



## WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

### Ecologies of Conflict: Exploring the Nexus of Violence, Environment, and [More than] Human Relations

**Organizer:** Annika SCHMEDING, Dat NGUYEN

**E-Mail Address:** [annika.schmeding36@gmail.com](mailto:annika.schmeding36@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Throughout much for the 20th and into the 21st century, mass violence and warfare wreaked havoc on the environment, including its human and more-than-human inhabitants, across the globe as different military superpowers tested new destructive explosive and chemical weapons. In the aftermath of these episodes of mass violence, humans and non-humans have had to confront the long-lasting political, cultural, and biological/genetical impact of war toxicities and destruction. Taking an anthropological approach to the notion of “slow violence,” this workshop examines the various nexuses, relations, and pathways connecting different forms of violence and the environment across various socio-political contexts. Participants are encouraged to explore and reflect on the following sets of themes and questions:

1. Genocide-Ecocide Relations: What are the linkages between genocide and ecocide in the participants’ regions of study? How is the destruction of the environment and ecologies connected to the systematic destruction of a group of people’s cultures, societies, and identities?
2. Human and More-than-Human Relations: How have the various episodes of mass violence and warfare reconfigured the relationships between the human and more-than-human actors? What new and unexpected forms of relations—as they are expressed in ritual activities, economic relations, technologies, etc.—have emerged?
3. Slow Violence and the ‘Military-Industry’ Complex: How have the military and corporations worked in tandem in reshaping and extracting local ecologies and the environment in various regions? What forms of violence—both slow and spectacular—have been enacted by both ‘corporate’ and ‘war-crime’ perpetrators on the environment and its human and more-than-human inhabitants?

The workshop will be held in a hybrid format. We welcome papers based on research in all regions of the world, with particular interest in Asia and the Middle-East.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

**Tuesday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 3 | Room 3**

*Shamshad Bashir: Entangled Histories: The Quotidian Life and The Culture Memory*

*Miss Daud: Cultural Genocide: An Examination of its Exclusion from the Genocide Convention and its Implications for Indigenous Communities and Environment*

*Annika Schmeding: The Place that wasn't empty: Environmental War Legacies in Afghanistan*

**Tuesday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 4 | Room 3**

*Martin Thalhammer: Tite Conflicts in and over Forests: Towards a Multi-species Political Ecology of Bark Beetle Outbreaks in Upper Austria and Beyond*

*Paul Christensen: Sandscapes and Slow Violence: Social and Environmental Implications of Sand Mining in the Mekong Region of Cambodia*

*Dat Nguyen: On the Land of the War Dead: Human Remains Recovery, Aquaculture, and Spirituality in Contemporary Vietnam*

## SESSION PAPERS

**Entangled Histories: The Quotidian Life and The Cultural Memory**

*Shamshad Bashir*

What does it mean to inhabit a space where death looms larger than the possibility of life? Terror is the rhizome of Kashmir's past and the spectre of its present. The memories of violence are a living memoir that unfold the deep scars, fragmented existence, informs and shapes the present subjectivities. Self-censorship is a norm in Kashmir and its efficacy sustained by fear, ambivalence thus constituting violence as an everyday inherited cultural memory without the need for explicit act of violence. The fear is a poison that breeds endless suffering and echoes the internalised 'panopticon' that transpires the bodies making them docile and captive. There is an inherent (invisible) violence, attached to it, an unease, sceptics that traversed all my journey of the fieldwork in Kashmir. Fear, having dispersed capillaries, 'thrives on ambiguities; it is a way of life' (Green, Linda, 1994) in Kashmir. This study engages with the dynamics of everyday violence in Kashmir which flourishes on the intricacies of fear and suspicion, and documents the intensified, nuanced nature of violence amidst the events of upheavals, torture; reducing life to its mere possibility of survival, damaging the social, thus offering a continuum of 'living violence' in Kashmir; that lay bare the intimate relationship the community share with violence. The author collected a wide-ranging narrative of violence, taking ethnographic and autoethnographic route, where the past informs the present as a project. The study complicates the understanding of the possibilities of life that 'emerge' either from violence or a 'descent into ordinary' and reveals the fusion of violence and existence within these death spaces citing exposure of the community to direct memories of violence that

defines Kashmir's ordinary which is all pervasive and continuous.

Keywords: Memory, Living Violence, Fear and Survival.

### **Cultural Genocide: An Examination of its Exclusion from the Genocide Convention and its Implications for Indigenous Communities and Environment**

Miss Daud

This paper critically examines the exclusion of cultural genocide from the Genocide Convention and its fuel in perpetuating the concept of slow violence upon Indigenous communities. Utilizing a scholarly approach, the study analyzes current legal frameworks to assess the gaps within current legal mechanisms, highlighting the significant challenge of holding perpetrators of the destruction of communities and their cultures and environment accountable.

The analysis further delves into the Genocide Convention, exploring its relevance to the complex spectrum of environmental degradation. Drawing from extensive scholarly discourse and empirical evidence, the study interrogates the nuances of defining and recognizing cultural genocide, especially concerning the subjugation of Indigenous lands, cultures, and identities.

The focus of the investigation centers on the Amazon rainforest, a focal point of ecological importance and cultural diversity. A thorough analysis is conducted on the interplay between environmental destruction and Indigenous lifeways, traditions, and cultural practices. Through an exploration of the Amazon's ecological decline, the study uncovers the existential threat posed to Indigenous communities by relentless environmental degradation.

Furthermore, the analysis extends beyond geographical boundaries, examining diverse case studies on a global scale to get an insight into the broader implications of environmental destruction on cultural heritage. By synthesizing empirical research, scholarly literature, and Indigenous perspectives, the study illuminates the complex interconnections between environmental degradation and cultural erosion, emphasizing the urgent need for interventions.

In conclusion, the paper advocates for a paradigm shift within legal frameworks and policy to address the exclusion of cultural genocide from the Genocide Convention. By highlighting the exclusion of cultural genocide as a result of systemic violence, we are then forced to reflect on the gaps in international law, paving the way for transnational legal activism that is emerging within the transitional justice realm.

### **The Place that wasn't empty: Environmental War Legacies in Afghanistan**

Annika Schmeding

Depictions of Afghanistan are often dominated by the colonial trope of an "empty space": book covers and news reports frequently portray desolate mountain terrain and desert landscapes, emphasizing barrenness and perceived backwardness rather than acknowledging the country's rich history as the cradle of Mughal and Timurid art and culture, with a diversity of climactic and environmental zones. This neo-Orientalist

imagery of emptiness has consequences for how we envision and often fail to perceive Afghanistan's environment.

For decades, the wars and proxy conflicts in Afghanistan have also served as laboratories for new military technologies and tactics. The presentation offers an overview of the multifaceted impact of war and militarism on Afghanistan and its people, exploring the complexities associated with analyzing the layered effects of multiple warring factions across various time periods.

### **Conflicts in and over Forests: Towards a Multi-species Political Ecology of Bark Beetle Outbreaks in Upper Austria and Beyond**

*Martin Thalhammer*

There is turmoil in and around Central European forests. Here, the escalating climate crisis with droughts and heat waves; there, increasing biotic disturbances like fungal diseases and insect pests. Here, humans holding on to an outdated form of forestry, a violent project of transforming Multi-Species landscapes into "extractive and enclosed plantations" (Haraway 2015, 162); there, "feral proliferations" thriving in the cracks of failed human forest management (Tsing et al. 2019). In the midst of these upheavals: A being four millimeters large, dark-brown in color. A being with the power to make humans despair, trees die, fungi thrive and landscapes change. A European Spruce Bark Beetle (*Ips typographus*) – an insect that with its population eruptiveness has messed with human forest-making to an unprecedented extent, that has become the most impactful biotic disturbance agent in Central European forests (Hlásny et al. 2019). While the impacts of bark beetles on forest landscapes, forest management and forest economics are in themselves a cause for concern (at least for foresters), as a political ecologist I am interested in how bark beetles exacerbate conflicts between, among and across Multi-Species forest assemblages, how bark beetles re-politicize the question of what to do about forests, whether to continue to use them for provisional purposes or to put them under strict(er) protection. Drawing on insights from ethnographic research on bark beetle outbreaks in the federal province of Upper Austria and on approaches from "political entomology" (Beisel et al. 2013), Multi-Species ethnography and a Multi-Species political ecology (Ogden et al. 2013), the paper at hand addresses the question of "who benefits when species meet" (Kirksey et al. 2014, 1). In doing so, it scrutinizes how to think about conflicts between human and more-than-human actors, about how to account for the more-than-human dimension of violent environments (Peluso, Watts 2001).

### **Sandscapes and Slow Violence: Social and Environmental Implications of Sand Mining in the Mekong Region of Cambodia**

*Paul Christensen*

This presentation explores the social impacts of sand mining in Cambodia. Sand and gravel are essential for construction and land reclaiming projects, leading to intense exploitation. The effects of sand mining in Cambodia include significant erosion, with wealthy residents securing their properties with concrete, while others suffer the effects of erosion. Protests are rare due to the slow pace of sand-mining and misinformation from the government.

Sand mining represents 'slow violence' (Nixon 2011), similar to Cambodia's deforestation since the 1980s, both supported by the military and police. This extraction alters human-environment relations, replacing spiritual authority with market-driven exploitation. Work (2023) and others such as Sahlins (2022) have studied this shift. Despite the immanent importance of spirits (Christensen 2022), non-human actors as spirits lose significance in the face of resource exploitation (Kent 2020, Work 2023).

As part of the Sandscapes in Southeast Asia project, this presentation will present initial data and explore the following questions: How does the 'slow violence' of extractivism change perceptions of the natural environment? How do these interventions affect human-non-human relations? How do past conflicts influence social resistance to deteriorating conditions, especially for the rural poor?

### **On the Land of the War Dead: Human Remains Recovery, Aquaculture, and Spirituality in Contemporary Vietnam**

*Dat Nguyen*

The Vietnam-American war (1955-1975) resulted in the death of millions of Vietnamese and the destruction of the country's environment. Across contemporary Vietnam, there are many mass graves of soldiers and civilians that remain undiscovered, and the dead buried there has not received proper burial treatment. For fallen revolutionary soldiers who fought for North Vietnam, the postwar Vietnamese state has recognized them as martyrs, whose physical remains, upon being recovered from former battlefields or mass graves, would be interned at one of the numerous state-funded revolutionary cemeteries. Drawing on recent fieldwork in southern Vietnam, this paper focuses on the recovery effort of a set of revolutionary soldiers' remains from a mass grave upon which shrimp farming activities have more recently taken place. It traces the collective effort of, as well as the tensions among, local shrimp farmers, veterans, and the local government to recover the remains, identify and ritually care for the dead. In doing so, I aim to shed light on the multiple entanglements between necropolitics, economic development, and spirituality surrounding the handling of the revolutionary dead in Vietnam. I argue that efforts to recover the remains of the war dead have not only prompted new forms of ritual care for the dead, but also reconfigured the relationships between the living and the natural environment in which the dead remains