

SASNET report from 23rd ECSAS conference in Zurich, 23–26 July 2014

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23rd ECSAS web page: www.nomadit.co.uk/easas/ecsas2014

The 23rd European Conference on South Asian Studies (ECSAS) was successfully held 23 – 26 July 2014 at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. Nearly 500



participants from all of the World turned up for the conference.

It consisted of 51 panels, focusing on diverse issues ranging from "*Video varieté: the cultures and forms of new visual media in South Asia*", to "*'Mafia(s)' and politics in South Asia*" (convened by Prof. **Arild Engelsen Ruud**, Oslo University), "*Understanding rural Pakistan: the political economy of power and agrarian relations*", "*Conspiracy, terrorism and counterterrorism in late colonial India (c.1900-1947)*", "*Lost in transition? Negotiating power, legitimacy and authority in post-war Nepal and Sri Lanka*", and "*India in the eyes of the others: world perspectives on India's global role*". Other conveners from Scandinavia were Prof. **Gunnel Cederlöf**, Uppsala University (panel on "*Subjects, citizens, and legal rights in colonial and postcolonial India*"); Dr. **Alf Gunvald Nilsen**, University of Bergen (panel on "*Inequality, subalternity and capitalist development in contemporary South Asia*"); and Prof. **Heinz Werner Wessler** (panel on "*Jews and Judaism in South Asia: cultural encounters and social transformations*").

[Keynote speech on Ayodhya](#)

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The keynote speech was given by Professor Prof. **Ratna Kapur** from the Jindal Global Law School in India. Her presentation was entitled "*Belief in Law: the Politics of Secularism, Religion and Hindu Majoritarianism in Indian Constitutional Law*". In this talk, she focused on the famous Ayodhya property dispute, the subject of a series of court cases in India, in order to analyse the shift that the Hindu Right, a conservative and religious political movement seeking to set up India as a Hindu state – has effected in the substantive meaning and practice of secularism and along with it the constitutionally guaranteed right to



religious liberty. This politically volatile dispute centres on a series of legal suits filed by Hindu and Muslim parties in the Allahabad High Court on whether a temple or a mosque existed on a plot of land in Ayodhya, a town in the northern India state of Uttar Pradesh. The decision of the Court in September 2010 not only appeared to legitimize the demolition of the 16th century mosque in 1992 that stood on the disputed site, but is indicative of the increasing influence of the Hindu Right on shaping the contours of secularism in contemporary law in India. The right to freedom of religion is being used to establish and reinforce Hindu majoritarianism through secular law and transforming the very definition and identity of the Indian nation-state.

Conference hosts



The hosts for the 23rd ECSAS were the Department of Geography and the University Research Priority Program (URPP) Asia and Europe, both at the University of Zurich. Conference convenors were Prof. Dr. **Ulrike Müller-Böker** (*photo to the left*), Department of Geography, University of Zurich (CH); and Prof. Dr. **Angelika Malinar**, Department of Indology; Academic Director University Research Priority Program Asia and Europe, University of Zurich (CH).

The Scientific Committee consisted of Prof. Dr. **Harald Fischer-Tiné**, History of the Modern World, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology

Zurich; Dr. **Urs Geiser**, Department of Geography, University of Zurich; Prof. Dr. **Shalini Randeria**, Anthropology and Sociology of Development Department, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva; Prof. Dr. **R. Ramakumar**, Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai; Dr. **Anita Ghimire**, Nepal Center for Contemporary Research; and Prof. **Mohammad Waseem**, Lahore University of Management Sciences.

The ECSAS has met regularly since 1968, and has provided an important opportunity to

discuss current research and scholarship on topics relating to South Asia within the humanities and social sciences. The 2004 conference was organised by SASNET in Lund, see the 2004 conference page.



The ECSAS conferences now operate under the auspices of the European Association for

South Asian Studies (EASAS), a charitable, academic association engaged in the support of research and teaching concerning South Asia with regard to all periods and fields of study.

SASNET representation

SASNET was represented at the conference by **Lars Eklund** and **Hawwa Lubna** (photo to the right). Lubna also

represented the South Asian Students Association at Lund University, and assisted the organising committee at the conference by taking part in the registration work and other tasks. Their reports from the conference will soon be posted.

During the conference, elections were held for the EASAS Council (board) for the coming two years. Lars had been nominated to become new Treasurer, and he was also elected to this position. Prof. **Marin Gaenszle** from the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna, Austria was elected new President, and Prof. **Alessandra Consolaro** from Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici at Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy new Vice-President. More information about the new EASAS board.

Go for Lars Eklund's personal day to day report from the conference.



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Basic page *Glimpses from the 23rd ECSAS conference in Zurich* has been updated.

Glimpses from the 23rd ECSAS conference in Zurich

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– by **Lars Eklund**

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The 23rd European Conference on South Asian Studies (ECSAS) was successfully held 23 – 26 July 2014 at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. Nearly 500 participants from all of the World turned up for the conference. SASNET was represented at the conference by deputy director Lars Eklund and communications assistant **Hawwa Lubna**. It was a great conference, both in terms of interesting panels with important research results being disseminated, but also in terms of networking. A large number of SASNET networking partners were present.

Wednesday 23 July 2014:

Zurich in July 2014, the temperature is moderate and the weather unstable, far from the heat wave normally pestering this part of Europe this time of year. Instead the current heat wave is keeping a steady grip over northern Europe, from where I came day before by train via Berlin and Hannover. A nice time to spend at the conference held at the Irchel campus of the University of Zurich, 15 minutes away from the city centre by tram.

I arrive at the campus at 11 AM, and meet well-known people already on the pathway from the tram, not the least my friend Prof. **Heinz-Werner Wessler** from Uppsala University, and in the registration office I find my SASNET colleague Lubna standing behind a desk assisting the arriving researchers.

And in the crowd I immediately meet Dr. **Margret Frenz** from



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Leicester University, Vice-President for the European Association for South Asian Studies (EASAS), and her husband Dr. **Matthias Frenz** from Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volk in Berlin, as well as Prof. **Roger Jeffery** from University of Edinburgh, outgoing EASAS President.



I also met Prof. **Rita Afsar** (*photo to the left*) from the University of Western Australia in Perth, former member of SASNET's South Asian Reference Group, and at the book stalls put up by a number of reputed books publishers I met not surprisingly Dr. **Peter Andersen** from University of Copenhagen.

At 13.00, the Welcome session started, with introductory speeches by representatives for the hosting institutions at University of Zurich,

namely Prof. **Ulrika Müller-Böker** from Department of Geography; and Prof.

Angelika Malinar from the Department of Indology (also being Academic Director for University Research). Ulrika showed slides giving statistics about the conference participants' most frequent home countries, the list topped by UK, followed by Germany, India and USA (*see photo to the right*). She also presented the scientific committee that has planned for the conference since two

years back, and Prof. Malinar made a speech presenting the history of South Asian studies at University of Zurich.



This was followed by a welcome speech by Prof. Roger Jeffery (*photo to the left*), in his capacity of being the President for EASAS, the organisation behind these European South Asian studies conferences, held every second year since 1968.

Now the real conference started. At 14.00, no less than 13 parallel sessions were launched, running throughout the afternoon, with a coffee break inbetween. For your reporters,

this meant logistical problems, which panels to follow and for what reason. Being mainly a Swedish and Scandinavian research network, SASNET of course should prioritize those sessions that were coordinated by, or included paper presentations by Scandinavian researchers, but naturally personal interests were also given priority.

My first stop was for **Panel 22, on "Conspiracy, Terrorism and Counterterrorism in late Colonial India (c.1900-1947)"**, convened by **Harald Fischer-Tine** from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich; and **Kim Wagner** from Queen Mary, University of London. The panel promised to explore the rhetoric and practice of political violence and revolutionary terrorism in late colonial India and analyse the reaction of colonial officials and western media.

I listened to two most interesting presentations, first by **Teresa Segura-Garcia** (University of Cambridge, UK, on "*The Baroda blueprint: an Indian princely state in the building of independent India*", about how in the late colonial period, Maharaja Sayaji Rao III of Baroda positioned his state (the main princely state of western India) as a



blueprint for the Indian nation. The local loyalties he fostered have contributed to layered and often contradictory experiences of belonging in postcolonial India. The second presentation was by **Kama Maclean** (*photo to the right*) from University of New South Wales, Australia, entitled "*'Outrage', 'action' and interpretation: the attack on the Viceregal Special, December 1929*", providing some background into the attempt, in late 1929, by revolutionaries to assassinate Viceroy Irwin. While the action overtly 'failed', it succeeded in bringing the issue of political violence to the fore, to not only Congress politics but also within revolutionary circles.



I then moved over to another panel, No. 38, on "Producing the Popular: Ethics and Politics of Left Discourses in late and post-colonial Bengal", convened by **Sanjukta Sunderason**, Leiden University, Netherlands; and **Uditi Sen**, Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA. A panel attended by very few individuals, but promising to explore discourses of the popular that emerged as the cornerstone

of left-wing politics in late and post-colonial Bengal. I had a chance to listen to two paper presentations, the first by Uditi Sen herself who was not physically present but appeared via Skype, on "*Dangerous citizens: surveillance, refugees and the Left in West Bengal*". Here she explores government response to the rising influence of Left political parties amongst East Bengali refugees in post-partition West Bengal, focusing on the period 1947-50. Then followed **Nusrat Chowdhury** from Amherst College, also in Massachusetts, USA, with a presentation on "*The left and the 'lynch mob': Shahbag and the politics of protest in Bangladesh*", an ethnographic study revealing the existing potential and paradoxes of left politics in the country.



The first day of the conference was followed by a mingle session within the Irchel university campus, at a place named Aperó, where the university offered snacks and drinks to the conference participants. An ideal place to mingle around in the lovely evening sunshine. The gathering was inaugurated by the University of Zurich President, Prof. **Michael Hengartner** (*photo above*), who held a spirited speech.



Guro Warhuus Samuelsen.



Prabhu Gupta and Dietmar Rothermund.



Samiksha Sehwat.



Gunnel Cederlöf, Pamela Price and Margret Frenz.



Runa Chakraborty, Heinz Werner Wessler and Stephania Cavaliere.

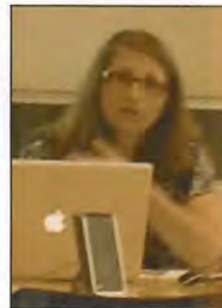
Thursday 24 July 2014:

Second day of the conference. Four sessions, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, beginning at 9.00 sharp, and finishing at 17.00. Time to participate in four different panels, the first one being **No. 43, on "States of exception: Contested politics in the central-eastern Himalayan borderland"**, convened by **Miriam Wenner**, University of Zurich; and **Mona Chettri**, SOAS, University of London; with **Martin Gänzle**, University of Vienna, and **Richard Whitecross**, University of Edinburgh, being discussants. The panel was supposed to describe how the central-eastern Himalayan borderland, artificially divided by national boundaries, is undergoing massive political and social transformations, entailing contestations about politics, democracy and belonging.



The first presentation was made by **Rune Bennike** (*photo to the left*) from the Dept. of Political Science at University of Copenhagen. He talked about "*Labeled belonging: tea branding, hill station images and politics of place in Darjeeling*", a paper investigating the political effects of the globalized branding of Darjeeling (across heritage tourism, tea certification and popular culture) on the contemporary movement for a Gorkhaland state. Rune defended his PhD in 2013 on a similar issue with a thesis entitled "Governing the hills".

He was followed by **Jenny Bentley** (*photo to the right*) from University of Zurich, with a paper entitled "*Homeland, dams and development boards: negotiated belonging and contested politics among the Lepcha in*



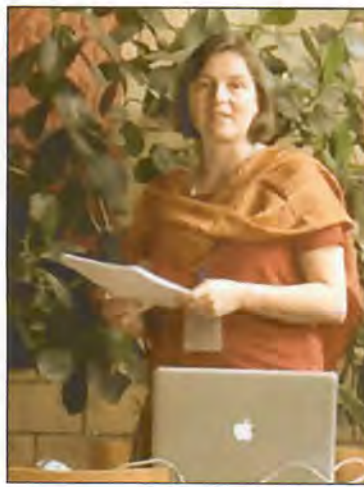
the central-eastern Himalayas", focusing on Sikkim and Darjeeling. Along recent developments she unravels the contestations in the struggle for protective rights, political power, and 'identity' within the Lepcha community in the various administrative and national regions they inhabit.

After morning coffee break I changed over to Panel **No. 44 on "Society, medicine and history: new perspectives"**, convened by **Samiksha Sehwat** from Newcastle University; and **Margret Frenz**, University of Oxford. Bringing together early career and established scholars, this panel promised to explore new perspectives on the social history of medicine in colonial and post-colonial periods. I was lucky enough to hear the two presentations by the conveners themselves.

Samiksha Sehrawat (*photo to the right*) gave a presentation about "*The Association of Medical Women in India: the trans-national*



professional communities of British medical women in India". British women doctors employed in zenana hospitals used the Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India to participate in a transnational imperial community of female medical experts, and demand a greater role in colonial administration. This process marginalized Indian medical women. The time period mentioned was 1830–1920.



Margret Frenz (*photo to the right*) continued with a paper entitled "*Circulating doctors in a connected world: South Asian trajectories in the twentieth century*", exploring the story of transimperial and transnational circulations of South Asian doctors between South Asia, East Africa, North America, and Europe. She focused on the history of Goanese medical doctors who settled in East Africa in the early 20th century, where they became marginalised members of a professional elite.



During the lunch break, a Call for a meeting was announced, a meeting to discuss a proposed resolution on protecting Academic Freedom in India. The initiative came from Prof. **Prabhu Gupta**, former Governor of the Polytechnic of Central London, and till he retired in 2011 for 15 years the Executive Director for the Organizational Development for Wolfsberg (a subsidiary of UBS, one of the largest banks in the world).

A small group of conference participants, including the SASNET reporter, met in a hall to discuss the issue. Since the resolution focused only on one country in South Asia, the European Association for South Asian Studies had in beforehand decided not to involve itself with the resolution, but let individual participants decide whether signing the resolution or not.

The afternoon sessions started at 13.30, and now I decided to attend Panel **No. 12 on "Reinterpreting South Asian State-formation: Communication-spatialities and State Structures"**, convened by **Nitin Sinha**, University of York, UK; and **Stefan Tetzlaff**, Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen, Germany, with **Ravi Ahuja** – also from Göttingen – being the discussant. Taking early-modern and modern periods as our historical timeline, the panel proposed to look at the relationship between communication infrastructures (physical networks of transport through which people, objects and ideas circulated) and processes of state-formation in South Asia.



I attended three presentations, the first by **Shreya Goswami** (*photo to the left*) from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India, on "*Building Calcutta's waterways: the River Hooghly and the Calcutta canals in the nineteenth century*", about the history of how the waterways in and around nineteenth century Calcutta were constructed through the efforts of both Government and private investors. Next came **Raghav Kishore** from the History department at SOAS, University of London, who presented a paper entitled "*Creating railway space: Traffic management, planning and state space in colonial Delhi 1899-1905*", exploring how railway re-development in colonial Delhi gave rise to a politics of planning between state agencies. It shows how the boundaries between 'railway space' and 'city space' were constantly shifting, as were those between the local

authorities and central government.

Finally, **Francesca Fuoli** (*photo to the right*), also from SOAS, University of London, presented a paper on *"Imperial networks of power and intellectual exchange: The role of British colonial knowledge in Afghan state-building, 1881-1900"*, a paper examining the Anglo-Afghan connections between 1881 and 1900, made possible by the improvement of communication and travel infrastructures. Fuoli argues that British colonial knowledge about Afghan tribes and ethnicity made it possible to travel into Afghanistan and indirectly influence state-building.



From the issue of communications history I then decided to shift over to a panel focusing on Muslim identity, to attend a fourth and final panel on this second day of the conference. Panel **No. 11, entitled "Re-thinking the 'Muslim Minority' in South Asia"** convened by **Sadia Bajwa**, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany; and **Razak Khan**, Center for the History of Emotions, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, also in Berlin. This was a panel supposed to show the plurality and historical variability of Muslim societies and cultures in South Asia by looking at the production and transformation of Muslim subjectivity in South Asia through the category of the minority. The panel drew a large audience, the chairs were not enough so some people even had to sit on the floor.



In this panel, I knew that **Andreas Johansson** (*photo to the left*) from Lund University and Linnaeus University in Växjö was going to present his ongoing research in a paper entitled *"Sri Lanka*



Muslim Congress (SLMC) dual nationalism: Caught between a lion and a tiger", where he argues that SLMC navigates to be loyal both to the nation (Sri Lanka) and the ethnicity (Muslims) and how the party uses Islamic concepts to do so, creating Muslim Politics.

Nathan Tabor, Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, Andreas Johansson and Razzak Khan.

However, not surprisingly, I came too late and missed his presentation. Instead I listened to two other presentations, the first by **Simon Wolfgang Fuchs** from Princeton University, USA. In his paper entitled *"It's not the economy: taking Pakistani Sunni-Shi'a polemics (and rapprochement) seriously"*, he traces the transformation of Sunni-Shi'a discourses in South Asia since the 1930s, growing tremendously after the Iranian revolution in 1979. It fleshes out how South Asian concerns and intellectual currents have shaped these debates.

Finally, **Nathan Tabor** from University of Texas at Austin, USA, presented a paper entitled *"An abode of beauties: Muslim publics in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh"* on how Muslim India's informal institutions found in Uttar Pradesh's semi-rural districts comprise an Islamicate public sphere, distinct from the majoritarian publics – liberal, secular, or otherwise – that govern India's public life and narratives about communal violence. Tabor highlighted the communal riots that took place in Muzaffarnagar in March 2014.

The final event of this second day was the **EASAS General Assembly**, from 17.30 till 19.00. This well-attended meeting (*photo to the right, with Siri Hettige in front*) was held in the main auditorium and was led by the outgoing President of the EASAS Council, Roger Jeffery, and the economic report was presented by outgoing Treasurer Heinz Werner Wessler. Elections were then held for the new Council to run EASAS for



the coming two years. The members present in the hall got a list of nominated candidates, and left their votes to be counted – the results to be announced at the Final Assembly session on Saturday.



As usual, the venue for the next ECSAS conference was presented, that is University of Warsaw in Poland. Prof. **Danuta Stasik** (*photo to the left*) entered the stage and welcomed people to attend the 24th conference at her home university in July 2016.

Finally, Roger Jeffery announced and congratulated the winners of the EASAS prizes for best student papers presented at the 2014 Zürich conference (*photo below*). The selected winners were:

- **Simon Wolfgang Fuchs** – information about his paper, see above;

- **Mythri Prasad**, from the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in Thiruvananthapuram, India, for her paper entitled *"Cards and carriers: migration and the politics of identification in India"*, where she probes the quotidian exclusions



that social life and contemporary capitalism produce and their effect on working class mobility, employment opportunities and resistance.

- **Giacomo Mantovan** from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris, France, for his paper entitled *"Between subjectivisation and resistance: the relationship between Sri Lankan asylum seekers and asylum courts in France"*, examining how Sri Lankan Tamils construct their life stories to seek asylum in France.

Friday 25 July 2014:

Third day of the conference. Lots of networking in the breaks, see a gallery of researchers to the right.

However, seven parallel sessions in the morning, 12 parallel sessions from lunchtime!

Totally impossible to cover all panels of interest, so I had to make strategic choices, in the process

unfortunately missing out on two panels convened by Scandinavian scholars, especially Panel No. 24 on



Claus Peter Zoller Darley Kjosavik Massimo Bon Shazia Wülbbers Ute Hüsken

Shweta Singh Dhammika Herath Koenraad Elst Mariola Offredi Ben Zachariah

"Inequality, subalternity and capitalist development in contemporary South Asia", convened by **Luisa Steur**, University of Copenhagen; and **Alf Gunvald Nilsen**, University of Bergen. This panel included highly interesting papers by **Dan Hirslund**, University of Copenhagen on *"Inequalities that don't matter? The political*

proletarianization of Maoist cadres in urban Nepal"; and by **Emilija Zabliute**, also from University of Copenhagen, with a paper entitled "Making the bodies of the urban poor women: governmental healthcare interventions in a jhuggi in Delhi".

I also had to skip Panel **No. 39** on "Jews and Judaism in South Asia: cultural encounters and social transformations", convened by Heinz Werner Wessler, Uppsala University.

Wessler himself presented a paper entitled "Swansong on Jewish identity in India? On Sheila Rohekar's novel "Miss Saimyuel: ek yahūdī gāthā".

Instead I covered four other panels throughout the day, the first being **No. 6** on "India and the Great War: Contemporary research for a centennial assessment", convened by **Ian Talbot** (photo to the right), University of Southampton, UK; **Roger Long**, Eastern Michigan University, USA; and **Maria Framke**, ETH Zurich. This panel was supposed to examine the profound impact of the World War One (1914-18) on the subcontinent and India's contribution.

Prof. Talbot was first out with an excellent learned presentation entitled "Punjab and the Great War: themes and fresh insights", highlighting two key opposite wartime experiences in the Punjab province: namely the recruitment of large numbers of servicemen for the British Army, and the transnational revolutionary threat posed to this 'model' province of British India in the form of the Ghadar Movement.

Talbot was followed by a presentation by **Salman Bangash** from the University of Peshawar, Pakistan, who talked about "Tribal Belt and the defence of British India: a critical appraisal of British strategy in the North-West Frontier during the first world war", on the strategy framed by the British Raj in India to protect its imperial interest in the region during the course of the war; and a presentation by **Nick Lloyd** from King's College London, UK, on "The view from Government House: Sir Michael O'Dwyer's war", an analysis of Dwyer's role during the World War One. Dwyer, later to be remembered for his role in the the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, played a vital role in the war efforts. Being the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, he led the recruitment effort for the Indian Army.



From the Great War panel I proceeded onwards to Panel **No. 36** on "Subjects, citizens, and legal rights in colonial and postcolonial India", convened by Prof. **Gunnel Cederlöf** from Uppsala University – former chairperson of SASNET's board and still very much engaged in the destiny of SASNET; and **Sanjukta Das Gupta**, Indian guest professor at Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. A panel discussing how law framed processes of state formation, subject formation and citizen rights in colonial and post-colonial India.

Prof. Cederlöf had already presented her paper on "The making of subjects on British India's north-eastern frontier", and Prof. Das Gupta her paper on "Tribes' as tenants: tenancy legislation and the creation of 'tribal' subjects in colonial Chotanagpur", but instead I was able to listen to two other interesting paper presentations. First **Simanti Dasgupta** from University of

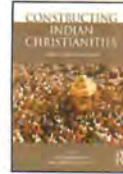


Dayton (photo to the right along with Prof. Cederlöf), USA, on "Contagious contestations: Sonagachhi between the colony and the postcolony", drawing upon ethnographic work in the Sonagachhi prostitution area of Kolkata, where the researcher explores how the colonial and the postcolonial legal practices around prostitution/sex work resonate in terms of creating and recreating the women's identity at the intersection of law and medicine and the resistance such practices evoke.



Then followed **Nishant Kumar** (*photo to the left*) from King's College, London, UK, with a paper entitled "*Rangila Rasul*, '*Sair-i-Dozak*' and the making of blasphemy law in colonial India: the philosophy and the politics", about the famous 1924 blasphemy case.

Two panels more to cover on this third day of the conference. After lunch attending Panel No. 9 on "**Christians, cultural interactions, and South Asia's religious traditions: Westernization and (or in) the process of acculturation**", convened by **Chad Bauman**, Butler University, USA; **Richard Young**, Princeton Theological Seminary, USA; and **Daniel Jeyaraj** from Liverpool



Hope University, UK. This panel was supposed to feature papers grounded in case studies and rigorously critical of extant scholarship, encouraging the articulation of more nuanced understandings of the complex interplay of westernizing and Indianizing processes in the development of South Asian Christianity. Baumann and Young has just published a book entitled "*Constructing Indian Christianities*" (Routledge, 2014, more information).

Unfortunately I missed the presentation by Danish networking partner **Peter B Andersen** from University of Copenhagen, and his paper on "*Indigenisation of a Christian mission to the Indians: the Lutheran mission to the Bodos in Assam*", focusing on the role of the Indian priests and catechists in the change of the Christian message from versions grown in Europe and the USA towards Indian interpretations relevant for Indians and Indian society.



However, I was fortunate to listen to four paper presentations, by **Miriam Benteler** from Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Germany, on "*Indigenized Western traditions? The confraternities and church festivals of the Latin Catholics of Kerala/South India*"; by **Roselle Gonsalves**, University of Calgary, Canada, on "*Maintaining identity: the religio-cultural community of Mumbai's Goan Catholics*"; by **Maria-Magdalena Fuchs** (*photo to the right*), Princeton University, USA, on "*Muslim converts to Christianity and the creation of a middle-class identity in late colonial Punjab*" (looking at Barakat Ullah, a Christian convert from Shia Islam in late 19th century, tracing issues of identity and belonging in late colonial North India through his Urdu writings); and by **Chandra Mallampalli**, Westmont College, USA, on "*Dalit Christian reservations in the Longue Duree, 1800-1950*".

The final panel to attend on this day became Panel No. 17, with the exciting title "**Mafia(s) and politics in South Asia**", convened by **Lucia Michelutti**, University College London, UK; and **Arild Engelsen Ruud** (*photo to the right*), University of Oslo, Norway. The panel aimed to bring together a set of studies on the working of 'mafias' in the politics of the subcontinent.



Anastasia Piliavsky (*photo to the left*) from Cambridge University presented a paper on "*Mafia Raj?*", describing a 'caste of thieves' in rural Rajasthan, arguing that the alleged crisis of 'mafia raj' in Indian politics has little to do with the prevalence of criminal cartels in the countryside and more about the political and legal anxieties of those who claim purity from them.



Guro Warhuus

Samuelsen from University of Oslo presented a paper entitled "*Myth-making and fear in the politics of Uttar Pradesh: the case of Raja Bhaiya*", an extremely interesting analysis of the phenomenon that in spite of elections being democratic, regular, free and fair, voters tend to support politicians that are widely known to be criminals and strongmen. Guro



has investigated the popular perceptions and myths that surround Raja Bhaiya, an infamous donturned-politician and five times MLA in Pratapgarh district, eastern Uttar Pradesh.



She was followed by yet another well-documented research paper, by **Jeffrey Witsoe**, Union College, USA, on "*The Sand Mafia: regional political economy and the politics of caste in Bihar*", examining the political economy of sand mining in Bihar and the syndicate that controls it, popularly referred to as the "baloo (sand) mafia."

Keynote speech

The day was however far from over. The conference organisers had made an unusual thing in placing the keynote speech not on the first day, but now on the end of day 3, from 17.45 till 18.30. The keynote speech was given by Professor Prof. **Ratna Kapur** from the Jindal Global Law School in India. Prof. Kapur is also Faculty at the Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations – a Swiss connection; and Faculty at Harvard International Global Law and Policy Institute.



Her presentation was entitled "*Belief in Law: the Politics of Secularism, Religion and*

Hindu Majoritarianism in Indian Constitutional Law". In this talk, she focused on the famous Ayodhya property dispute, the subject of a series of court cases in India, in order to analyse

the shift that the Hindu Right, a conservative and religious political movement seeking to set up India as a Hindu state – has effected in the substantive meaning and practice of secularism and along with it the constitutionally guaranteed right to religious liberty. This politically volatile dispute centres on a series of legal suits filed by Hindu and Muslim parties in the Allahabad High Court on whether a temple or a mosque existed on a plot of land in Ayodhya, a town in the northern India state of Uttar Pradesh. The decision of the Court in September 2010 not only appeared to legitimize the demolition of the 16th century mosque in 1992 that stood on the disputed site, but is indicative of the increasing influence of the Hindu Right on shaping the contours of secularism in contemporary law in India. The right to freedom of religion is being used to establish and reinforce Hindu majoritarianism through secular law and transforming the very definition and identity of the Indian nation-state.

Conference dinner at Dozentenfoyer

After the keynote speech, the conference participants had to leave Irchel campus and either by tram or on foot go for the conference buffet dinner, held at Dozentenfoyer, the roof restaurant of ETH, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, close to the city centre, and neighbouring the main building of University of Zurich. A marvellous place, with a grand view of the city, and good food served amidst mingling around with participants. A nice finale of the conference, even though half a day remained on Saturday as well.



Lars Eklund.



Peter B Andersen and Anasua Basu Chowdhury.



Amit Prakash



Veena Ravikumar and Hawwa Lubna.



Rosa Maria Perez



Univ Freiburg

Saturday 26 July 2014:

Final day of the conference. Two morning sessions with altogether 11 panels, 09.00-10.30, and 11.00-12.30, followed by the Final Assembly. Quite a reduced crowd met up at Irchel campus at 9 AM. But SASNET was of course on spot to follow two panels of special interest, first **No. 42 on "Return migration of South Asians: Thoughts about returning and coming home"**, convened by **Ulrike Müller-Böker**, University of Zurich, and **Anita Ghimire** from Nepal Centre of Contemporary Research, the latter well-known to SASNET since she has been involved in research collaboration with SASNET director



Anita Ghimire and Karen Valentin.

Anna Lindberg. The panel was supposed to address practices and discourse of return among migrants by giving empirical evidences that illustrate thoughts and the decision-making process in relation to return and the experience of return as well as use of knowledge and skills for different groups of migrants of South Asia.

Three Scandinavian researchers with a special interest in Nepal were members of the panel. **Karen Valentin** from Aarhus University presented a paper on "*Educational migration, development and the myth of return in Nepal*", where she critically examines the link between educational migration, development and the 'myth of return' with attention paid to the expectations of return built into prevailing ideas of education and mobility in the context of educational migration from Nepal to Denmark.

Directly after her followed **Jytte Agergaard** and **Ditte Rasmussen Brøgger** (*photo*) from

University of Copenhagen with a paper presentation entitled "*Returns to home: An analysis of internal educational migration in Nepal*" in which they analyze the "home" discourse and return practice among educational migrants from the Ilam region in Eastern Nepal. Through analysis of multilocal migrants' connections and orientation towards various "homes" they discuss what "home" means for the migrants, and how their return affect local development.



I also listened to **Berenice Girard** and **Aurelie Varrel** from EHESS, Paris, France, who presented a paper on "*Exploring the return of IT professionals: perspectives from South Indian metropolis*", where they address the meanings and practices of return migration among Indian highly skilled migrants working in the IT sector. Their study was based on two different studies: one conducted among 45 returned migrants in Bangalore in 2004 and one conducted among 45 returned migrants in Hyderabad in 2011.

From Migration to Land Struggles, I changed hall and went over to attend a crowded panel session, **No. 23 on "Development', national security and investment: Struggles for land in South Asia"**, convened by **Eva Gerharz**, Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany; and **Katy Gardner**, London School of Economics (LSE), UK. A panel focusing on land dispossession in contemporary South Asia, examining discourses of 'development' and

changing power relations in the struggle over land. Unfortunately, I had missed the presentation by Copenhagen researcher **Siddharth Sareen** (photo to the right) and his paper entitled "Development as security in India's Jharkhand? Practices of assemblage and the Saranda Action Plan", on the struggle for land in mineral-rich, conflict-stricken Jharkhand state.



But instead I came just in time to listen to **Ritanjan Das** (photo to the left) from London School of Economics, presenting his paper on "The politics of negotiation: revisiting the development-displacement narratives of Singur-Nandigram", re-examining the widely debated development-displacement narratives of Singur-Nandigram, contextualising these against the contradictions embedded in the political negotiation tactics adopted by the West Bengal government to engineer a pro-market transition in its development policy.

Next came **Richard Axelby**, another LSE researcher, with a paper entitled "Low politics in high places: struggles over grazing resources at a Himalayan pasture", examining shifts in the management and use of a single grazing pasture in

Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh. It focused on conflicts between user groups and the changing ways that local norms of use are socially justified through discourses of development and of Indian nationalism.

Finally, the last presentation I listened to during the 23rd ECSAS conference, by **Éva Rozália Hölzle** from Bielefeld University, Germany, on "Hidden powers: expanding army cantonments in Bangladesh", on land dispossession generated through establishing army cantonments, a missing aspect of the contemporary land grab debate in Bangladesh. In her paper she focused on two empirical cases where local people lost their land because of establishment of cantonments.

Final Assembly



At 12.30 on Saturday noon, the final conference event was held, the Final Assembly. The time to thank the organisers behind the conference, the voluntary staff working with all practicalities (photo). It was also time to announce the results of the elections for the EASAS Council. Not surprisingly, the results followed the nominations being made.

New President is Professor



Martin Gaenzle from the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna, Austria; incoming Vice-President is Professor **Alessandra**

Consolaro from Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici at Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy; and the third and final office bearer, the new Treasurer, is Lars Eklund from SASNET/Lund University, Sweden, at your service. (Photo of the office bearers)

The outgoing office bearers – Roger Jeffery, University of Edinburgh, UK; Margret Frenz, Oxford University, UK; and Heinz Werner Wessler, Uppsala University, Sweden – remain as council members, along with Danuta Stasik, University of Warsaw, Poland; Samiksha Sehrawat, Newcastle University, UK; **Kunal Sen**, University of Manchester, UK; **Nicolas Jaoul**, CEIAS Paris, France; **Martin Fuchs**, Universität Erfurt, Germany; and Rosa Maria Perez, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE -IUL), Portugal. More information about the new Council and its work.

After an hour the conference was declared over, a very successful conference. See you next time in Warsaw 2016!