaza is nothing new*. Australian Outlook. <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/latest-violence-gaza-nothing-new/>. Accessed May 15, 2019.
- Görzig, Carolin. 2018. *Wege aus dem Terrorismus*. Max-Planck-Gesellschaft Jahrbuch 2018. DOI: 10.17617/1.7N.
- . 2018. *How do terrorist groups learn and unlearn violence?* Latest Thinking. 12:08 min. DOI: 10.21036/LTPUB10624.

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Location of the Institute



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SfE – Seminar für Ethnologie

Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology
Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg
Reichardtstraße 11



ZIRS – Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien

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