

## James Connell

### Violence, Trauma and Political Consciousness amongst Tibetan Refugees in South-East Asia

Supervisors: **Dr Martin Rew** (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government-society/staff/profiles.aspx?Referenceld=4514>), **Dr Heather Marquette** (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government-society/staff/profiles.aspx?Referenceld=4495>)



My research essentially aims to provide an ethnography of violence and trauma amongst young Tibetan refugees in Northern India. Treating displacement as a 'continuation of conflict', it traces the myriad challenges that young Tibetans face both in Tibet and in India in an attempt to better understand how experiences of violence condition notions of identity and political consciousness at individual and collective levels. At core it responds to broader questions about the ways in which youth make sense of, adapt to, and cope with experiences of political violence and conflict, and examines the factors involved in mediating the ways in which they respond to such experiences. Such questions are made all the more relevant by the disturbing incidence of so many young Tibetans choosing to engage in self-immolation as a form of protest in the People's Republic of China, despite the broader collective resistance to forms of more outwardly violent action.

The project additionally attempts to refocus on the complexity of a conflict and a community that has historically been treated as simple and homogeneous. Through a focus on trauma, I examine the ontology of individual and collective 'cultural trauma', at the same time as exploring the tensions between the ways in which communities construct such traumas through the appropriation and neglect of certain narratives. In particular I attempt to disentangle the ways in which political interests and social relations in the Tibetan community are deeply embedded within depoliticised and normative claims of pathology and human rights, and examine how such processes work to selectively silence the concerns of groups within the community. For this reason I pay particular attention to issues of class and gender, and the ways in which displacement has worked to preserve, reconfigure, or end exclusory processes.

My work draws on two pieces of medium-term ethnography in Tibetan settlements across Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh, with purposive visits to settlements in Nepal and South India. I employ a mixed methodology drawing on observation, semi-structured interviews, analysis of quantitative data, documentary photography, and participatory work using photography elicitation.

### Profile

I am a graduate of the Universities of St Andrews (History) and Birmingham (International Development), with strong interests in Conflict & Human Security, Human Rights, Refugee Studies and the politics of identity and exclusion. My core interest is to explore the ways in which memories of violence and trauma are constructed and condition the life-worlds of young Tibetans, including the ways in which they contribute to the development of identity and political consciousness. This responds more broadly to a theoretical impasse in so-called refugee studies that tends to result either in the pathologisation or over-politicisation of refugees – both of which tend towards constructing them as a threat to public security that needs to be governed. On the other hand my work explores the way in which refugee communities themselves also work (directly or indirectly), to govern those that belong to them, and occlude inequitable social relations through appeals to narratives of violence, trauma, and suffering. For this reason my work depends on a broadly constructivist framework that examines power relations in refugee communities through the work of Foucault, Bauman, Bourdieu, and Gramsci.

### Qualifications

- MSc International Development, University of Birmingham, 2010
- MA English and History, University of St Andrews, 2008

### Research interests

- Children and Youth in Conflict
- Displacement
- Social Exclusion and Identity Politics
- Health and Development
- Human Rights Law, Governance and Development
- Religion, Culture and Development
- The Himalayas (Tibet, Nepal, Ladakh), Afghanistan.

### Teaching responsibilities

- 2012-2013 – Seminar Tutor, Critical Approaches to Development.

### Publications

Connell, J. A. (2013) 'Where shadows fall patchwork: religion, violence, and human security in Afghanistan'. In: Clarke, M. ed. *Handbook of Research on Religion and Development*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 540-569.

Alolo, N. A., Connell, J. A. (2013) 'Indigenous Religions and Development: African traditional religion'. In: Clarke, M. ed. *Handbook of Research on Religion and Development*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 138-163.



