

Book review: Arne Seifert: Dialog und Transformation - 25 Jahre OSZE- und Zentralasienforschung. Baden-Baden: Nomos 2017. ISBN 978-3-8487-3827-4

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have unearthed, when he states of Kingsbury, dismissively, that he “did not break any new ground” or “perceptibly change the agenda of the Jesus-quest enterprise” (p. 138). Winding down, Sugirtharajah’s desultory comments on the quest for the historical Jesus conclude on such a pessimistic note, as observed above, that one is left to ponder how the author calculated the loss and gain of engaging in his project in the first place. And while I heartily concur with Sugirtharajah that “Jesus is not the private property of Western scholarship” (p. 3), I find more value in the anthology of extra-Christian readings entitled *Jesus Beyond Christianity*, compiled by Gregory Barker and Stephen Gregg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and recommend it highly.

Richard Fox Young

ARNE SEIFERT, *Dialog und Transformation. 25 Jahre OSZE- und Zentralasienforschung*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017. 303 pages, €64.00. ISBN 978-3-8487-3827-4

Arne Seifert, a diplomat and researcher, has worked on Central Asia, in particular on Tajikistan, over the last three decades. This volume, which was published by the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), on the occasion of Seifert’s 80th birthday, provides an excellent synopsis of his research and writings since the mid-1990s.

Arne Seifert grew up in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), studied International Relations and Diplomacy in Moscow, and served from 1964 to 1989 as a diplomat for the GDR Foreign Office. After the collapse of the Soviet Union he was deployed to the OSCE mission in Tajikistan in 1996 and 1997, where he became an eyewitness to the final phase of the country’s civil war. Afterwards he switched to academia and became a member of the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) at the IFSH.

The title of this volume, *Dialog und Transformation* (“Dialogue and Transformation”), thus nicely summarises Seifert’s cross-border work at the interface between academia, diplomacy and practice. Overall, this fine collection of his articles includes sharp analyses and deep insights into Central Asian society and history, which are enriched by illustrative examples collected during his diplomatic deployment to Tajikistan. In the first two sections of the book the author reflects on his experiences when he served with the OSCE mission in Tajikistan. The third and fourth parts of the book are based on his work at CORE/IFSH, where he conducted several dialogue projects between Germany and Central Asia, particularly focusing on the role of political Islam.

Readers who are engaged in learning more about policy and diplomatic missions will be interested in the first two parts of the book. Here Seifert provides profound insights into his diplomatic deployment to Tajikistan. With a knowing hand, he describes the emergence of competing political elites in Tajikistan and how the intense struggles between them sparked the civil war in the country. At the same time, the former diplomat provides critical and outspoken reflections on the intervening missions of the United Nations and the OSCE. His main point of critique is that the international peace missions were trapped in the misconception that Tajikistan was undergoing a conflict between two distinct parties. In his eyes international diplomacy never fully grasped the deeply engrained societal dimension of the conflict, which encompassed not only ideological, but also ethnic, regional and social dimensions and which permeated the society as whole. Based on his OSCE experiences Arne Seifert furthermore elaborates in detail what the future role of the OSCE in a changing world should be. The concrete ideas he develops in this book are well argued and are worth a second thought – particular against the background of the frozen conflicts in Eurasia and the deteriorating relationship between Europe and Russia.

Shaped by his sobering experiences during his diplomatic mission to Tajikistan, Arne Seifert focused his research after his move to CORE/IFSH on understanding the societal dimensions of conflict and how to deal with them. To overcome political confrontations, it is imperative always to maintain dialogue between political adversaries, the author argues. In addition he provides innovative approaches on how to permeate ideological silo structures and how to explore alternative ways of thinking. Against the backdrop of ailing Soviet institutions and the revival of authoritarianism Seifert shows a particular interest in understanding the role of political Islam in Central Asia. In addition he elaborates concrete ideas in this volume on how to build trust between proponents of political Islam and secular ideologies.

From the title of the book, *Dialog und Transformation*, one can conclude that Arne Seifert is a convinced advocate of “dialogue” to facilitate social change and to mediate conflicts. With respect to “transformation”, it is no surprise that the author takes a rather critical stance. He does not believe in the uninterrupted transformation of society towards liberal democracy and a market economy that many politicians and observers envisaged for Central Asia in the 1990s. In contrast, Arne Seifert convincingly argues that social change proceeds in fits and starts. In his thinking the direction of transformation must always remain open and can hardly be planned in a concrete way.

Conrad Schetter