



## **What is non-traditional after all? Gender, sex and discrimination in Central Asia**

### **Panel at the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS) Conference, Oct 8-11 2015, Zurich, Switzerland**

Organized and chaired by Judith Beyer

#### **1. Judith Beyer**

Juniorprofessor of Anthropology  
University of Konstanz  
Germany

#### **Introduction**

This panel seeks to problematize the notion of tradition and retraditionalization in the Central Asian context. The three papers critically investigate the implications of current retraditionalization discourses and practices concerning gender, sex and discrimination. (Re-) traditionalization is often portrayed as a positive dimension of ongoing wider transformation processes, and as a source of inspiration to which people in Central Asia turn to, looking for guidance in how to shape their own future. This panel, however, concentrates on the intended or unintended side effects of such discourses and practices, and seeks to explore in what ways they might lead to an overall re-conceptualization of gender- and sex-relations on the one hand, and to an exclusion, marginalization and criminalization of some members of society on the other hand.

#### **2. Cynthia Buckley**

Professor of Sociology  
University of Illinois  
USA

#### **Framing homosexuality in moral terms: Patterns of potential tolerance among Eurasia's Muslim populations**

Over the past decade substantial shifts in public opinion regarding homosexuality in western Europe, north America and elsewhere match legislative changes legalizing same sex unions and restricting statutes limiting the rights of homosexuals. Most recently, Russia and other Eurasian states have been experiencing increasingly restrictive legislation regarding homosexuality and rising tides of anti-homosexual public opinion. Using data from the 2012 Pew Research Center's Muslim World Survey, I investigate levels and individual predictors of homosexual tolerance in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia.

Supporting previous studies on tolerance, bivariate logistic regression indicates that highly educated, female, rural and less religious individuals are less likely to view homosexuality as morally unacceptable in all countries but Russia. However, age patterns among Muslims in Eurasia differ markedly from other national studies. Thinking sociologically about the origins of and trends within tolerance can improve understandings of current public opinion trends and identify likely future trajectories in Central Asia.

### **3. Anna Kirey**

Senior Program Officer  
Public Health Program at Open Society Foundations

#### **LGBT activism in Central Asia at the crossroads after the introduction of 'propaganda' bills**

In my presentation I provide an overview of LGBT activism in Central Asia with a focus on Kyrgyzstan and some glimpses into three other Central Asian countries. As someone who participated in ten years of emerging LGBT activism in the region, I would like to discuss different influences that contributed to framing LGBT issues before the 'propaganda' discourse emerged in post-Soviet space and after the introduction of the 'propaganda' bill in Kyrgyzstan. I will also relate this to current developments in Russia and Ukraine and to an overarching discourse on traditional values.

### **4. Diana Kudaibergenova**

PhD Candidate in Sociology  
University of Cambridge  
UK

#### ***Instagram* exposed: Framing traditional and neo-traditional gender perceptions online**

The paper discusses (neo-) traditional perspectives and perceptions as framed through the visual platform *Instagram* in contemporary Kazakhstan. Discussing gender roles in patriarchal societies such as Kazakhstan, I propose researching *Instagram* on the basis of three levels of framing: an internet-based frame (action), a social frame (traditional perceptions and code of behaviour) and a neo-traditional frame (re-creation of presumably traditional values online). In doing so, I argue that social networks serve as spaces of visualization and re-creation of new forms of traditional and "acceptable" behaviour, lifestyles, self-representation, gender and sexual identity as well as beauty standards. *Instagram* is both a global space of visual exchange as well as a norm-setting framework on the local level. In this hybrid production of cultural content, youngsters in Kazakhstan are positioning themselves as global consumers of famous brands and glamour but also as guardians of traditional lifestyles. But *Instagram* also serves as a space for breaking the typical gender roles especially for non-traditional discourses of male gay culture in Kazakhstan.