Conferences and Lecture Series

New Games in Central Asia, Great and Small

A Panel Session during the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, November 23, 2002

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This panel session was jointly organized by Robert L. Canfield (Department of Anthropology, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo., USA) and Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek (Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna, Austria). The central focus was to examine the relationship of local political activities to regional and global processes in Central Asia. To this end a number of scholars from both the USA and Europe were invited to present papers that approached issues such as local developments, contests over critical resources, access to sources of power, disputes informed by religious or ethnic differences, conflicts over political representation within the state and its agencies, and strategies evoked by the people coming to terms with their particular situation by creating or recreating various kinds of networks and alliances.

Thomas Barfield (Department of Anthropology, Boston University, Boston, Mass., USA) gave a paper entitled "Rebuilding Afghanistan." In the first half of his paper he outlined the alterations in the political structure of the country. Decades of warfare led to a breakdown of the prevailing Pashtun-biased ethnic hierarchy and to an increased military and political importance of the formerly subordinated ethnic groups. Some observers have suggested that this will lead to a division of the country along ethnic lines, make forming a central government impossible, and even provoke the dissolution of Afghanistan itself as a unitary state. Barfield, however, did not agree with these pessimistic scenarios. In his presentation he pointed out that concepts of nationalism and ethnic identity do not fit Afghanistan's cultural and political history well. To stress this argument he referred to the current political disputes. Even though ethnic and regional cleavages have become sharper over the past ten years, no faction in Afghanistan has proposed either a division of the country along ethnic lines into ever tinier parts nor threatened to join with co-ethnics in neighboring states. He also argued that an examination of ethnicity in Central Asia reveals a pattern in which groups strive for dominance but not exclusivity. Afghan factions understand that the resources of the international community can only be effectively tapped if there is a national government to deal with the outside world, even if only to cash the checks and redistribute the money. Hence patterns of competition that seem irreconcilable at the local level create few obstacles to cooperation at the national level.

The paper of Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek (Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna, Austria) on "Opting Out of the Afghan State or Opting In? The Uzbeks of North East Afghanistan" referred to the growing politicization and self-awareness of Afghan minority groups. Focusing on the Uzbeks of northeastern Afghanistan, a group representing the dominant political stratum until it was finally superseded by the Afghan state in the late 19th century, she described the alterations of Uzbek identity and self-representation and the changes in the political relations of the Uzbeks at the local level (that is, their relations to other ethno-linguistic and religious groups in northeastern Afghanistan) as well as at the national level since the late 1970s. Rasuly-Paleczek demonstrated that in contrast to the past, when the Uzbeks of northeastern Afghanistan had pursued a policy of trying to evade the Afghan state and had underestimated their ethno-linguistic identity (e.g., by representing themselves not as Uzbeks but as "people from the North"), Uzbek ethnicity now gained momentum and people started to demand their fair share in the newly emerging power structure of the Afghan state.

Robert Canfield talked about "Nationalistic Trajectories among Afghanistan's Hazaras." This paper examined social trends among the Hazaras as a case of rising nationalistic consciousness. Canfield pointed out that the wars in Afghanistan brought the Hazara peoples into closer contact with each other, with their Afghan neighbors, and with the wider world, and fostered a nationalism that will be more in evidence as the future Afghan state structure emerges. Referring in particular to developments since the early 1980s (e.g., the crucial role of the Hazaras and their main settlement area, the Hazarajat, during the years of anti-communist resistance in the country and the persecution of the Hazaras by the Taliban regime from the mid-1990s to its downfall in 2001), Canfield showed that despite loss of life and many hardships, the Hazaras have gained much. Here he stressed the Hazaras' emphasis on education of their youth and the rise of a strong Hazara identity. He concluded his presentation with a note on the contradictions and mitigating influences now appearing on the scene.

Alessandro Monsutti (Graduate Institute for Development, Geneva, Switzerland) also gave a paper on the Hazara. His presentation, "Towards a Transnational Community: Migration and Remittances among the Hazaras," focused on the effects of migratory movements, which since the end of the 19th century have played a crucial role in the society of the Hazaras, especially during the last two decades. Monsutti showed how the various patterns of migrant labor have not only contributed to sustaining family members in the Hazarajat, but have also led to the emergence of a new social and economic structure. Here he argued that the last twenty years of war and spatial mobility have enabled the Hazaras to use existing cultural resources to open new horizons. These included the emergence of very effective transnational migratory and trade networks linking the local and global as well as the development of strong political claims of the Hazaras in Afghanistan.

Peter Finke (Department of Anthropology, University of New Hampshire, USA, and Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Salle, Germany) presented a paper entitled "Central Asian Attitudes towards Afghanistan: Perceptions of the Afghan War in Uzbekistan." Using empirical data from Uzbekistan, his paper described the way in which current events as well as the basic patterns of society in Afghanistan are perceived. Another topic of his presentation referred to the question of why the expected fraternization did not occur. Finke argued that identity among the Uzbeks (and other groups in Central Asia) is based on different criteria than usually assumed. Islam does not have the strong impact we are inclined to think it has, nor is "Pan-Uzbekism" a significant factor. Concluding his paper Finke pointed out that the Soviet past has resulted in a conceptualization of Uzbekness, which includes an idea of European-style "civilization," and sharply contrasts with the image of Afghanistan and other Middle Eastern societies.

Boris Petric (Laboratoire d'anthropologie et des institutions des organisations sociales and Maison des sciences de l'Homme, Paris, France) gave a paper on "Political Games at the Local Level in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan." Petric argued that the oft-employed focus on democratization in most political analyses of the region has a number of shortcomings and does not help to fully understand Central Asian societies and their political systems. He suggested another approach. Using the key role various forms of gift exchange play during many social events in the private as well as in the public domain as a starting point of his analysis, he revealed the close relationship between the system of gift exchange and the political game at the local level. On these occasions local leaders spend tremendous wealth in order to build a network of political supporters. According to their perception it is socially more profitable to spend wealth instead of accumulating it. Each Uzbek family keeps a record of gifts received and given. These records, Petric emphasized, allow for the drawing of a map of social networks and for analyzing the characteristics of social solidarity. However, as the building of a network of supporters implies constant participation in the system of gift exchange, in which the receiver of a gift is obliged to respond with an even greater gift, the incapacity of a leader to give back more than he has received in this gift exchange system eventually leads to shifts in the socio-political networks and their leadership. Consequently, Petric argued, power does not remain in the hands of the same families. In Uzbek society a constant circulation of power exists. Everybody can participate in this social game except people who are not considered as Uzbek. The system of gift exchange is thus also a tool to determine citizenship in this post-Soviet society.

Emphasizing that the interpretations and implementations of religious beliefs and practices do not take place in a political vacuum, the paper by Nazif Shahrani (Departments of Anthropology and

Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind., USA), "From Reclaiming Islam to Muslim Militancy in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan," focused on the link between the religious and political domain and its alterations in the course of time. With European colonial hegemony in the Muslim Orient, Shahrani argued, the long-standing relationship of mutual authorization between traditional political institutions and Muslim religious establishments faced serious challenges. For the most part, colonial and the emergent post-colonial/post-Soviet nation-states in the Muslim world have adopted policies and practices to undermine the legitimating role of Islam in national politics. Shahrani then examined the effects of the policies of the Soviet Union, and especially of the post-Soviet successor state in Uzbekistan, on the emergence of Muslim militancy. Using extensive firsthand ethnographic data (since 1992), he explored how a peaceful educational process of reclaiming Islamic knowledge, practices and institutions during the early 1990s was transformed into the rise of radical Muslim militant movements.

Morgan Y. Liu (Society of Fellows, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., USA) gave a paper on "Post-Soviet Muslims at the Intersection of Competing Modernities: Islamic Study Groups in Osh, Kyrgyzstan." According to Liu post-Soviet Central Asia presents an opportune nexus in which to think about the intersection of competing modernist discourses. Soviet-era expectations about state stewardship of society collide, he pointed out, with neoliberal promises of economic prosperity and global connections, and articulate with Islamic models of communal renewal. Liu then demonstrated how these issues, in particular the question of what kind of influence Islam should have in a post-Socialist society, play out within Islamic study groups [*ziyofat*], which were regular, self-run gatherings in the Uzbek neighborhoods of urban Osh in the 1990s. These groups, Liu stated, are key loci where Islamic knowledge is transmitted and discussed among Uzbeks in Osh, who openly admit their relative ignorance of Islam. Liu then illustrated that their understanding of Islam is strongly framed by both Soviet socialist conceptions of society and the desire to engage the post-Cold War world stage via neoliberal idioms of progress. Their discourses also reveal a spatial dimension that situates the various competing discursive streams into a coherent political imagination, which maps out a desired communal trajectory amid the uncertain circumstances of economic stagnation and political instability in Central Asia today.

Ildikó Bellér-Hann (Orientwissenschaftliches Zentrum, Martin-Luther Universität, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany) presented a paper entitled "Localism and Identity among the Uyghur of Xinjiang," which dealt with the current situation of the Uyghurs, an officially recognized minority of the People's Republic of China. Focusing on the reform period, which has often been described by analysts in terms of the retreat of the state, e.g., from controlling land use, space and mobility, Bellér-Hann showed that while controls have indeed been relaxed in some fields the grip of the state remained as strong as ever in others. Her paper then looked more closely at the ways recent policies have affected notions of locality and attachment among Uyghur peasants. Bellér-Hann also focused on how traditional social practices and understandings of customary law may be mobilized to reinforce a sense of belonging and to subvert state control.

Another presentation devoted to the Uyghurs of Xinjiang was "Whose Business is Islam in Xinjiang?" by Gardner Bovingdon (Department of Anthropology, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri). Bovington's contribution explored the role and the fate of Muslim Uyghurs under increased international, national, and local scrutiny. According to him the Western community has begun to view Uyghur religiosity with concern, fearing the emergence of a Taliban-like movement among the Uyghurs. The Chinese party-state, on the other hand, has for years surveyed resurgent religious practice with growing apprehension, suspecting Uyghur mosques to be hotbeds of separatism. Among Uyghur Muslims themselves, Bovingdon pointed out, no uniform stance vis-à-vis the role of Islam exists. The largely secular Uyghur urban elite views politicized Islam with suspicion. Intellectuals and professionals all consider themselves Muslims yet do not wish to return to an era in which religious elites dominate social life. Within the Uyghur religious community itself there is tension. Since renewed crackdowns on religious practice began in 1990, some religious Uyghurs have begrudgingly accepted the narrow definition of acceptable Islam mandated by the state, while others have demanded greater freedoms.

A final session of the panel was devoted to comments and discussion. Following commentary by the session's discussants, who were Dru Gladney (Departments of Asian Studies and Anthropology,

University of Hawai'i, Manoa, USA), David B. Edwards (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Williams College, Williamstown, Mass., USA), Anatoly Khazanov (Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis., USA) and Margaret Mills (Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA), a lively discussion took place. The organizers of the panel session now plan to publish the papers and comments of the panel.

Eighth Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS VIII), September 25-28, 2002, Bordeaux, France

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The Eighth Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS VIII) took place from September 25th to 28th, 2002 in Bordeaux, France. It was organized by Prof. Vincent Fourniau, Prof. Cathrine Poujol, Prof. Pasquet and Dr. Françoise Rollan and hosted by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine and by the Maison des Sueds (University of Bordeaux). The conference attracted a large regional and international audience. Most notable was the large number of scholars from Central Asia, above all from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The general theme of the conference, around which five panel sessions were organized, was "Central Asia in Transition: Models, Disruptions, Centrality." This report will briefly describe the plenary session papers and a few selected papers from among the five panel sessions. The full program of the conference can be viewed on the ESCAS website at http://www.let.uu.nl/~escas/ESCAS%20VIII,%20Bordeaux%20(2002).htm.

The plenary session highlighted some of the crucial topics that formed a common link to all panel sessions. In a paper entitled "Post-Soviet Historiography: Who Speaks for the 'Central Asian' Past?" Prof. Turaj Atabaki criticized the dominant current approaches to the historiography of post-Soviet Central Asia as highly nationalistic and called for a new approach. Similarly, Prof. Meruert Abuseitova (Institute of Oriental Studies, Almaty, Kazakhstan) criticized the ideological nature of the established approaches in her paper, "New Approaches in Central Asian Research." She underlined the importance of evolving new concepts on such topics as the role of nomadic civilizations in the history of Kazakhstan. In line with Abuseitova's critical remarks Prof. Dilorom Alimova (Institute of History, Academy of Sciences, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) called for a more open-minded and multi-dimensional approach when studying Islam in Central Asia in her paper, entitled "Studying Islam and the Soviet Model of 'Militant' Atheism in Uzbekistan (based on materials from the 1920s-1930s)." Prof. Françoise Rolland (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux, France) rounded off the plenary session with a paper on "Central Asia and its Borders." She looked into the history and socio-political consequences of delineating the borders between Central Asian states and the reappearance of border issues after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular Prof. Rolland highlighted the problems of constructing borders in a region where the population is highly mixed and local majorities do not always correspond to national majorities, as is the case in the Ferghana Valley.

In the panel sessions there were numerous fascinating presentations. I will only describe a few of them. In line with current efforts of Central Asian scholars to rewrite the history of the region and to develop new perspectives in evaluating their history, Dr. Elyor Karimov (Young Scientists Association, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) presented an analysis of documents in the manuscript collection of the Ishan-Qala in Khiva in a paper entitled "Patterns of Development in Central Asia: Khorezm, 18th c.-beginning of the 20th c. (Rethinking the Khiva Khans' Yarliks)." These documents, according to Karimov, not only allow us to draw a detailed picture of the peculiar history of Khorezm, which has been only marginally studied, but also provide ample material to reject the contention of Soviet historians that the period of the 18th and 19th centuries was a time of stagnation and decline in Central Asia. On the contrary, the manuscripts Dr.

Karimov analyzed point to rapid and manifold changes in the administrative domain, the tax system, terms of landownership and many other aspects of society and politics in Khorezm.

In her paper "The Thaw in Soviet Uzbekistan: Procedures of Rehabilitation of Individuals," Dr. Céline Behr (University of Paris I, Sorbonne, France) examined aspects of de-Stalinization in the Khrushchev era, especially the rehabilitation of former political opponents. Drawing on the memoirs (published in Tashkent in 1994) of Nuriddin Muhitdinov, one of the prominent Muslims in the Soviet hierarchy, and on a lengthy interview with Naim Karimov, the president of the Rehabilitation Commission established in Uzbekistan after independence, Behr explained the important role that rehabilitation activities in the Uzbek SSR played as Khrushchev sought support for his policies.

A number of presentations were devoted to reflections on the rich cultural heritage of Central Asia and the problems of its preservation. For example, scholars from the University of Bordeaux and the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique in Paris (among them Claire Pacheco, A. Ben Amara, C. Barras, C. Ney, O. Bobin and M. Schvoerer) outlined their attempts to preserve and restore glazed ceramics and monuments from the pre-Timurid and Timurid eras. They reported on the results of the PACT TIMOUR Program, scheduled for 2002-04, which has as its goal to preserve and enhance the Timurid architectural heritage of Samarkand.

Anthropologists and other social scientists were well represented at the conference. Dr. Olga Gorshunova (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russian Federation) presented a paper on "Female Shamanism in Central Asia," which focused on the revival of traditional spiritual practices and archaic cults in today's Central Asia. Based on field research carried out in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan between 1991 and 2001 she examined the revival of women's rituals and practices. While emphasizing the important role of women in the restoration of ancient cults, her research also drew attention to the shamanistic practices among men.

Dr. Cynthia Werner (Department of Anthropology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Tex., USA) spoke on "Women, Marriage and the Nation-State: The Rise of Non-Consensual Bride Kidnapping in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan." Werner's paper dealt with the discrepancy between state laws aiming to regulate certain aspects of family life (e.g., marriage and divorce) and social practices that do not always coincide with state laws, especially when the laws are not strongly enforced. This is the case in South Kazakhstan Province, where non-consensual bride kidnapping occurs frequently, despite its illegality. There, approximately sixty percent of all marriages involved bride kidnapping in the 1990s and of those nearly twenty percent involved minimal consent of the bride. Based on almost one hundred interviews conducted in South Kazakhstan Province in 1994, 1995, and 2000, Werner analyzed the reasons for the sharp increase in non-consensual bride kidnappings in the post-Soviet period. She argued that it can be explained by a social environment where unemployment rates and limited opportunities make it difficult for young men to offer a bright future to potential marriage partners. Additionally, two factors allow young Kazakh men to get away with their crime: first, the young men and their parents appeal to the Kazakh "custom" that obligates young women to stay with their kidnappers in order to avoid societal shame; and second, the men realize that the post-Soviet state is unlikely to interfere in these cases because it is less concerned than the Soviet state had been with issues of gender equality. Werner argued that in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, the state's reluctance to condemn non-consensual bride kidnapping reflects a broader process of nation-building where gender equality is no longer a state priority.

Dr. Kamoludin Abdullaev (Visiting Fellow, Yale University, New Haven, Conn., USA) focused on contemporary politics in Tajikistan in "Including Islamists in Legal Politics." His paper tackled the question of how to deal with the emerging Islamic political activism in the political domain in Central Asia, a question important both for the political leadership in Central Asia itself and among players in the international political arena. Dr. Abdullaev criticized the "political sterilization" of Islam in contemporary Central Asian politics, that is, depriving Islamists from playing an official role and relegating Islam to a non-political status. He argued, however, that political sterilization appeared to be ineffective: Islam has become politicized and violence in society and politics has increased. In this situation, governments have adopted three different approaches to an Islamic challenge: to combat and control (such as in Uzbekistan), to control strictly (as in Turkmenistan), and to control but with some

cooperation with emerging Islamic political activists (as in Tajikistan). Following a discussion of the pros and cons of these three options Dr. Abdullaev drew the attention to the case of Tajikistan, where after a civil war that took the lives of almost 50,000 people, the activists of political Islam were integrated into the new political setup, implemented according to the UN-sponsored General Peace Accord between 1997 and 2000. Evaluating the Tajik case he stressed that drawing them into the political game is much more profitable than excluding them. Furthermore, in light of the growing importance of Islam in the daily lives of the people of Central Asia, a political climate should be established which helps the Central Asians to discuss and make conscious choices in their attitude towards Islam and Islamism. Forcible imposition of "preferred" models of governance and support of "secular and democratic" regimes in their repressive actions under the guise of "uprooting weeds of terrorism," is not a good answer to the emerging Islamic political activism, argued Dr. Abdullaev.

During the ESCAS VIII Conference a general assembly took place. After reports on the activities of ESCAS since the last meeting in Vienna in 2000 by Prof. Turaj Atabaki (the acting ESCAS president), a new ESCAS board was elected and future ESCAS activities were discussed. The following individuals were unanimously elected by the General Assembly: President: Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek (Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vienna University, Austria); Vice President: Cathrine Poujol (INALCO, Paris/ France); General Secretary: Giorgio Rota (Naples University, Italy); Board Members: Vincent Fourniau (EHESS, Paris/ France) and Jadwiga Pstrusinska, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland.

Last but not least, the General Assembly expressed its sorrow that the long active president and founding member of ESCAS, "the very soul of the organization," Prof. Turaj Atabaki, resigned as ESCAS president. Prof. Atabaki will continue to work for ESCAS, for the time being as the organization's treasurer and as coordinator of the ESCAS homepage (http://www.let.uu.nl/~escas/). Utrecht University will remain the permanent address of ESCAS.