

The Organization of Solidarity in the City of Mostar (BiH). Approaches from Cultural Anthropology and Administrative Sciences.

Larissa Vettters, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Germany, E-mail: vettters@eth.mpg.de

Introduction



Photo by courtesy of A. Curran
Fig. 1: Physical evidence in Mostar's urban landscape of the violent conflict following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 90s.

The current debate on the legitimacy and sustainability of international intervention and state-building in post-conflict countries has curiously been restricted to international relation theories and practice. So far, little detailed in-depth ethnographic research was conducted as to the consequences of such state-building projects for newly evolving forms of governance within the affected societies.

This PhD is carried out at the German University of Administrative Sciences in Speyer. It aims at contributing to theoretical and practical understanding of the effects of internationally monitored public administration reforms on local structures of solidarity (or exclusion) in Bosnia-Herzegovina - a Southeastern European post-conflict society, which emerged as an independent and multi-ethnic state out of the Yugoslav conflicts of the early 1990s.

Structures of solidarity or exclusion are intentionally chosen as a broad conceptual point of departure, in order to include formal and informal, institutionalized and spontaneous, local as well as national and international forms of community/state-building in this interdisciplinary project.

Scientific Approach/Methods

Empirical data collected during fieldwork is being interpreted in the light of two theoretical frameworks:

- ❖ Cultural anthropology with an emphasis on informal arrangements, the embeddedness of social actions and the importance of symbolic meanings and representations.
- ❖ Administrative sciences with a focus on administrative functions, personnel management, organizational structures, standard work procedures, and questions of "good governance".



Photo: L. Vettters
Fig. 2: A local community/neighborhood office. This surviving element of the former system of socialist self-management still provides for a point of contact between citizens and the city administration. Recently, this institution has been rediscovered by international organizations in their efforts to promote local democracy and enhance citizens' participation. It offers the anthropologist an ideal entry point into exploring the various meanings attributed to local government and the uses - in material as well as symbolic/ideological terms - made of these offices.

Fieldwork carried out from July 2005 to August/September 2006 in the City of Mostar closely followed the interactions of three groups of actors in various public sites:



A mix of qualitative methods was applied: participant observation in administrative institutions, international organizations and other public settings, extensive interviewing, the study of administrative records and statistical data, and a survey of media coverage of relevant topics.

(Expected) Results

The combination of public administration research with an extended period of ethnographic fieldwork serves to fill a gap in the academic literature on state-building by probing the tension between globally designed projects of state-building and local responses in the specific case of the City of Mostar.

The cross-fertilization of disciplinary approaches should enrich both:

- ❖ an anthropology of the state which acknowledges the complexity of bureaucratic organization and scholarly theorizing thereof, and
- ❖ a comparative administrative science which draws on existing anthropological knowledge.

By examining local level state-building through the lens of the concept of solidarity rather than through such concepts as reconciliation or peace-building, attention is drawn to the fact that issues explored in Mostar are pressing questions in the context of globally changing state-society relations.



Photo by courtesy of A. Curran
Fig. 3: The stepping stones of Mostar's famous reconstructed "Old Bridge", one of the most frequently used but also highly contested symbols for a past and future peaceful and multi-ethnic community in BiH.

Publications and Presentations

Publications:

2007: The Power of Administrative Categories: Emerging Notions of Citizenship in the Divided Town of Mostar, special issue on "Governance in Ethnically Mixed Towns", *Ethnopolitics*, vol. 6(2), p. 187-209.

2008: Reflections on "the Field": Local Community Offices in Mostar as a Site for Investigating State-Society Relations in a Post-Conflict Country, in: Nitsiakos, V. et al. (eds.) *First Annual of the Konitsa Summer School*, Münster, p. 460-471.

Presentations:

2009: "Doing Democracy the Bosnian Way: Mostar's Local Community Offices as a Site of Circulating Ideologies and Practices of Local Participatory Democracy" at the workshop The European Union and State-building: Lessons for and from the Balkans, Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, Canada, 8 - 9 May 2009.

2008: "The Incorporation of Individual Aspirations in the State-building Project - Past and Present Trajectories in Mostar" at the conference Critical Spaces of Hope: Locating Postsocialism and the Future in the Post-Yugoslav Anthropology, Center of East European and Russian/Eurasian Studies, University of Chicago, USA, 24 - 25 October 2008.

2007: "Mastering the Politics of Scale: Contemporary Place-making Projects among Mostar's Politico-administrative Elites" presented at the 1st CEU Sociology & Social Anthropology Graduate Conference, Budapest, 22-23. June 2007.