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Theme
Futures of Indigeneity: Spatiality, Identity Politics and Belonging

Organisers
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Futures of Indigeneity: Spatiality, Identity Politics and Belonging

Concept Note

‘Indigeneity’ is a continuously contested concept, and a site of socio-cultural (re)presentation of self and others linked to social, cultural and political boundaries and un-boundaries. It is woven together in an intricate web of ideas such as ethnicity, hybridity, authenticity, diaspora, nation and homeland, and the ways those ideas are formed, developed and “owned.” It also concerns territoriality and ancestral rights over land and hence indigeneity deals with place, space and time with its respective imagining. Once labeled as “backwardness” and inferiority, indigeneity has now increasingly become a source of pride for many of those who claim it as a sign of resilience and embeddedness. As a sign of deep belonging, desired more than discouraged, proclaimed more than disguised as attachment to particular place, culture, social category and nation, it is now an important source of personal identity. Therefore, the sense of indigeneity begets paradox of identity as it is an encompassing concept entailing the cultural survival of individuals, communities, organizations and nations that ascribe themselves to an idea of belongingness. The concept of indigeneity and belonging are intimately entwined, inlaid together in conversations about attachment to place, about nationalism and love of country whilst at the same time they are reworked and modified in trans-local and transnational communicative and interactive processes. Consequently, these concepts intersect with local, national and global socio-political realities on the one hand and, on the other hand, they are confronted with the challenges posed to indigenous aspirations by the neo-liberal agenda of nation-states and their concerns with sovereignty.

In the late 1980s, global academia started paying attention to the interdisciplinary mode of understanding the specialty of spatiality, politics of identity and belonging in relation to notions of indigeneity. Social, political, and cultural matters pertaining to this inter- and trans-disciplinary interest ranging from the micro level affective nature of individual constructions to macro structures of international, transnational, and post-national orders is fundamentally important. Therefore, the idea of indigeneity is at the center of radical political discourse, serious academic research and public imaginations of personhood and identity.

This workshop aims to address the theoretical, critical and radical aspects of indigeneity in relation to spatiality, identity politics and belonging from cross disciplinary perspectives, bringing together scholars from different disciplines, e.g. anthropology, sociology, political science, psychology, history and literary studies. It intends to engage critically in debates on indigeneity in its ideological trajectories to determine its theoretical and political destination. This workshop examines the current state of the idea of indigeneity in a de-territorialized world by exploring the multi-dimensional formations of political and national identity and critically assessing the scalar and temporal dimensions of indigeneity’s sources, contents, and its connectedness with related concepts. Thus, the workshop will especially investigate the inter-relationship of spatiality, identity politics and belongingness to embark on a deep understanding of the futures of indigeneity.
Keynote Lecture

The Futures of Indigenous Medicines: Networks, Contexts, Freedom

Keynote Speaker

William S. Sax
Professor and Head, Department of Ethnology
South Asia Institute (SAI), University of Heidelberg

Abstract of lecture

It has been argued that although biomedicine (also called “modern medicine,” “cosmopolitan medicine,” “allopathy” and, in German, Schulmedizin) began as a form of indigenous or local knowledge in Europe, it transcended its origins and became universal or “cosmopolitan.” It is therefore often regarded as a timeless and culture-free form of universal (as opposed to indigenous) knowledge that can be transplanted from place to place without undergoing fundamental change, much like chemistry, physics, or mathematics. I argue that, on the contrary, although there may be some heuristic value in describing it as an abstract system divorced from its context, knowledge is in fact always “done”: acquired, owned, disputed, implemented or, as the positivists would have it, “discovered.” Knowledge has no ontological status outside of the human practices that produce and reproduce it, and such practices are always historical and contextual. Thus all medicine, including modern cosmopolitan medicine, is indigenous. Although it is true that in our times, biomedicine is epistemologically, institutionally, and politically dominant, this has to do less with universal and context-free truths, than with the circumstances of its dissemination. When we compare what are called “indigenous medicines” (e.g. tribal medicines, traditional healing) with modern biomedicine we are not comparing a context-bound with a context-free system, because there are no forms of knowledge that are free of context. Rather, we are dealing with what Latour would call “networks” of different sizes. In this lecture, I discuss and compare several of these networks, focusing on various forms of “traditional” and “religious” healing from Asia, in an attempt to show that their spectacular growth in recent decades has much to do with their context dependency.

Short academic biography

William S. (‘Bo’) Sax (PhD, Chicago) studied at Banaras Hindu University, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Washington (Seattle), and the University of Chicago. He has taught at Harvard, Christchurch, Paris, and Heidelberg, where he is Chair of Cultural Anthropology at the South Asia Institute. His major works include Mountain Goddess: gender and politics in a Central Himalayan Pilgrimage (1991); The Gods at Play: Lila in South Asia (1995); Dancing the Self: personhood and performance in the Pandav Lila of Garhwal (2002); God of Justice: ritual healing and social justice in the Central Himalayas (2008); and The Problem of Ritual Efficacy (2010).
Abstracts of all papers to be presented

Considering the Implications of the Concept of Indigeneity for Land Management in Cambodia, Thailand and Laos

Ian G. Baird
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Over the last couple of decades the concept of “Indigenous Peoples” has gained increased traction in Asia, with some countries—such as the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, and Cambodia—having adopted legislation that recognizes Indigenous Peoples. Still, other national governments in Asia continue to resist, with many following the ‘salt-water theory’, which specifies that the concept of Indigenous Peoples is only applicable in places where there has been considerable European settler colonization (such as the Americas, Australia and New Zealand). Elsewhere, the concept is seen as irrelevant, since everyone is considered to be indigenous. Still, even in these countries the movement has made some inroads, albeit unevenly, due to varied political and historical circumstances. Much of the increased attention to the concept of Indigenous Peoples is linked to advocacy associated with attempts to gain increased access and control over land and other natural resources. In this paper, I consider the links between the Indigenous Peoples movement and land and resource tenure issues in three countries in mainland Southeast Asia where the concept of indigeneity is variously recognized: Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

Short academic biography

Ian G. Baird (PhD, British Columbia) is an assistant professor in Human and People-Environment Geography and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Before coming to UW-Madison in 2010, he spent most of the previous 25 years living in Southeast Asia and working for non-government organizations (NGOs). He has considerable experience working in both lowland rural areas of mainland Southeast Asia, and in the uplands of Laos and northeastern Cambodia and Thailand. He particularly works with ethnic Lao, Thai, Hmong and Brao people. He has been investigating the concept of indigeneity in Cambodia, Laos and Thailand for a number of years. He recently edited a soon-to-appear special section focused on "indigeneity and natural resources in Cambodia" for the peer-reviewed journal, Asia Pacific Viewpoint.
Mediating Indigenous Modernity

Bender, Cora
University of Munich

This paper discusses the conference theme - spatiality, identity politics and belonging as the key sites for the future formation of indigeneity - by addressing the role of mediation in these processes. In order to do this, it reviews some key arguments in current media-related research in Cultural Anthropology and neighboring disciplines. Here, mediation is usually seen as the social and cultural production and reproduction of people by way of communicational media practices. Ethnographic research into media in different cultural contexts, however, suggests that this communication-centered focus leaves much space for a debate that was recently raised in Cultural Anthropology: the struggle for a broader understanding of “how we should conceptualize media in the first place” (Boyer 2012). In this context, current media-related research argues about the significance of certain key features of culture under the condition of globalized modernity, most prominently its character as a net (Schüttpelz 2007). Media anthropologists, specifically, address this either as the human capability to connect in kinship-like socialities resurfacing in social media such as Facebook (Miller 2011); or as the rhizomatic inescapability of power appearing, for instance, in online news production (Boyer 2009). Both draw individuals and groups into ever expanding conglomerates of relationships. However, the complex engagement of indigenous people in these processes, I argue, produces different concepts of media and of mediation, and therefore, specific and different forms of nets and networking. These become apparent in indigenous practices of organizing spatiality, in its negotiations of identity politics and its expressions of belonging. Drawing on fifteen years of recurrent ethnographic fieldwork in indigenous communities in the U.S. and Canada, I suggest that we look at this work of mediation as the production of a specific form of modernity - Indigenous modernity.

Short academic biography

Cora Bender (PhD, Frankfurt-Main) is a Cultural Anthropologist specializing in Media, Global Health, and Indigenous Cultures of North America. In 2011, she published her first monograph, "Die Entdeckung der indigenen Moderne" (Exploring Indigenous Modernity), based on fifteen years of recurrent ethnographic research in indigenous communities of the American Midwest. In the past, she has held positions at the J.W. Goethe University’s special research college “Knowledge Culture and Social Change”, at the University of Bremen Department of Anthropology, and the University of Siegen Department of Media Studies. Currently, she is a professor of Anthropology at the University of Munich and completing her second book dealing with diabetes in the context of Indigenous Modernity.
The Significance of Indigenous Knowledge for Feeling Indigenous: Psychological Reflections

Chakkarath, Pradeep  
Ruhr-University of Bochum

Indigeneity is commonly defined by referring to smaller or larger collectives of people who believe that they share specific historical roots and experiences - which are closely tied to certain territories - and specific ethnic traits and linguistic autonomy as well as specific customs, institutions, worldviews, and a characteristic way of life. While some of these aspects, like territorial boundaries, ethnic traits, or customs seem to be more of an objective nature than others, we know from our everyday experiences that the subjective feeling of belonging to a certain group plays an important role when it comes to social cohesion and attachment between the members of the groups. We also know that an individual’s mere feeling of belonging to a specific, for example, indigenous group, does not suffice to be accepted as a member of the group. As we know, it is possible to go native, while the natives do not care or may even ridicule one’s emotional craving.

Since it is interesting to learn more about the psychological scaffolding of this feeling of belonging or feeling accepted, in my presentation, I will look into the role that some cognitive and emotional aspects play in producing indigeneity. Drawing upon social and cultural psychological theories, I will especially focus on questions concerning what kind of knowledge can be considered indigenous knowledge, how it contributes to the construction and consolidation of indigenous groups, and why a scientific discipline like modern Western psychology should not ignore the indigenous aspects of its own knowledge production.

Short academic biography

Pradeep Chakkarath (PhD, Konstanz) is a cultural psychologist at the Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany, and a lecturer at universities in Germany and Switzerland. He was a visiting professor at the Université Evangélique du Cameroun and he is a fellow alumnus of the Center of Excellence at the University of Konstanz, Germany. After having completed his Master’s degree in Philosophy and History and his Ph.D. in Psychology, he did cross-cultural research on children’s development and parent-child relationships with an emphasis on Asian-European comparisons. Currently, his main interests are in human development from an interdisciplinary perspective, the history and methodology of the social sciences, and the relevance of the indigenous psychology approach.
Revolutions within the Revolution: Maoists and Statemaking in the Forests of Eastern India

Chandra, Uday
Max Planck Institute, Göttingen

The Communist Party of India (Maoist), in its own words and in those of its critics, is fighting a revolutionary guerrilla war to overthrow the bourgeois state in India. Yet, everyday local realities show Maoist cadres in their tribal bases to be making claims on the state to raise minimum wages, implement new forest laws, and ensure timely payment of rural employment guarantee funds. Since 2009, Maoist factions and splinter groups have also routinely campaigned for adivasi political parties such as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), and have even begun fighting state and panchayat elections in scheduled tribe constituencies. By participating in the electoral arena, are Maoist rebels abandoning their radical political project in favor of indigenous politics? Or does the agenda for radical social change spill over into "revisionist" avenues such as elections?

To explain this apparently anomalous state of affairs, I propose the notion of "radical revisionism," encompassing political practices that work within existing democratic structures, push them to the hilt, and seek to transform them from below in the hope of radical democratic futures. I draw on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in central and southern Jharkhand to shed light on the everyday tactics and maneuvers of adivasi youth, who, as radical revisionists in Khunti and West Singhbhum districts, abandon their party line and, paradoxically, deepen the modern statemaking process in the tribal margins of modern India. I focus, in particular, on how new political subjectivities as well as new notions of democratic citizenship, community, and leadership emerge on the ground.

Short academic biography

Chandra Uday's (PhD, Yale) research interests lie at the intersection between agrarian studies, state formation, theories of power and resistance, postcolonial theory, political anthropology, and South Asian history. Chandra's doctoral research revisits classic questions of power and resistance via a study of the origins and social bases of the ongoing Maoist insurgency in eastern India. Currently, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Chandra's articles have appeared in the Law & Society Review, Contemporary South Asia, Social Movement Studies, New Political Science, SAMAJ, and the Economic & Political Weekly.
Indigeneity, Culture and the State:
Social Change and Legal Reforms in Latin America

Gabbert, Wolfgang
University of Hannover

Since the 1980s, constitutions have been reformed to acknowledge the multicultural and ethnically diverse character of the nation and recognize the existing indigenous legal and political practices in many Latin American countries. Thus, a first step in creating a more accessible and more adequate legal system has been taken. However, these legal reforms touch on a number of practical and theoretical issues related to such fundamentals of social anthropology as the reification of culture and tradition. The paper will discuss four of these topics: the political fragmentation of the indigenous populations, their cultural heterogeneity, the relationship between law and social structure, and the incidence of power relations in customary law. It argues that much of the current debate on the recognition of so-called indigenous customary law applies the earlier model of the nation-state, thereby running the risk of fostering new forms of cultural homogenization and sustaining the current relations of domination in indigenous groups.

Short academic biography

Gabbert Wolfgang (PhD, Berlin [Free University]) is sociologist (Ph.D. 1991) and anthropologist (habilitation 2000), he is currently Professor of Development Sociology and Cultural Anthropology at the Leibniz University of Hannover. His main research areas are legal anthropology, the anthropology of conflict and violence, ethnicity and social inequality, migration, colonialism, Christian missions in Latin America and Africa. He has authored the first book-length treatment of Nicaragua's African American Creoles (Creoles- Afroamerikaner im karibischen Tiefland von Nicaragua. Münster: Lit 1992) and the first English-language study that examines the role of ethnicity and social inequality in the history of Yucatan, Mexico (Becoming Maya? Ethnicity and Social Inequality in Yucatán since 1500. Tucson: University of Arizona Press 2004). He has published widely on the history and cultural anthropology of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America.
Communicating Indigeneity in Translocal Space

Gerharz, Eva
Ruhr-University of Bochum

The notion of “indigeneity” has become an important category in the fight for equality worldwide. Being a crucial category signifying belonging, indigeneity is made use of by activists, more or less successfully and in various ways.

Taking Bangladesh’s indigenous activist movement and its demands for the recognition of diversity as an example, this paper looks at the various communicative processes situated in translocal space, which are made use of in particular ways depending on the respective social, cultural and political conditions. The analysis focuses on the configurations of spatially situated attempts to allocate meaning to the notion of indigeneity and on the various channels through which its meaning is vernacularized in public discourse and everyday action. Reconstructing the processes taking place at different scales and stretching across translocal space helps to reveal the ways in which indigeneity is translated into and adopted to local systems of meaning. Translocal communicative processes can, first, be identified in concrete situations of interaction in activist forums as well as in everyday-action at the intersections. A second assumption is concerned with the particular locations and venues of public discourse. A third focus lies upon the ruptures emerging at the interface between the level of the everyday vis-à-vis national and global discourse. Everyday action, however, is always determined by local rationalities, whereas interethnic interaction usually takes place beyond the communicative barriers.

Understanding the communicative construction of indigeneity from a global perspective requires connecting the spatial dimension with the relationships between discourse and interaction as well as the individual and society. The situated construction of indigeneity and its vernacularization in translocal space serves the aim of illuminating the relationship between diversity and social cohesion: What are the social conditions under which diversity and difference may lead to social cohesion or may prevent the same? In what ways may claims for the recognition of diversity foster social cohesion?

Short academic biography

Eva Gerharz (PhD, Bielefeld) is Junior Professor for Sociology of Development and Internationalisation at Ruhr-University Bochum. With a major focus on South Asia (Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), her research deals with ethnicity and conflict, development and reconstruction, political activism, and transnationalism. She is the author of “The Politics of Reconstruction and Development” (Routledge, 2014) and co-editor of “Governance, Development and Conflict in South Asia” (Sage, forthcoming, with Siri Hettige).
Processes of Indigenization: Cases from Amazonia (Yanomami, Southern Venezuela)

Herzog-Schröder, Gabriele
University of Munich

The Yanomami of Venezuela and Brazil are often presented as an “isolated” indigenous ethnic group of South America lowlands, prototypically for Amerindian societies of Amazonia. In the Brazilian part of their territory they have however for the past 30 years been invaded and extremely abused by a disgraceful gold rush whereas on their dwelling land in Venezuela anthropologists became notorious for inappropriate ethic conduct. Due to both of kinds of these calamities and their worldwide mediation the Yanomami became particularly well known within anthropological academia and far beyond this scope. This widespread popularity obscures the fact that at present the acquaintance with the globalized “outside” world is quite heterogeneous among the Yanomami. While some Yanomami-personalities are quite well informed about city life and circumstances of globalization – like the famous Davi Kopenawa from Brazil – most Yanomami have not yet travelled to the world outside of their traditional territory.

Centring on indigeneity and processes of approximation of a quite isolated area in Southern Venezuela will demonstrate how the gradual understanding of the “outside world” goes hand in hand with the own understanding of being “indigenous”. At the same time this new indigenous identity situates the actors as members of a nation and makes them belong to a particular indigenous group within a choir of other indigenous people within these newly conceived national complexes.

These freshly acquainted forms of identities as being “Yanomami” (as an indigenous group), as being indigenous and being Venezuelan or Brazilian is contested by a traditional cosmological worldview – in short determined as “shamanic”. New forms of “knowledge” as well as spatial imaginaries – novel to the traditional worldview – are discussed in the presentation, focusing particularly on schooling as an interface of indigeneity and modernity.

Short academic biography

Herzog-Schröder Gabriele (PhD, Berlin [Free University]) got her trainings in social and cultural anthropology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich and at the Free University in Berlin. She has been doing fieldwork among the Yanomami of southern Venezuela since the early 1980th. Currently she holds a position as senior lecturer at the Institut für Ethnologie der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München (Institute for social and cultural anthropology at the LMU, Munich). Aside from her academic work she is also engaged in diverse responsibilities in the context of ethnographic collections and exhibitions mainly related to lowland South America.
From Indigenismo to Indigeneity: Political Conjunctures of (De-)Colonization of the "Indian Question" in Latin America

Kaltmeier, Olaf
University of Bielefeld

The Indian question lies at the heart of the political-cultural definition of the Americas in the process of colonization. The identitarian concept of “Indian” is a colonial intervention and an exercise of epistemological power, subsuming different peoples and empires to a single signifier. Thereby, this classification has been used since Colonial times to design ethnic policies of domination. Nevertheless, subaltern actors have made frequently use of this concept in order to frame their protests, which finds its highest expression in the politicization of the indigenous question in the 1990s. The aim of this paper is to analyze the different conjunctures of the political use of indigeneity in modern Latin America from the beginnings of the 20th century to the present. Relying on Latin American Postcolonial and Cultural Studies the paper works out the conjunctures of state-driven inter-American indigenismo, of indianismo and of indigenous autonomy and plurinationality. At the end the paper discusses the question if the pluri-national redefinition of Andean societies marks a turning point towards an end of coloniality, or if we face a new conjuncture of colonization based on a closure of the Indian mobilization cycle and on the emergence of a regime of accumulation based on appropriation.

Short academic biography

Kaltmeier Olaf (PhD, Bielefeld) is Junior Professor of Transnational History of the Americas and Director of the Center for InterAmerican Studies at Bielefeld University. He has published on issues of indigeneity, post-coloniality, space, and identity politics. Among his recent publications are Politische Räume jenseits von Staat und Nation (2012), Selling EthniCity: Urban Cultural Politics in the Americas (2011) and En diálogo: Metodologías horizontales en ciencias sociales y culturales (with Sarah Corona Berkin, 2012).
On the Nature of Indigenous Land: Ownership, Access and Farming in the Garo Hills of India

Maaker, Erik
University of Leiden

In this paper I explore the relationship between modes of land ownership, conceptualizations of land and nature, and notions of indigeneity. I proceed from the well-known idea that the portrayal of upland communities of Northeast India as ‘indigenous’ depends to a large extent on a presumably inextricable relationship between people and land (Li 2010, Karlsson 2011). Upland people are believed to ‘belong’ to their land, and its forests, in the sense that it is considered sacred to them. One way in which this essential tie to land finds expression, is in joint land ownership. In the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, collective ownership has been legally secured in the colonial period. Whereas its aim is to avoid that villagers lose their land, it cannot counteract disparities in power and wealth that occur, and have always been prevalent, within village communities. Moreover, in much of the Garo Hills there is a tendency towards the privatization of land use, as well as ownership. This commodification of land is unavoidable for the modernization of agriculture, yet challenges Garo notions of indigeneity, as well as related perceptions of land and nature. In the paper, I will analyze the transformation of land relationships, the legalities in which these are founded, and the consequences that these transformation have for Garo notions of indigeneity.

Short academic biography

Maker Erik (PhD, Amsterdam) is a researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of Leiden University in the Netherlands. He studied anthropology in Amsterdam and Leiden and wrote a PhD dissertation that takes mortuary rituals as a starting point for an analysis of social structure and community in upland Northeastern India. His current research in South Asia focuses on the material and ritual dimensions of religious practices, linked to the politicization of ethnicity. Erik has published several articles in academic journals and edited volumes, and is preparing a monograph on the transformation of Garo social structure.
Different trajectories of the indigenous rights movement in Africa:
A comparison of the Mbororo of Cameroon and the Maasai of Tanzania

Pelican, Michaela
University of Cologne

‘Indigeneity’ has been a highly contested concept, particularly in the African context. Within the past twenty years, many ethnic and minority groups in Africa have laid claim to ‘indigeneity’ on the basis of their political marginalization and cultural difference in their country or region of residence. They have drawn inspiration from the UN definition of ‘indigenous peoples’ as a legal category with collective entitlements, and have linked up with the global indigenous rights movement. Concurrently, there has been an extensive debate within Africanist anthropology on the concept’s analytical usefulness. Moreover, several African governments have questioned its applicability to the African continent, arguing that all population groups may count as ‘indigenous’. However, with the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, conceptual criticism has abated, and many African governments have made attempts to integrate the indigenous rights discourse in their policies and development programs – with varied outcomes.

In this presentation I wish to outline different trajectories of the indigenous rights movement in Africa, and discuss the factors that may contribute to its success or decline. In particular, I will compare two case studies: On the one hand, the Mbororo of Cameroon, a pastoralist group that in 2005 has been internationally recognized as an indigenous people, and whose socio-economic and political trajectory I have followed since the 1990s. On the other, the Maasai of Tanzania, whose involvement in the indigenous rights movement dates back to the late 1980s. Here I rely on the research of the anthropologist Dorothy Hodgson and her comprehensive review of twenty years of Maasai advocacy and activism.

Short academic biography

Pelican Michaela (PhD, Halle-Wittenberg) is Assistant Professor of Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Cologne, Germany. Ethnicity has been one of the central themes guiding much of her research. In particular, she has been interested in the expression of ethnicity as a collective identity, its use in political and economic contexts, as well as its role in conflict. Two projects grew out of this thematic focus: firstly, a study on interethnic relations and identity politics in northwest Cameroon; secondly, a critical examination of recent claims to indigeneity in Africa, centring on the case of the Mbororo-Fulbe in Cameroon. Both studies have resulted in a number of publications. Her book ‘Masks and staffs: Identity politics in the Cameroon Grassfields’ will be forthcoming with Berghahn.
Indigenous People and Local Political Change in Contemporary Mexico

Rescher Gilberto  
Ruhr-University of Bochum

Public discourses on indigenous people in Mexico frequently emphasize their supposed backwardness and in consequence conceptualize indigenous groups as marginalized and trapped in clientelist relations. However my field work suggests that in contrast indigenous villages are localities where local and translocal processes intersect facilitating social, economic and political transformations.

In Mexico indigenous villages normally present themselves as indigenous communities, and these can be seen as an important basis of the political system, because they are conceived of as a unit of potential political mobilization in favor of specific political actors. This allegiance was classically thought to be secured in manner of a clientelist exchange of (state) resources vs. political loyalty. Though local political actors seldom employ the term indigenous, the communities' representatives allude to relevant imaginaries and views, enacting its conceptual load in subtle ways, and in different manners strategically employ suitable representations in political negotiations. On the one hand they stress common ideas on indigenous communities, reproducing (prejudiced) mainstream ideas about indigenous people, as a strategic concession that allows to gain access to state resources. Additionally it facilitates the preservation of a quasi-autonomous social space in the way of hidden resistance in Scott’s sense. However on the other hand the staged capability to collectively mobilize as community can also be turned around, being used as a menace in political interactions. This is facilitated by a transformation of the community’s bargaining position in political negotiations based on the entanglement of local and migration induced translocal processes that foster social change and alter forms of dependence, as translocal flows of resources but also ideas, knowledge and experiences combine with local processes.

The underlying relative unity of the communities is achieved by social cohesion based as much on several forms of pressure as on belonging based inter alia on day to day interactions. Therefore (often prejudiced) visions of indigenous communities are embodied by their members and the affiliation is internally and externally displayed. Hence indigeneity and the representation as consolidated communities are important political resources, even though these groups, far from being homogeneous, are often affected by internal conflicts and power relations. So the social positioning of these indigenous groups initially stays the same. Nevertheless indigenous communities may use this (self-) representations to promote a transformation of (local) political relations.

However also party affine organizations that seek to transnationally reestablish networks of political cooptation are frequently ethnically framed, employing discourses that emphasize a pretended shared ethnic identity. In this context formal migrant organizations, in migration studies usually conceived as the main realm for migrants political engagement, are frequently seen as facilitators of cooptation and therefore distrusted. Thus indigeneity can be both part of practices that enhance political transformations and a discursive instrument to revive clientelist modes of political interaction.

Short academic biography  
Rescher Gilberto (PhD Candidate, Bielefeld) is a lecturer at the Ruhr-University Bochum. His research interests include (local) politics, development, migration/transnationality, indigenous/ethnic groups, gender issues and qualitative methodologies, and he has conducted extended empirical fieldwork in Mexico, Nicaragua and on the Philippines. Based on these he published several articles inter alia on political transformations in an indigenous region of Mexico and is co-editor of the anthology „The Making of World Society: Perspectives from Transnational Research“.  

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In Search of Self:
Identity, Indigeneity, and Cultural Politics in Bangladesh

Uddin, Nasir
Ruhr-University of Bochum & University of Chittagong

Idea of indigeneity contains constant contestation between culture and politics as well as local notions of identity and trans-local discourse of indigeneity. People claimed of being indigenous continuous negotiate their local identity with trans-local politics and trans-national political imagining. Claim of being indigenous is thus more political motivation than a socio-cultural category. Endorsement of indigenous rights therefore challenges the idea of unitary nation-state that excludes cultural “others” from social and political integration in national space as the idea of nation-state always preferentially treats the majority whilst keeping cultural minority marginalized. Within the complex networks of the politics of indigeneity, identity of a particular group of people having limited access to education, urban center, and statecraft fall in crisis with local articulation of selfhood, national politics of ‘otherness’ and transnational discourse of indigeneity. This paper critically engages with the debates of indigeneity, identity politics and the politics of nationalism at local, national and transnational spheres with the case of the Khumi people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT); a south-eastern part of Bangladesh.

The Khumi, culturally different from majority Bengalis and sharply distinct from other ethnic minorities living in Bangladesh, confront multiple identities — Khumi, Pahari, upajatee, tribe, jumma, adivasi or indigenous people, khudra-nrigoshti or ethnic minority, and so on — amid the local and global politics of indigeneity. State’s politics of nationalism, transnational politics of indigeneity and postcolonial practice of colonial discourse in South Asian sub-continent put the Khumi in a crisis of identity, paradox of belongings and problem of subscribing the idea of indigeneity. Consequently, they are now in the state of losing their “self” in the paradox of multiple identities. With the case of Khumi, the paper examines the idea of indigeneity, politics of identity and belonging, as well as the notions of nationalism in Bangladesh within the larger canvas of the CHT vs. the state relations that have been historical shaped across times and regimes from colonial (British) through semi-colonial (Pakistan) to post/neo-colonial (Bangladesh) era.

Short academic biography

Uddin Nasir (PhD, Kyoto) is a cultural anthropologist based in Bangladesh. He is currently a Humboldt Visiting Scholar at Ruhr-University Bochum and an associate professor of Anthropology at the University of Chittagong. He did, and is doing, study and research in the University of Dhaka, Kyoto University, University of Hull, Delhi School of Economics, VU University Amsterdam, and Ruhr-University Bochum. His current research interests include indigeneity, and identity politics; migration and refugee studies, dialectics between colonialism and post-colonialism; notions of power and state in everyday life; peace and conflict, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and South Asia. His forthcoming book is Anthropology, Colonialism and Representation: A Case of the Adivasis Politics in Bangladesh (2014).
Fluid Indigeneities:
Dialectics of State-making and Belonging in the Indian Ocean

Zehmisch, Philipp
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The most constant features of indigeneity are flexibility, dynamism, and multiplicity. Discourses, definitions, and practices relating to indigeneity have shifted across time, spaces, and contexts. My understanding of the term is contingent upon the relationship between state and non-state people. The paper aims to discuss indigeneity as a dialectical process between essentialist classifications of indigenous groups by authorities, and creative appropriations of such categories by indigenous people for processes of identification and belonging. My ethnographic example, the Andaman Islands, serves to demonstrate the term's trajectory. Here, popular definitions, representations, and discourses of the British Empire, the Indian nation-state and the global sphere intersect. The shifting notions are discussed by looking at state policies and indigenous-settler dynamics. I intend to highlight how specific spatial arrangements and contact scenarios were interpreted, explained and described by referring to various notions of indigeneity.

In the Andamans, colonial notions of “savagery” were indicative of indigenous warfare and co-optation at the frontier; they justified the taming and civilizing of “primitive” islanders and their forests through settling convicts and “criminal tribes” from the Indian subcontinent. The transformation of ecological “wilderness” into ordered settler colony spaces was executed by “aboriginal” forest labourers: “Adivasi” migrants from Chota Nagpur, the Ranchis, and the Karen, a Burmese “hill tribe”. After Independence, anthropologically informed “tribal” governance led to protection acts, reserve zones, and welfare policies. Parallel to that, forestry, infrastructure development and migrations degraded indigenous resources and led to violence. More recently, transnational, national and local civil society actors have appropriated indigeneity for politics: Conservationists and indigenous activists promoted their own “ecologically noble savage” agenda when struggling with the government about the isolation of indigenous peoples; contrary to that, local politicians advocated the mainstreaming of backward “junglees”. Beyond that, Ranchi elites fight for official recognition of an indigenous status, while the majority of “Adivasi” people is threatened by eviction from encroached forest lands due to environmental governance. Such conflicting and fluid characteristics appear to be essential elements of indigenous futures.

Short academic biography

Zehmisch Philipp (PhD Candidate, Munich) is PhD Fellow of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich. His theoretical interest encompasses political Anthropology, Migration Research and Postcolonial Studies. Two research scholarships and a position in a German research council (DFG) project enabled him to complete eighteen months of fieldwork in the Andaman Islands between 2006 and 2012. Currently, he is getting a LMU grant for his dissertation "Mini-India – Migration, Subalternity and Indigeneity in the Andaman Islands". In June 2013, he organized the conference “Manifestations of History in the Andaman Islands” with more than twenty speakers from five countries and seven academic disciplines.
Defining indigeneity has recently been approached with renewed vigor. While the field can involve quite passionate commitment to advocacy among scholars, theoretical clarity is needed in understanding just who might be thought of as indigenous, and the reasons why this is... More happens under the sign of the indigenous than being born, or belonging, in a bounded land or nation (Clifford 2007:199). Clifford (2007:199) thus loosens the common opposition of indigenous and. As such, narratives of indigeneity are particularly useful for prescribing who may be considered a member of a given community and how they may participate within it. Shinto has been described by various interest groups as ethnically, geographically, conceptually, and authoritatively Japanese. Identity Politics Groups are politicized on the basis of gender, ethnicity, language, religion, race, indigeneity.

Normative Political theory explores how claims to the recognition and accommodation of identity relate to broader principles of justice, freedom, human rights, and democratic citizenship (see Appiah 2005, Gutmann 2003, Kymlicka 1995, Taylor 1994, Tully 1995; for a notable exception and dissent, see Barry 2001).