

## WS 33

### Social negotiations along frontiers: dynamics, limitations and closures

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Organisiert von / organized by:

**Michaela Haug** (Universität zu Köln)

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This workshop aims at contributing to the emerging ethnography on activism by exploring the various trajectories of when negotiations never seem to come to an end and where there is an apparent interest for an endless continuation of negotiation in various ways. Whereas activism is generally perceived as a moral act that is based on, and oriented towards, achieving greater social good vis-à-vis conditions of inequality, injustice or violence, interestingly the negotiations about these can become an end in itself.

Various trajectories can be discerned as to how and why negotiations can become an end in itself. In a context of economic uncertainty and a competitive civic domain, for instance, an ongoing engagement with activism can provide valuable skills, material benefits, social capital or access to employment, thereby turning the activist's engagement into a means of personal livelihood. Here the figure of the 'professional activist' emerges, for whom there may be no interest in bringing negotiations to an end but whose interests may become judged as being at odds with the social imagery of 'selflessness'. Another trajectory may be that never-ending negotiations do not serve the cause activists' concerns as such, but rather the public presence and positioning of a particular social body, group or organization in a specific socio-political arena. In contrast to the example above, here not so much self-serving economic factors are involved, but questions regarding public representations, 'voice' and the social pressure 'to take a stand' in certain debates.

Focusing on the socio-cultural and economic rationales of activism in their present-day manifestations in Africa, the workshop will discuss these processes of endless negotiation in the domain of sexual and relational health and rights. In this context, negotiations that become an end in themselves bring up issues of (dis-)trust, (moral) justification as well as claims to sincerity and authority in the activists' cause.

Vortragende / Speakers:

**Fariba Alamgir** (University of Bath, UK)

#### **Making of frontier in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh**

The paper is based on data collected by employing ethnographic and archival research method. Frontier dynamics took place in the CHT of Bangladesh during the colonial period, when the pre-colonial authority structure was replaced with 'traditional institution'. However, the state's property regime has never been fully established. This is discussed by analysing how people make land claims, invoke various norms and authorities, and by showing contradiction between rules and practices. Besides, since land survey has not been carried out to determine state and private land in the region, there are numerous cases of competing claims over land and also 'who owns land' in the CHT remains a perennial question. The armed conflict of the hill people against the Bangladesh state ended with signing an accord in 1998. In post-conflict period, in CHT, new rules and institutions have been established to endorse recognition to hill people's land claims and social norms of property, however, these are not still functioning. By showing the ongoing contestation

over authority involving multiple state institutions (central government, bureaucratic, regional and traditional institutions, the army) and how this is linked to political contestation over land and territorial control, I argue that frontier remains open in the CHT.

**Immo Eulenberger** (MPI Halle/Saale)

**Resilient difference preventing the closure of an East African frontier**

In my work on borderlands of Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda I conceptualise frontiers as geographical and social zones of comparably low but increasing integration of local socio-ecological systems into national and international circuits of exchange, and frontier closure as a blurry threshold level of similarity to other regions. While local pastoralist communities of vast areas act with broad autonomy, make war and peace, cross boundaries and conquer territory, this autonomy is increasingly restricted in some areas; business operators, government and non-governmental organisations extend their reach; and populations socialised into national and regional versions of modernity grow as older economies based on local resources reach limits of intensification. Though surplus population needs to be accommodated within larger economies, 'development frontier' policies prove often destructive as they keep trying and foreseeably failing to impose intensification models adapted to different environments. Pastoralist expertise tends to remain disregarded in policy and future-making processes and anthropologists struggle for integration at uneasy knowledge and practice frontiers.

**Paolo Gaibazzi** (ZMO – Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin)

**Bordering the internal frontier: when negotiation ends**

This paper discusses the concept of "internal frontier" and its heuristic value for understanding the expansion and closure of spaces of social negotiation. Diverging from Turner's notion of a "tidal frontier", Igor Kopytoff (1987) argued that African political cultures historically developed through an "internal frontier", whereby different actors settled in interstitial spaces existing between political formations. The internal frontier was essentially a space of encounter and negotiation, which colonial borders and territorialisation would later curtail. Ironically, postcolonial borderlands in Africa have often become again internal frontiers, sites of reconfiguration, and hence negotiation, of sovereignty, identity and space. I will illustrate this through two ethnographic cases studies on the institutional grey zones emerging in the governance of (unauthorized) migration in the Euro-African zone and in Angola. At the same time, I will illustrate how the recrudescence of bordering threatens this "interstitial frontierization" by mining the very principles of negotiation undergirding it.

**Alexander Koensler** (Università degli studi di Perugia, ITA)

**Affective frontiers: negotiating contested lands and settling enterprises in the Israeli periphery**

Power relations in settler-native interactions in frontier settings are often taken uncritically as self-evidently diametral opposed. Based on an ethnographic perspective that combines Herzfeld's attention to the "intimacies" with critical writing on the symbolization of reality, this paper investigates Israeli-Palestinian relations as rather less clear-cut frontier negotiations. Focusing on specific fragile and contradictory relations of single settlers and natives unfolding around a newly established neo-Zionist village on land claimed by Palestinian Bedouin advocates in Israel's southern Negev desert, this ethnographic lens contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving Israeli-Palestinian frontiers as entangled and entwined rather than clear-cut. Beyond a dichotomist conception of native-settler relations and beyond the palpable dynamics of power, this examination

demonstrates that the more opponents invest in distinguishing themselves from the settler endeavor, the more its power over them grows.