

“Peace, order and securitisation in post-imperial Central Asia”

Wrap-up from the workshop held at the Collaborative Research Centre/Transregio 138
 "Dynamics of Security. Types of Securitisation from a Historical Perspective"

From Thursday, the 24th until Friday, the 25th of January 2019 the subproject B05 of the Collaborative Research Centre/Transregio 138 “Dynamics of Security” held an interdisciplinary workshop under the title “Peace, order and securitisation in post-imperial Central Asia”. Bringing together researchers from both this region and Western Europe, the event connected debates in security and securitisation studies, peace and conflict studies, and social scientific and historical research on order and change in the region, channelling them into a critical perspective on the imperial legacy of Central Asia and its present-day implications. The contributors’ presentations and in-depth discussions provided valuable insights into different trajectories and forms of securitisation as they occurred in the Soviet Central Asian republics and in their successor states, and specifically in their evolving relations with Moscow, as well as their materialisations in forms of hierarchising, exclusion and biopolitics along ethnic, religious and gender lines. Thus, the event offered important input for the research of the Collaborative Research Centre/Transregio 138, and specifically on the ways in which externally introduced frames and repertoires of securitisation make their way into national discursive regimes and can re-produce imperial logics of governing, controlling and ‘othering’.

On the first day, Prof Thorsten Bonacker welcomed participants and officially opened the workshop, before Philipp Lottholz, Visiting Fellow at the Collaborative Research Centre/Transregio’s subproject B05, gave an introduction into the rationale and goals of the initiative. He particularly emphasised the possibility, but also necessity, to advance a critical agenda in security studies and securitisation theory which aims to take into account narratives and forms of securitisation that are not immediately obvious in analyses of public communication, specifically historical ones, but may be located in counter-publics or parallel spheres of communication. Besides the ‘imperial’ logics through which such alternative viewpoints have often been silenced or marginalised, he drew attention to the important insights that studies of peace, conflict and of social and political (re-) ordering in a number social science disciplines – as showcased by the following workshop presentations – have to offer to a critical and multiperspectival study of security/securitisation both in Central Asia and beyond.

The first set of contributions spoke to these key themes in various ways. David Lewis’ (University of Exeter) introductory talk provided an overview of “Competing spatial orders in post-imperial Central Asia” and specifically the successive geopolitical imaginaries through which the Russian Federation has projected its power ambitions onto the region. Lewis concluded that given the little attraction or failure of models such as, for instance, the ‘Russian World’ (*Russkii mir*), *Novorossia* (‘New Russia’) or Eurasia (and the associated economic union), the recently emerging idea of ‘Greater Eurasia’ proved more salient given its greater openness

in terms of identitarian belonging and emphasis on Sino-Russian cooperation. The discussion largely revolved around the question how much of a role identity and the common Soviet past play vis-à-vis more strategic and economic factors, and the degree to which intellectual and policy elites are instrumentalised in the formation of such geopolitical imaginaries (as opposed to articulating wider socio-political interests, as argued by Lewis).

The first panel shifted the attention to national and community-level perspectives on discourses and practices of non-securitisation. Sophie Roche, a social anthropologist from the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”, University of Heidelberg, presented in-depth ethnographic and background research on the issue of uranium waste and the dangers it poses in the formerly secret city of Chkalovsk in northern Tajikistan, where the Soviet Union’s first uranium processing plant was located. Roche’s respondents’ downplaying or denial of the danger posed by the insufficiently insulated tailing dumps and other sources of radiation and their pride in the progress and development that they still associated with the now deserted town presents a stark, even paradoxical, contrast, and a remarkable form of non- or de-securitisation. It appears especially contradictory or even cynical in the context of the Tajik government’s admissions of the degree of nuclear contamination in its bids for international funding for removal or upgrading of nuclear facilities.

Similar contrasts were presented in Nick Megoran’s (Newcastle University) analysis of Uzbek authorities’ attempts to prevent inter-ethnic unrest and attacks against Kyrgyz minority populations in the country’s eastern provinces bordering Kyrgyzstan. He detailed how, while freedom of speech had been abused for hate speech and agitation against Uzbek minorities in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, eventually leading to inter-ethnic clashes in the country’s south in June 2010, the same was not the case in Uzbekistan. Here, as Megoran showed, authorities imposed a ban on news on the ongoing clashes and deployed numerous police forces to potentially endangered regions, who demonstrated their presence by ‘knocking on people’s doors’ and ‘asking if everything was OK’. Megoran concluded that with this combination of non-securitisation of ethnicity in the public sphere with securitising practices on the ground, Uzbekistan’s ‘authoritarian conflict management’ had worked better than Kyrgyzstan’s ‘populist democracy’, although it left unresolved wider questions about the management of peaceful inter-ethnic relations and the obvious discontents of the ‘people’s friendship’ model of multiculturalism hailing from the Soviet period.

Taking the participants back to the period of perestroika and the fundamental changes and uncertainties it brought, Medet Tiulegenov’s (American University of Central Asia) presentation explored individual biographical accounts and oral histories as to their relations with society and, specifically, the evolving role of ‘the state’ therein. This provided ample illustration on the issue of fragmentation and networking of spheres of communication in societies like the Soviet Union, where acts of defiance and speaking up against the leadership (as done by Andrei Sakharov) spread only slowly and via word-of-mouth and many people were preoccupied with ‘surviving without the state’ rather than supporting it. Furthermore, the discussion addressed the general sense of historical regress, decay and uncertainty experienced by people depending

on their personal trajectories, and the critique of present conditions of the peripheral Kyrgyz Republic that the examined oral histories appeared to express.

On the second day, the two following panels explored (post-) imperial policies of ordering and control and their underlying securitising logics in particular issue areas and historical periods. Panel II turned to issues of health and sexuality and the selective securitisation of sexual conduct and diseases. Saidolimkhon Gaziev from the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies presented an intriguing analysis of imperial Russia's attempts to regulate prostitution in what was called the Governor-Generalship Turkestan in the late 19th/early 20th century. Largely relying on material from the Central State Archive of Uzbekistan, Gaziev detailed how Russian administrators sought to protect imperial soldiers from contracting venereal disease through strict regulation of the health and even physical movements of sex workers, but repeatedly failed in their efforts given local individuals' ability to circumvent the systems and numerous bans and sentences put in place by administrators, who were often helpless in light of language and other cultural barriers. Karolina Kluczevska and Oleg Korneev's (CERAL, University of Paris 13) presentation offered equally enriching insights on policies of prevention and addressing of HIV/AIDS in Tajikistan from the late Soviet to the current period. Similar to Gaziev's presentation, they showed how governmental actors and NGOs extend and implement internationally financed programmes in ways that prioritise public health over human rights and confidentiality concerns, such as in the case of AIDS testing and work with affected individuals in schools and universities. Such securitisation and biopolitics in a literal sense present significant historical continuities and parallels with the trajectory identified in Roche's presentation.

Turning to the issue of religion, H  l  ne Thibault's (Nazarbaev University Astana) and Emil Djuraev's (OSCE Academy Bishkek) presentations illustrated the ambiguous trajectory on which the legacy of Soviet imperial secularism has embarked in Central Asia. Focussing on the discursive shift "from Wahhabism to Salafism", Thibault traced "the threat of non-traditional religious movements" back into the Soviet period, showed how it is presently materialising in the association of such movements with "clothes that cover the head and/or face, certain types of beards and short trousers" and is heavily securitised as a form of 'foreign' and intruding Islam. Both her paper and the subsequent discussion shed light on the interesting fact that such securitisation of an "other", supposedly foreign and somewhat more conservative Islam appears to concur with a creeping conservatism of the 'traditional' Central Asian Hanafi school Islam, whose leaders have been seen to symbolically acknowledge practices such as polygyny, for instance. Based on his study with the NGO *Search for Common Ground*, Emil Djuraev provided insights on the degrees to which respondents in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan securitise religious practices and worldviews or exhibit accommodating tendencies towards them; and how these correspond with the respective countries' – not rarely ambiguous – policies on religion.

The final panel returned to the national and international politics of Central Asia during and after Soviet rule. Isaac Scarborough (currently London School of Economics) illustrated the only partial sovereignty and high degree of cooperation of Tajik security services with its Russian counterparts and how continued Russian dominance is expressed both in this and other areas such as border security. This picture of networked sovereignty and a de facto security union with Russia was contrasted by Mario Cucciolla's (Higher School of Economics Moscow) analysis of the historiography of Soviet domination and imperial exploitation in Uzbekistan. The latter was especially pronounced in the ecological dimension in the form of cotton monocultures – although, somewhat paradoxically, continued by the sovereign government in pursuit of its own gain – and centred around the so-called 'Uzbek cotton affair', a corruption scandal spurring disciplinary measures from Moscow which were later decried as purges and attacks comparable to the Stalinist purges in the 1930s. Such framing and securitisation of metropolitan policies presented the clearest illustration of Central Asia's self-construction as having been subject to imperial domination.

Sebastian Schiek's (SWP Berlin) presentation on the 'politics of political participation' in so-called 'societal councils' (*obshchestvennye soveti*) in municipalities in Kazakhstan once again shifted the focus onto present-day practices of control and ordering. Schiek explained how the councils had been recently created to demonstrate authorities' willingness to include citizens into local-level decision making, and how they had accordingly attracted project funding from the EU and other international organisations. On the other hand, he scrutinised the fact that their participation and representativeness is limited and that in most cases they seem to serve the purpose of 'window dressing' or justifying more draconian policies instead of the proclaimed progressive purposes.

This ambiguity between participation and collective-decision making on the one hand, and ambitions to control and co-opt populations and their supposed representatives, on the other, was one among a number of issues that were picked up in the closing discussion. The workshop participants agreed that processes of security or securitisation can be most effectively analysed in specific contexts, such as that of relations between Central Asian republics with Moscow, or in specific national-level policies in sectors such as the environment, public health or multicultural diversity. Ideas on related concepts that help to better synthesise these perspectives, such as 'statebuilding' or 'conflict management', were also discussed and will be considered in the further work towards a publication of the outputs of the workshop.

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