

gests a journeying approach to the interview, heterochronic (multi-temporal) assemblages, and relations that the researcher trespasses into. This hyperlinks the interview into the 21st century rather than cast the interview as a pause or suspension from the everyday heard in analogue.

In chap. 6, Judith Okely rallies against interviews as pre-planned “performed detachments” (130), favouring interviews as trust exchanges with her colleagues and friends. She suggests that they should be participatory, open-ended, and reciprocal. An interview should not be a contamination-free interrogation. It is only in these relaxed serendipitous encounters that new insights can bubble to the fore. Ana Lopes echoes this impulse to use the interview in the everyday fostered by Okely. She gives it an applied action-research edge looking at the unionisation of sex workers in the UK. Her interviews became moments of empowerment for the subjects, catalysts for action, and often “reverse interview” scenarios where she ended up being the subject of their conversation. This is the result of having relationality in the interview. It is an example of those moments of remembering and re-authoring past experiences in a forward looking space (176): retrospective, introspective, and prospective all converge in this ordinary but also extraordinary encounter. And it is often ironic, according to Rapport in the “Epilogue,” as self-awareness and self-commentary frame the perspective on the words used and self-narrated.

Jonathan Skinner

**Sökefeld, Martin** (ed.): *Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life. Perspectives across Asia*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015. 225 pp. ISBN 978-3-8376-3024-4. Price: € 29.99

This collection of essays is based on a conference organised by the research network Crossroads Asia, which took place in October 2014 in Munich. The overall rationale of the book is to explore the everyday experience of conflict through a series of case studies on Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir. A special attention is given to the perspectives of the actors involved and issues revolving around processes of social and political mobilisation, land dispute, and space, but also hospitals, local assemblies, or networks of patronage. One of the main general points is that even in situations of widespread violence, institutions and a certain sense of legality and legitimacy still matter.

In a substantial introduction, Martin Sökefeld summarises the whole rationale of the volume: “instead of focusing on states and actors, we were interested in the everyday life of conflicts – or rather everyday life in the context of conflicts” (10). If conflicts are socially embedded, social life is also embedded in conflicts in the various locations studied by the contributors to this volume. All of them share some basic assumptions in spite of differences in style and disciplinary background. First, conflict is seen as a constitutive feature of social life and not as a deviation from normal social order. Second, conflicts are conceived as complex processes that cannot be accounted for in terms of causes and consequences or simplistically

labelled as “ethnic” or “religious.” Rather than applying predefined categories, it might be more fruitful to look at the perspectives of people themselves. Norbert Elias’s concept of “figuration” proves useful to move beyond the insoluble dichotomy between methodological individualism and methodological holism. Conflicts are here read as figurations where people interact and form alliances or oppositions: their “actions are not determined, but their choices are limited by the conflict” (21). The example of the Shia-Sunni violence in Gilgit, northern Pakistan, helps Martin Sökefeld to develop the idea that there is an intimate relationship between conflict, material things, space, and mobility. More than the divide-and-rule strategy of the Pakistani central state to prevent the development of centrifugal forces at regional level, he is interested in the progressive dynamics of polarisation, spatial segregation, sectarian “un-mixing” by which the construction of group boundaries gets inscribed into spatial boundaries. The various contributions in the volume delve further into these issues of conflict, space, and mobility.

Aksana Ismailbekova explores the violence that occurred in 1990 and 2010 in the city of Osh, southern Kyrgyzstan, between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. During the Soviet time, the urban land became more contentious due to the arrival of many people from the countryside. Mutual avoidance and ethnic homogeneity can be discussed by some inhabitants as a way of dealing with the conflict. However, there is a contrast between various parts of the city, which were not affected equally by the process of spatial segregation.

Khushbakht Hojiev focuses on intercommunal tensions in the Batken province, also in Kyrgyzstan. He analyses how escalation has been avoided through the mediation of a group of local elders. To go beyond the divide between instrumentalist (rational choice) and interpretivist (social-psychological dimension) approaches, he uses the notion of framing, by which he refers to the intersubjective process, the active role of the involved actors in reality construction.

Jan Koehler develops a methodological reflection to examine what role institutions in situations of conflict play. Drawing on a large-scale comparative research project, he focuses on a case of land-grabbing in Nangarhar province, eastern Afghanistan. He shows that even in situations of violence and state fragmentation, some mediation mechanisms persist. Actors in conflict respect some rules and do not apply all means at their disposal to further their interest.

We stay in Afghanistan with Nick Miszak, who also explores a case of conflict around land, one of the most important sources of wealth but also social status in the country. He analyses how two groups in conflict for a plot of land are invoking the right of preemption (*shuf’a*), as defined by Islamic property law. Although the threat to use violent means is always present, both parties strive to enhance the legitimacy of their claims.

Katja Mielke looks at one district at the outskirts of Kabul mainly inhabited by Hazaras, which is not included in the master plan of city administration. For many inhabitants it may be explained by the fact that they belong to

a discriminated minority. But the struggles of local representatives to obtain some infrastructural improvements – sometimes successfully – show that interdependencies cannot be understood in mere ethnic terms but needs to be resituated in wider figurations.

Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra brings us to another theatre of conflict with his chapter on the borderlanders' perspective in Kashmir, which resolutely moves beyond state-centric and security analyses. He successively examines how people have experienced displacement, fencing, or landmines. This specific border is one of the most violent one on Earth; it cannot be described in terms of fluidity and flexibility, as often done elsewhere to characterise a supposed globalised world.

The volume's last contribution turns back to the case addressed in the introduction, the Shia-Sunni conflict in Gilgit. Emma Varley offers a detailed description of the consequences on the healthcare system of the hostility between religious communities and state's inability to promote civil security and non-discriminatory public space. She shows how hospitals are sites of inclusion and exclusion at the same time and participate in segregated geographies and segregated governance. Everyday life is strongly affected by the sectarianisation of medical institutions.

More than a juxtaposition of studies, this edited volume consistently emphasises people's perspectives. It has the merit to propose an overall argument beyond considerable differences in methodological approaches and writing styles between the contributors. In spite of the general coherence and quality of individual chapters, however, readers interested in the everyday experience of conflict in places such as Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, or northern Pakistan-Kashmir may have two grounds for frustration. First, the various authors display little reflexivity on the conditions of fieldwork in a context of conflict. If a researcher is interested in studying everyday life, he or she has to negotiate his or her presence with real persons who have to manage concrete problems. Field research is a specific social relation by itself. How does it influence the knowledge produced? Ethical, methodological, and epistemological issues are inextricably intermingled, an aspect hardly touched across the whole volume. Second, it comes as a surprise that anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists have not more to say on the vast apparatus of humanitarian and development organisations intervening in situations of conflict and the impact of their presence and work on the life of their expatriated and local staff, as well as the people targeted by their programmes. Can we understand the everyday experience of people confronted to violence and insecurity without considering the myriad of international and nongovernmental organisations supposed to mitigate their suffering?

Alessandro Monsutti

**Steinmüller, Hans, and Susanne Brandtstädter** (eds.): *Irony, Cynicism, and the Chinese State*. London: Routledge, 2016. 193 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-94314-8. (Routledge Contemporary China Series, 132) Price: £ 95.00

This is a very good collection of articles in the sense that it draws our attention to a couple of important questions that confront us – not just those whose focus is on China. Built on a prior workshop and a following conference on the similar topic, the intent of this volume is to take up the problem of irony and cynicism as a lens to examine the ongoing moral transformation that China faces today. The term “state” in the title should be read, in its essential meaning, as “a state of being” under the Chinese rule (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff, “Of Revelation and Revolution”; Vol. 1. Chicago 1991). The material and sources of the volume cover a wide range of themes, chiefly ethnographic but also sociohistorical in terms of its mode of presentation. Both Hans Steinmüller's “Introduction” and Michael Herzfeld's “Afterword,” in their respectively insightful ways, made two useful summaries of all the nine pieces included, and this should justify my avoidance of writing another summary.

This volume raises an important question, which is the question of *horizon*. If an empirical study requires a certain theoretical background as its conceptual horizon, a careful reading of this volume would bring us back to the question: What is or should be the theoretical horizon, from which our empirical investigations must emerge, i.e., when we study today's China? Of course, this is not saying that a certain kind of theory should be followed or not; we are speaking of a horizon as a meeting-point when we conduct empirical research that would tie our immediate interests to a number of conceptual problems. “Horizon” is not merely the sociohistorical or theoretical background; it is the intellectual refraction through which our specific studies become illuminated. For example, behind the notions of irony and cynicism there came the post-socialist literature as a horizon, and the meaning of these terms obtained their true significance in the known problem of the socialist-postsocialist transitions. That is why, for example, in the “Introduction,” the volume refers to Yael Navaro-Yashin, Alexei Yurchak, and Caroline Humphrey, etc. in order to indicate, in the East European context, such as from Turkey to Mongolia, there was a cynical reaction to the irony of the Soviet states. “What about cynicism and paranoia in China?” (4). Is this not an adequate and provocative question? What does it imply? How do Chinese people cope with a similar condition of life, from Maoism to post-Maoism, for example? Can or should we borrow those terms from the East European context to the ethnographic studies of China? A patient reader would, when reading the volume with care and attention, raise such a question: Given the importance of China's recent past, what is or should be an adequate intellectual horizon upon which we may draw broader comparative light?

This volume has brought us back to this ground-question: What should be the intellectual horizon (or horizons) from which we must derive light in order to shed on our anthropological investigations? More specifically, to what extent should we continue to derive our conceptual energy from the postsocialist literature? Not too long ago, from Berkeley to Cambridge and vice versa, there was a lively conversation on the problem of postsocialist transition. For example, Alexei Yurchak, my colleague at