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Editorial:
Grenzregionen und Border Studies in Südostasien /
Borderlands and Border Studies in South-East Asia

Alexander Horstmann

ASEAS-Gastredakteur / ASEAS Guest Editor

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Die vorliegende ASEAS-Ausgabe bietet eine Übersicht über aktuelle Forschungsarbeiten zum Thema Grenzregionen und *Border Studies* in Südostasien. Unterschiedliche Aspekte und theoretische Zugänge werden präsentiert und heben die Bedeutung dieses neu entstandenen Feldes für die Sozialwissenschaften hervor. Die AutorInnen sehen in *Border Studies* ein wertvolles Instrument zur Dekonstruktion geografischer Grenzen und nationalstaatlicher Ideologie. Es erlaubt Perspektiven zu hinterfragen, die das Konzept der Nation implizit akzeptieren und bestätigen, indem sie sich auf die Erforschung sozialer Transformationen innerhalb eines Landes beschränken.

Grenzgebiete verfügen über eigene spezifische politische Räume, in denen Staatsangehörigkeit, Rechtsstaatlichkeit und Souveränität angefochten

The present ASEAS issue presents current work on borderlands and border studies in South-East Asia. It concentrates on different facets and approaches to highlight the contributions of this emerging field to the social sciences. The contributors find border studies a powerful tool to deconstruct the geographical demarcations and national ideology of the nation state and to question a perspective that implicitly accepts and reconfirms the nation by limiting itself to the study of social transformations inside a country.

Borderlands have their own specific political spaces in which citizenship, law, and sovereignties are contested. While they are integrated into nation states, governments' rule is being negotiated there – not least by the local elites and government offi-

werden. Wenngleich Grenzgebiete in Nationalstaaten integriert sind, wird die Macht der staatlichen Regierungen dennoch verhandelt – nicht zuletzt von lokalen Eliten und RegierungsbeamtInnen, die aus wirtschaftlichen Aktivitäten in den Grenzregionen Gewinne erzielen. Im Kontext der Globalisierung wird gerne von einer grenzenlosen Welt gesprochen. Grenzen sind jedoch weiterhin existent und Staaten beeinflussen das Leben der Menschen. Wie die folgenden Beiträge hervorheben, nehmen staatlicher Einfluss und staatliche Unterdrückung mitunter enorme Ausmaße an und bringen bedeutende Konsequenzen für die Lebensbedingungen und Identitätsdiskurse der lokalen Bevölkerung mit sich.

Beinahe alle AutorInnen dieser Ausgabe stützen sich auf reiches ethnografisches Material, um die Handlungsfähigkeit jener Menschen zu erfassen, die in der einen oder anderen Form ihr Leben in unterschiedlichen Grenzregionen bestreiten. Grenzgebiete werden als liminaler Raum beschrieben, in dem verschiedene Souveränitäten und Rechtsformen aufeinanderprallen und miteinander rivalisieren. Die relativ schwache Präsenz des Staates ist jedoch nicht mit dem Fehlen staatlicher Kontrolle gleichzusetzen: Menschen, die Grenzgebiete durchqueren oder die-

cials who often enough share profits from border economies. Some people like to talk about a borderless world in the context of globalisation. Yet, borders continue to exist and show the presence and impact of the state in people's lives. In a way, this impact of the state and state influence in the contributions that follow is immense and has important consequences on livelihoods and identity discourses.

Almost all of the contributors to this issue can draw on rich ethnographical fieldwork to capture the agency of people crossing or contesting different borderlands. They describe borderlands as exceptional and liminal spaces where various sovereignties and laws are competing with each other. Nevertheless, the relatively weak presence of states in borderlands does not mean a stateless society: interference, and sometimes outright repression, by the states can be felt by people crossing and inhabiting these borderlands.

How do the contributions now intervene into the burgeoning field of border studies? First, they describe the connecting processes of territorialisation, de-territorialisation, and re-territorialisation. Where borderlands are connected to each other, local, national, and global spaces can overlap

se bewohnen, erfahren Eingriffe und manchmal offene Repression seitens des Staates.

In welcher Form tragen nun die AutorInnen dieser ASEAS-Ausgabe zum aufstrebenden Feld der *Border Studies* bei? Erstens veranschaulichen ihre Dokumentationen Prozesse von Territorialisierung, De-Territorialisierung und Re-Territorialisierung. Wo Grenzgebiete miteinander verbunden sind, können lokale, nationale und globale Räume überlappen und verschmelzen. Zusammen formen sie dann die spezifische Topografie von Grenzräumen. Lokale, nationale und globale AkteurInnen haben Eigeninteressen an der Kontrolle zwischenstaatlicher Gebiete und ihrer Bevölkerungen – Machtkämpfe werden dafür ausgetragen, aber auch Kooperationen eingegangen. In vielen Fällen muss die lokale Bevölkerung einen Weg durch diese Konfliktlandschaft finden, indem sie Allianzen mit lokalen Eliten, humanitären NGOs, lokalen Regierungen oder kriminellen Netzwerken schließt.

Im ersten Artikel dieses Themenhefts beleuchtet Kazi Fahmida Farzana (National University of Singapore) durch eine Analyse künstlerischer Ausdrucksformen den Kampf und die Entbehrungen der muslimischen Rohingya-Flüchtlinge im Grenzland zwischen

and conflate – together shaping the specific topography of border spaces. Local, national, and global actors have vested interests in and sometimes compete over, sometimes collaborate on the control of areas and people in the borderlands between states. Often enough, local people have to make alliances with local elites, humanitarian NGOs, local governments, or criminal networks.

This special issue's first article by Kazi Fahmida Farzana (National University of Singapore) sheds light on struggles and hardships of Muslim Rohingya refugees between Burma and Bangladesh by analysing their artistic expressions. The author is not satisfied with only documenting human rights abuses but rather interested in the Rohingya's agency. She interprets and explores artistic performances and artefacts such as music, drawings, and poetry of the Muslims as everyday forms of resistance, drawing among others on the work of James C. Scott. Artistic works are central expressions in the people's lives, highlighting humiliations and human rights violations. Farzana argues that the Rohingya use these artefacts to restore and maintain their dignity and cultural identity against the odds of repression and forced migration

Burma und Bangladesch. Das Interesse der Autorin liegt nicht nur in der Dokumentation von Menschenrechtsverletzungen, sondern vor allem bei den Handlungsfähigkeiten der Rohingya. Sie interpretiert künstlerisches Schaffen wie Musik, Malereien und Gedichte der Muslime als alltägliche Formen des Widerstandes und bezieht sich dabei unter anderem auf die Arbeiten von James C. Scott. Künstlerische Arbeiten sind im Leben dieser Menschen zentrale Ausdrucksformen, um Erniedrigung und Menschenrechtsverletzungen aufzuzeigen. Farzana argumentiert, dass die Rohingya, konfrontiert mit Unterdrückung, Zwangsmigration und Ausgrenzung aus dem öffentlichen Leben, diese Ausdrucksformen zur Wiederherstellung ihrer Würde und kulturellen Identität verwenden. Auf diesen Einsichten aufbauend, ist Farzana in der Lage, über einen phänomenologischen Zugang die Transnationalisierung der Existenzgrundlagen der Rohingya in Burma und Bangladesch zu illustrieren.

Im zweiten Beitrag nähert sich Michael Eilenberg (Aarhus University) über eine Diskussion von Gesetzlosigkeit und Selbstjustiz dem malaysisch-indonesischen Grenzgebiet auf Borneo. Er veranschaulicht seinen Zugang anhand eines Falls, in dem die lokale Iban-Bevölkerung aufgrund mangeln-

and resist their exclusion from public life. The production and exchange of artefacts gives insight into the development of livelihoods, and Farzana is able to illustrate by means of phenomenological data the trans-nationalisation of Rohingya livelihoods in Burma and Bangladesh.

In the second contribution, Michael Eilenberg (Aarhus University) explores the Malaysian-Indonesian borderland in Borneo by a discussion of lawlessness and vigilantism in this region. He illustrates his argument by showing how in one instance the local Iban population did not trust an Indonesian court, taking justice in their own hands by killing the murderer of a clan member. Eilenberg continues with a discussion of a case from the logging business: After having lost a source of income due to logging bans, the Iban again turn against state authorities. For the state, it seems impossible to prosecute the Iban without creating further conflict with them. Eilenberg's paper stresses the ambiguity of law in the borderlands and the relative lawlessness emerging in Post-New Order Indonesia in the context of a weakened and decentralised state. Borderlands essentially have their own laws.

Alexander Horstmann (Mahidol University & Max Planck Institute for

den Vertrauens in die indonesische Rechtssprechung das Gesetz selbst in die Hand nahm und den Mörder eines Clan-Mitglieds tötete. Eilenberg veranschaulicht auch anhand einer Fallstudie aus der Holzwirtschaft, dass die Iban sich, als wegen eines Verbots von Holzfällereiaktivitäten ihre Haupteinkommensquelle verloren ging, einmal mehr gegen die Staatsobrigkeit wenden. Dem Staat scheint es unmöglich, die Iban strafrechtlich zu verfolgen, ohne den Konflikt mit diesen weiter zu schüren. Eilenbergs Artikel betont die Unklarheit der Gesetzgebung in Grenzregionen und die relative Gesetzlosigkeit, die in Indonesien nach dem Ende der „Neuen Ordnung" im Kontext eines geschwächten und dezentralisierten Staats erwuchs. Grenzgebiete verfügen im Grunde genommen über ihre eigene Gesetzgebung.

Alexander Horstmann (Mahidol University & Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften) präsentiert im Anschluss die spirituelle und politische Konstruktion einer Karen-Nation im liminalen Raum zwischen Burma und Thailand. Horstmann argumentiert, dass das protestantische Christentum ein entscheidendes Vehikel zur politischen Mobilisierung wurde. Flüchtlingslager und deren Bildungssysteme

the Study of Ethnic and Religious Diversity) then explores the spiritual and political construction of a Karen nation in the liminal space between Burma and Thailand. Horstmann contends that Protestant Christianity has become a crucial vehicle for political mobilisation. Refugee camps and their educational systems have become centres for the reproduction of Karen nationalism as well as Protestant Christian proselytisation. The author argues that the KNU's insurgency, taking the civil population a political hostage, has been enabled and nourished by humanitarian aid. At the same time, evangelical and missionary networks provide a corridor across the border and emergency relief to some displaced and suffering people. Horstmann is interested in demystifying refugees, showing that different people have different access to resources and varying vested interests in institutions (such as church) and networks. Instead of talking about 'the refugee' we should rather talk about different transitions in people's livelihood and about their aspirations.

In the fourth paper of the section 'Current Research on South-East Asia', AKM Ahsan Ullah (The American University in Cairo) and Mallik Akram Hussain (Rajshahi University) provide

wurden zu Zentren der Reproduktion, sowohl von Karen-Nationalismus als auch von christlich-protestantischer Missionierung. Der Autor argumentiert, dass humanitäre Hilfe den Aufstand der *Karen National Union* (KNU), welche die Zivilbevölkerung teilweise zu politischen Geiseln machen, erst ermöglichte und nährte. Gleichzeitig bieten evangelische und missionarische Netzwerke jedoch einen Korridor und Soforthilfe für die vertriebenen und notleidenden Menschen. Horstmann möchte zu einer Entmystifizierung von Flüchtlingen beitragen, indem er aufzeigt, dass unterschiedliche Menschen unterschiedlichen Zugang zu Ressourcen und variierende Eigeninteressen an Institutionen und Netzwerken haben. Anstatt von „Flüchtlingen an sich" zu sprechen, sollte seiner Meinung nach über die verschiedenen Einschnitte in die Existenzgrundlagen der Menschen und über deren Aspirationen gesprochen werden.

Im vierten Artikel der Kategorie „Aktuelle Südostasienforschung" berichten AKM Ahsan Ullah (The American University in Cairo) und Mallik Akram Hussain (Rajshahi University) über Menschenhandel in der *Greater Mekong Subregion* (GMS), wohin eine große Zahl junger Frauen, insbesondere aus verarmten Gebieten in Burma, Kambo-

a coherent account of human trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). A huge amount of young women are trafficked there, especially from the impoverished parts of Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam into Thailand. Many women are forced into sex work and kept in slavery-like conditions. While the information provided in the article is well known, the authors provide a systematic approach to the subject by taking the life histories of sex workers into account. Their research is thus an important contribution to the study of human rights violations against young women tricked into sex work.

Finally, Natalie Boehler (University of Zurich) gives an intimate account of the creative presentation of landscape, nature, and the jungle in the works of Apichatpong Weerasetakul. Unlike other artists who present rural landscapes as romantic and tranquil, the well-known Thai filmmaker Apichatpong uses the image of the jungle to open a space for transgressions, sensual and secret contacts, encounters with the foreigner, and with the spirit world. In his awarded film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, Apichatpong uses Bonnmee's encounters with the spirit world to confront his audiences with the violence im-

dscha, Laos und Vietnam, illegal nach Thailand geschafft wird. Viele Frauen werden zu Sexarbeit gezwungen und unter sklavenähnlichen Bedingungen festgehalten. Der Wert dieses Artikels liegt in der systematischen Annäherungsweise an den Gegenstand, der die Lebensgeschichten der Sexarbeiterinnen berücksichtigt. Ihre Forschung ist somit ein wichtiger Beitrag für die Dokumentation und Analyse von Menschenrechtsverletzungen an jungen Frauen, die gegen ihre Absicht in die Sexarbeit gedrängt wurden.

Im darauf folgenden Beitrag setzt sich Natalie Böhler (Universität Zürich) mit der kreativen Darstellung von Landschaft, Natur und Dschungel in den Werken Apichatpong Weerasetakuls auseinander. Im Gegensatz zu anderen KünstlerInnen, die ländliche Gebiete tendenziell als romantisch und ruhig darstellen, benutzt der berühmte thailändische Filmemacher Apichatpong das Bild des Dschungels dazu, einen Raum für Grenzüberschreitungen sowie Orte zu kreieren, an denen geheime und sinnliche Treffen möglich werden und Begegnungen mit Fremden und der spirituellen Welt stattfinden. In seinem preisgekrönten Film *Uncle Boonme Who Can Recall His Past Lives* verwendet Apitchatpong Boonmes Begegnungen mit der spirituellen Welt dazu, sein Pu-

posed on villagers in the past and with that one felt by foreign migrant workers in the present. Boehler finds the metaphor of the border helpful for her account of Apichatpong's art.

The contributions of Farzana and Boehler connect well with each other: While Farzana describes claims to a shared cultural identity and cultural rights for the Rohingya, Boehler is concerned with artistic expression and the role of media. In the films of Apichatpong, the images of rural Thailand are not used to glorify the simple life of the farmers but to create a space for cultural productivity and resistance. Apichatpong is sceptical about the use of nature in claims of authentic Thai culture and national ideologies and instead presents images of the wilderness to create a space of freedom and subversion. At the same time, Farzana is also interested in processes of territorialisation from below. As a matter of fact, all articles to the section 'Current Research' deal with one or more of the following topics: processes of inclusion and exclusion, the notion of the stranger and the question of self-identification in relation to strong external pressure, affections of place and social space, and the reconstruction and re-imagination of community in the contested

blikum mit der Gewalt zu konfrontieren, der die DorfbewohnerInnen in der Vergangenheit ausgesetzt waren und die ArbeitsmigrantInnen heute noch erleben. Böhler findet in der Metapher der Grenze einen wertvollen Zugang in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit Apichatpongs künstlerischem Werk.

Die Beiträge von Farzana und Böhler können gut miteinander in Verbindung gesetzt werden: Während Farzanas Arbeit die Forderungen nach einer gemeinsamen kulturellen Identität und kulturellen Rechten für die Rohingya zum Gegenstand hat, beschäftigt sich Böhler mit künstlerischen Ausdrucksformen und der Rolle künstlerischer Medien. In den Filmen Apichatpongs werden die Bilder des ländlichen Thailands nicht zur Glorifizierung des einfachen Lebens der Bauern und Bäuerinnen verwendet, sondern zur Erschaffung eines Raums für kulturelle Produktivität und Widerstand. Apichatpong steht der Verwendung von Natur zur Konstatierung einer authentischen thailändischen Kultur und nationaler Ideologien skeptisch gegenüber und präsentiert stattdessen Bilder der Wildnis, um einen Raum von Freiheit und Subversion zu schaffen. Farzana ist ebenfalls an Prozessen der Territorialisierung von unten interessiert. Neben diesen Gemeinsamkeiten haben alle Artikel aus der Rubrik „Akspheres of the borderlands.

Agency is another important theme. Trafficked women in Ullah and Hossain's article are mostly described as victims, whereas Horstmann strongly emphasises that victims of state persecution can also become actors of violence – sometimes even against their own people. Eilenberg documents cases in which state authorities are reluctant to pursue the state's governance, and the Iban turn against state authorities and follow their own customary law to achieve their claims on resources. For both sides involved, local arrangements are more practical than relying on arbitrary laws from the far-away centre. Ullah and Hossain also show how little states are prepared and willing to help victims of organised trafficking. In fact, government or police officials are sometimes even involved in different border businesses. The repression by the Burmese state in the borderlands of the Karen and Rohingya is not an indicator of a strong state but rather shows the state's incapability to win the hearts and minds of the people.

Religious affections and solidarities play a growing role for the self-identification of the Karen and the Rohingya in a cultural environment dominated by Theravada Buddhism.

tuelle Südostasienforschung“ auch die Beschäftigung mit einem oder mehreren der folgenden Themen gemeinsam: Prozesse der Inklusion und Exklusion, die Vorstellung des Fremden und die Frage nach der Selbstidentifizierung in Bezug auf starken externen Druck, die Verbundenheit zu Orten und sozialen Räumen und die Rekonstruktion und Re-Imagination von Gemeinschaften in den umkämpften Sphären von Grenzregionen.

Handlungsfähigkeit ist ein weiteres zentrales Thema. Die vom Menschenhandel betroffenen Frauen aus Ullahs und Hossains Artikel werden zumeist als Opfer beschrieben, wohingegen Horstmann betont, dass Opfer von Staatsverfolgung auch selbst zu GewaltakteurInnen werden können, die sich manchmal sogar gegen ihre eigenen Leute richten. Eilenberg dokumentiert Fälle, in denen die Staatsobrigkeit bei der Durchsetzung von Gesetzen zögert und die Iban sich gegen staatliche Autoritäten wenden und ihrem eigenen Gewohnheitsrecht folgen, um ihren Anspruch auf Ressourcen geltend zu machen. Für beide Seiten scheinen lokale Arrangements besser geeignet zu sein, als sich auf die oftmals widersprüchliche Gesetzgebung eines weit entfernten Zentrums zu verlassen. Ullah und Hossain zeigen auch, dass nur eine

At the same time, in one of the works of Apichatpong discussed by Boehler, the intensive communication with his ancestral spirits who are presented as real beings gives the film’s main character the opportunity to meet his relatives once again and to get relief and consolidation before passing away and probably joining the spirit world. While the dying film character crosses the boundaries of life and death, the Karen and Rohingya refugees also draw and refer to their emotions and affections in relation to their social suffering and existential struggles to negotiate the boundaries of their community.

In addition to the presented research papers, this special issue contains an interview with Chayan Vaddhanabhuti, Director of the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University, Thailand, conducted by Napakadol Kittisenee (Chiang Mai University). Chayan has long been active on development issues and engaged himself extensively with ethnic groups both within Thailand and beyond, sharing his expertise on border studies in the Thai context, integration in the GMS, and challenges to the social sciences in the globalised world.

In summary, the contributions give

geringe Anzahl von Staaten bereit ist, Opfern des organisierten Menschenhandels zu helfen. Tatsächlich sind RegierungsbeamtInnen oder PolizistInnen manchmal sogar in unterschiedliche Grenzgeschäfte verwickelt. Die Unterdrückung durch den burmesischen Staat in den Grenzregionen der Karen und Rohingya ist kein Indikator eines starken Staats, sondern zeigen vielmehr die Unfähigkeit desselben, die Herzen der Menschen für sich zu gewinnen.

Religiöse Ansichten und Solidarität sind für Karen und Rohingya von identitätsstiftender Bedeutung in einer kulturellen Umgebung, die vom Theravada Buddhismus dominiert ist. Gleichzeitig bietet die intensive Kommunikation mit den Geistern seiner Vorfahren, die als reale Wesen präsentiert werden, der Hauptfigur eines von Apichatpongs Werken eine Möglichkeit, seine Verwandten noch einmal zu treffen und Linderung und Stärkung zu erfahren, bevor er stirbt und wahrscheinlich in die spirituelle Welt eintritt. Während der sterbende Filmcharakter die Grenzen zwischen Leben und Tod überquert, beziehen sich die Karen- und Rohingya-Flüchtlinge auf ihre Emotionen und Zuneigungen in Bezug auf ihr soziales Leiden und ihre existentiellen Kämpfe, um die Grenzen ihrer Gemeinschaft auszuhandeln.

insights into the contested sovereignties in South-East Asian borderlands by providing detailed case studies on how the actors negotiate their livelihoods with the states and thus also regard the state in a new light. Accordingly, the state is not seen as a rational or omnipresent institution but as an agency with its own interests and local presence. The contributions emphasise that ethnic minorities in the borderlands also aspire and indeed establish their own political and moral orders. Thus, this special issue encourages more research in a very important field.

Outside this special issue's focus on borderlands and border studies, Rolf Jordan (University of Kassel) analyses the results of Singapore's 2011 general election. Despite the fact that the long-term ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has won 81 out of 87 seats in parliament, the author states that opposition parties have received significant gains in parliamentary representation. The still high number of members of parliament sent by the ruling party is not so much a reflection of voters' actual choices but rather distorted by Singapore's system of majority representation. In fact, with only 60 percent of votes, the PAP was able to fill 93 percent of parliamen-

Zusätzlich zu den präsentierten Forschungsbeiträgen beinhaltet die vorliegende ASEAS-Ausgabe ein von Napakadol Kittisenee (Chiang Mai University) geführtes Interview mit Chayan Vaddhanabhuti, dem Direktor des *Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Developement* (RCSD) an der Chiang Mai University, Thailand. Chayan arbeitet seit langer Zeit zu Fragen von Entwicklung und trägt durch seine Expertise zu Ethnizität und *Border Studies* im thailändischen Kontext, Integration in der GMS und den Herausforderungen der Globalisierung zur sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung bei.

Alles in allem tragen die Arbeiten der AutorInnen mit ihren detaillierten Fallstudien zum Verständnis bei, wie AkteurInnen ihre Existenzen mit staatlichen Autoritäten aushandeln. Die resultierenden Einsichten in umkämpfte Souveränitäten in südostasiatischen Grenzregionen helfen, den Staat in neuem Licht zu betrachten. Folglich ist der Staat nicht als rationale oder allgegenwärtige Institution zu sehen, sondern als Handlungsmacht mit eigenen Interessen und lokaler Präsenz. Die Beiträge betonen, dass ethnische Minderheiten in den Grenzregionen auch nach eigenen politischen und moralischen Gesetzen streben und diese tatsächlich zu etablieren vermögen. Somit ermutigt

tary seats. Future elections will show whether opposition parties will be able to convince voters and challenge the ruling party.

Finally, as in previous ASEAS issues, there is another exciting visual contribution on life in South-East Asia: Kuba Ryniewicz presents his work on Indian photo studios in Singapore.

diese Ausgabe weitere Forschung in diesem wichtigen Feld.

Außerhalb des Schwerpunkts beinhaltet diese ASEAS-Ausgabe eine Analyse der Ergebnisse der Parlamentswahlen 2011 in Singapur von Rolf Jordan (Universität Kassel). Trotz der Tatsache, dass die seit langem regierende *People's Action Party* (PAP) 81 von 87 Sitzen im Parlament gewann, argumentiert der Autor, dass die Oppositionsparteien einen deutlichen Zuwachs an Unterstützung erhielten. Die große Zahl an Parlamentsabgeordneten, die von der regierenden Partei gestellt werden, ist weniger eine Reflexion der eigentlichen Entscheidungen der WählerInnen, als ein durch Singapurs Mehrheitswahlrecht verzerrtes Ergebnis. Tatsächlich war die PAP mit nur 60 Prozent der Wählerstimmen imstande 93 Prozent der Parlamentssitze zu füllen. Zukünftige Wahlen werden zeigen, ob Oppositionsparteien die WählerInnen überzeugen und die regierende Partei herausfordern können.

Schließlich gibt es, wie auch in vorangegangenen ASEAS-Ausgaben, zusätzlich einen informativen visuellen Beitrag über das Leben in Südostasien: Kuba Ryniewics präsentiert seine Arbeit zu indischen Fotostudios in Singapur.

Music and Artistic Artefacts: Symbols of Rohingya Identity and Everyday Resistance in Borderlands

Kazi Fahmida Farzana[1]

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This study looks at the creation of music and art by Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh as a symbol of social resistance and identity. Ethnographic research on the Rohingyas' use of music and art suggests that these non-conventional means play an important role in communicating their coherent identity and expressing their resistance to the discrimination and oppression experienced in their country of origin as well as in their exile in Bangladesh. This informal resistance is used to keep their memory alive, to transmit that history through verbal and visual expressions to the new generations, and to communicate information about themselves to outsiders. This article posits that these forms of expression, while suggestive of their identity and everyday resistance, occur mostly in an informal and indirect form, rather than in direct confrontation and protest. These informal means also reflect the Rohingyas' pragmatism and coping strategies for living in the borderlands.

Keywords: *Music; Art; Rohingya Refugees; Bangladesh; Burma/Myanmar*

Die vorliegende Studie untersucht die Bedeutung der Musik und Kunst der Rohingya-Flüchtlinge in Bangladesch als Symbole sozialen Widerstands und Ausdruck ihrer Identität. Ethnographische Forschungen zur Rohingya-Musik und -Kunst lassen darauf schließen, dass diese nicht-konventionellen Mittel eine wichtige Rolle bei der Vermittlung ihrer kohärenten Identität spielen und ihren Widerstand gegen Diskriminierung und Unterdrückung in ihrem Herkunftsland als auch im Exil in Bangladesch ausdrücken. Der informelle Widerstand wird dazu verwendet ihre Erinnerung lebendig zu halten, ihre Geschichte mittels verbaler und visueller Ausdrucksformen weiterzugeben sowie mit der jungen Generation und Außenstehenden Informationen über sich selbst zu teilen. Der Artikel postuliert, dass diese Ausdrucksformen – wenngleich suggestiv in ihrer Identität und im alltäglichen Widerstand – meist in informeller und indirekter Form auftreten und nicht mittels direkter Konfrontation und Protest. Die informellen Mittel spiegeln auch den Pragmatismus der Rohingyas und deren Bewältigungsstrategien für das Leben in der Grenzregion wider.

Schlagworte: *Musik; Kunst; Rohingya-Flüchtlinge; Bangladesch; Burma/Myanmar*

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Introduction

Social science scholars have always been keenly interested in studying social movements and resistance movements by minorities and disadvantaged groups in society. The focus of such studies has mostly been on certain forms of action which lead to the organisation and active participation of individuals with their group interests in mind (Dunaway, 1996; Hughes, Mladjenovic, & Mrsevic, 1995; McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984; Rubin, 1996; Rapone & Simpson, 1996; Robinson, 1995; Rupp & Taylor, 1987). However, some scholars have focused on the more informal and alternative forms of resistance (Adams 2002; Adas, 1981; Goldstone, 1991; Jasper, 1997; Kerkvliet, 1986; Luke, 1992; Scott, 1985; Staggenborg, Eder, & Sudderth, 1993-1994; Szombati-Fabian & Fabian, 1976). Disadvantaged groups have tended to use informal means such as music, the arts, and artefacts to express themselves and avoid direct confrontation with their oppressors. This non-conventional form of resistance is more humble, but distinct, in nature; this is especially powerful for disadvantaged groups such as displaced communities and refugees who would rarely be given an opportunity to express themselves. Therefore, it is important to understand this aspect of resistance from the perspective of ordinary individuals.

This article examines the Rohingyas' music and art, documenting their lives as a marginalised group of refugees living in Bangladesh by the Naff river, which flows through Myanmar (Burma)[2] on one side and Bangladesh on the other.[3] This border area is significant for several reasons. First, it is where two political regions – South Asia and South-East Asia – adjoin. Second, it has political significance for the neighbouring states, as it constitutes the boundary interlinked to national security for these states. Third, it has social significance to the people who live on both sides of the Naff river.

The Rohingya refugee problem has been a longstanding issue and involves the question of an ethnic minority's identity. The Rohingyas are an ethnic minority group in the northern Arakan (currently Rakhine) state of Myanmar. Commonly known as Muslim Arakanese, the Rohingyas trace their historical roots in the Arakan region

2 The term 'Myanmar' and 'Burma' are used interchangeably in this article to indicate the same country. Most scholars still tend to refer to Myanmar as 'Burma'.

3 The two neighbouring countries share an international border of 270 km; the adjoining regional units are Cox's Bazar district, 150 km south of Chittagong city in Bangladesh, and the Arakan state, located on the western coast of Burma.

from the eleventh century to 1962 (Yegar, 1972, pp. 1-25). The Arakan was not always part of Myanmar. In the pre-colonial history, Arakan (or the Maruk-U kingdom) was once an independent kingdom, separated from the Burmese kingdoms in the Irrawaddy delta and central Burma as well as from Bengal and the Mogul empire to the west. Its land area, however, extended as far as Chittagong (including the Teknaf and Cox's Bazar areas), which is now part of Bangladesh. Geographically, the area is separated by a range of mountains, the Arakan Yoma, from central Burma (Oberoi, 2006, p. 172). There is no such physical barrier between Arakan and Chittagong. Therefore, Bengali influence in Arakan is obvious.[4]

During the colonial period, from 1886 to 1937, Burma was a province of British colonial India, and this stimulated intra-regional labour flows (Taylor, 2009, p. 156). The enduring legacies of this historic movement of people include millions of Chinese and Indian labourers in the region, many of whom stayed on in Burma even after the British had left. On this basis, the post-independent Burmese governments claimed that the Rohingya Muslims were more recent migrants who had come to the region from South India during the British colonial days. The military government's official stand on the issue is even more radical: it regards the Rohingyas as more recently arrived 'illegal immigrants' from Bangladesh. Therefore, the military government refused to grant the Ronhingyas citizenship. It also declined to differentiate between the Arakanese Muslims who had been in the region for centuries – long before the arrival of the British – from the migrant Muslims who came only in the later part of Burma's colonial history. That was how the Rohingya community became stateless in their own country. Because of discriminatory policies and military operations, the whole community is affected, being either internally displaced or forced to become international refugees in the neighbouring countries. Currently, there are approximately 326,500 Rohingyas in various parts of Bangladesh, primarily in Teknaf, Ukhia, and Cox's Bazar, many of whom have been there for about two decades.

The aim of this study is to analyse Rohingya arts and artefacts as textual clues to how the refugee community continues to nurture their identity in the borderland, to see how the ordinary Rohingyas use these materials, under what circumstances, and for what reasons. The remaining part in the article is divided into three main sec-

4 As Bhattacharya noted, "in history . . . the Arakanese king Basapyn occupied Chittagong in 1459 and we know that since then it was ordinarily in Arakanese hands till 1666. The influence of Bengal is, however, apparent till 1638 from the Mahomedan names and Persian and Nagri characters on the coins" (1927, p. 141).

tions: first, the methodology and data used in this research; second, an examination and analysis of the documentary records of music and artwork; and finally, a reflective analysis of arts and artefacts in refugee life. This article posits that music and the arts play a significant role in communicating the Rohingyas' coherent identity and expressing a more informal form of resistance against the discrimination and oppression they have experienced.

Methodological Approach Adopted

The data for this article is from fieldwork conducted in 2009 and 2010 as part of a larger study on the documented and undocumented Rohingya refugees in various parts of Teknaf,[5] in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh adjacent to Burma. The primary data I used for this article are three songs and two drawings produced by the refugees.[6] Using these documents as a basis for reflecting and contemplating, I conducted in-depth interviews[7] with the refugees to ascertain their personal stories, thoughts, feelings, and interpretation of the meanings and processes in their country of origin as well as their current life in Bangladesh.[8]

While doing individual interviews, my primary attention was on the refugees' responses to my questions, but I found myself looking into issues I had not originally intended to examine. For example, the Rohingyas' behaviours, different symbols, communication systems, and so forth. Therefore, besides the interview method, I also included ethnographic participant observation as part of my data collection. This then opened the door to other 'non-conventional' aspects such as drawings and music in refugee life. I noticed that ordinary Rohingya refugees[9] frequently used visual means of communication which are particularly expressive and helpful in il-

5 Teknaf is an Upazila (sub-district) of Cox's Bazar, bounded by Cox's Bazar district on the North, the Bay of Bengal on the South and West, and the Naff river and the Arakan region of Myanmar on the East. I chose Teknaf as my field site as it is one of two officially registered refugee camps and likely the main centre for undocumented migrants from Arakan.

6 For a more extensive project, I collected 15 drawings, seven poems, and 16 songs (*taranas*) produced by the refugees. Because of space constraints, I selected only a few representative works to discuss in this article.

7 Non-probability selection techniques of sampling were utilised for this study. Questions were mostly descriptive in nature. Questions were memorised and discussed with the respondents so as to make the interview sessions friendly and less formidable. I took a semi-structured, informal, and more open-ended approach.

8 Besides several fieldtrips to Teknaf, I continue to maintain constant communication with several refugee individuals and families via mobile phone to get their updates. I am very much indebted to the refugees for their selfless generosity in sharing their stories and information.

9 These songs and images were produced by ordinary refugees from every strata of life – both male and female, registered and unregistered, single mothers, rickshaw pullers, daily labourers, and beggars.

lustrating aspects of their collective sense of self and culture. Here, I worked on the premise that these are valuable data, and I present these unconventional documents as text, as an original, documentary record of a marginalised group's experiences in the form of visual productions as a powerful means of social resistance.

The Context of Refugee Life

The Rohingya refugee population live in Bangladesh as documented or undocumented individuals. The documented refugees, estimated at 26,500, live in two officially registered refugee camps, while the vast majority of undocumented refugees[10], estimated to be between 200,000 and 300,000, live among the host population in scattered settlements in Teknaf, Ukhia, and Cox's Bazar. In Teknaf sub-district, the main areas are Jaliapara, Naitongpara, Mitha Panir Chora, Nayapara official UNHCR refugee camp (section I and II), Leda, Shamlapur, and Shah Porir Dip. In the Ukhia sub-district, they are more dispersed in the plains and hill villages, and in the Kutupalong official UNHCR refugee camp surrounded by makeshift camps. In Cox's Bazaar district, many live in semi-urban slums in Nazirartek, Samitipara (near the port and coast), and Gunarpara (in the hills near the town). The reason for selecting the Upazila-border in Teknaf is that ,the largest number of undocumented Rohingya refugees as well as the registered UNHCR refugee camp Nayapara are located within this area of Bangladesh.

The Nayapara registered refugee camp was established on 19 November 1992. The refugees living in this camp are those who had crossed the border into Bangladesh from November 1991 to June 1992. The total area of the Nayapara camp is 3.234 km2. The actual number of the refugee population is in dispute. According to the Bangladeshi government's 'Quick Facts of Nayapara Refugee Camp', the total refugee population (based on estimates as of 13 July 2009) was 14,287 individuals from 1,771 families.[11] However, the UNHCR (2008) suggests that the total refugee population in Nayapara camp in 2008 was 17,022.[12] Life in the refugee camp is strictly regulated

10 Undocumented Rohingya refugees are those who are not registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

11 The camp has seven residential blocks with 474 tin sheds (203 new sheds and 271 old sheds), 875 latrines, 365 bathhouses, 24 garbage pits, and 45 points of water distribution.

12 UNHCR estimates suggest a total of 28,004 refugees living in two registered refugee camps – Nayapara and Kutupalong.

by multiple layers of security installations, which control entry, exit, and in-camp activities. The registered refugees live on allocated food rationing and are subject to restrictions on movement, behaviour, activities, and their relationship with the authorities. They live a miserable life, subject to the control and mercy of the authorities, alongside internal power politics of discrimination and exploitation.

The self-settled, undocumented Rohingya refugees are even more vulnerable. They remain unprotected by the Bangladeshi government and international organisations. As in Myanmar, they are viewed by the Bangladeshi government as 'illegal immigrants'. Some of them live among the local community, while others hide in remote areas in the hills near the town. Their living conditions are varied. Some are so poor they have only an assortment of tree branches and plastic paper to cover and make tents for families of 8 to 10. For food, water, and work, they have to find their way to the nearest town. Many find themselves in low-skilled and menial work such as rubbish collection or cooking and selling fried food, dried fish, and so forth. As there is no protection afforded them, many find themselves in a cycle of abuse, exploitation, and arrest.

Documentary Record of Music

Music plays an important role in the life of a displaced community like the Rohingyas. An analysis of one form of their spoken arts known as *tarana* (poems/songs) suggests that these are highly significant for their collective memory. This section looks at their poetry and songs, especially those commonly available among the ordinary refugees (both documented as well as undocumented), telling of their experiences on both sides of the Naff river.

The Concept of Despair

The following tarana is from Aleya Banu, a 39-year-old housewife and mother of five, living in a shabby thatch, hiding with other Rohingya families at the hilltop close to Naitong *para* (village).[13] She had come with her family to Bangladesh from the

13 All names of the Rohingyas used in this study are pseudonyms.

Buthidaung township of Arakan in 1991. As she explains the song in her language:

> *This song tells about what we encountered in Arakan. Our life . . . our memory about our homeland. We could not tolerate the persecution (*julm*) any more. . . . We had to leave our place. This tarana is all about that feeling.*

Although the context of this song is about life in Arakan, it was later reproduced by their popular local singers to depict their displaced life in Bangladesh in a bid to keep their memories alive. To Aleya, this song reflects her own life in Arakan. Watching her sing, it was difficult to overlook the intensity of her facial expressions and emotional involvement with the song, magnifying her frustration and insecurity in life, and her resentment articulated as the song's lyrics.

The word *dor* (fear) is used eight times in this song, in nearly every stanza, to explain why they had to spend a lifetime crying in their own homeland. Specific sources of fear mentioned are the torture at the hands of the Burmese government, the military men, and

Rohingya Song 1

ARKANI ORIGINAL	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Kandi kandi din katailam	***We spent our life crying***
Kandi kandi din katailam	*We spent our days crying*
Mog Bormar vitore	*Surrounded by the Mogs in Burma*
Helom pori no parilam	*So we've left behind homeland*
Hokumote dore	*Fearing torture of the government*
Kani kandi buk vashailam	*We spent our life crying*
Arkan nor vitore	*In a home called Arakan*
Helom pori no parilam	*So we've left behind homeland*
Hokumote dore	*Fearing torture of the government*
Gura gura doodhor jadu	*Tender babies and charming lovely kids*
Gura gura doodhor puain	*Why should they starve to death?*
puashsha kene more	*So we've left behind homeland*
Pori thori no parilam	*Fearing torture of the government*
Hokumote dore	
Kandi kandi din katailam	*We spent our life crying*
Mog Bormar vitore	*Surrounded by the Mogs in Burma*
Helom pori no parilam	*So we've left behind homeland*
Hokumote dore	*Fearing torture of the government*
Mogor puain dui class pori	*Mogs attend elementary*
chori dhori thake	*Yet they pick the stick to rule,*
Valor puain BA pass hoile	*But we get to sell betel leaves*
panor khili beche	*Even if we earn a BA**
Gura gura doodhor puain	*Tender babies and charming lovely kids*
puashsha kene more	*Why should they starve to death?*
Helom pori no parilam	*So we've left behind Arakan*
Arkan not dore	*So we've left due to fear of everyone*
Helom pori no parilo	
Biyaginor dore	
Gura gura doodhor puain	*Tender babies and charming lovely kids*
Na khai kene more	*Why should they starve to death?*
Helom pori no parilo	*So we've left due to fear of everyone*
Biyaginor dore	*So we've left due to fear of military men*
Helom pori no parilam	
Militarir dore	
Kandi kandi din katailam	*We spent our life crying*
Mog Bormar vitore	*Surrounded by the Mogs in Burma*
Helom pori no parilam	*So we've left behind homeland*
Hokumote dore	*Fearing torture of the government*

**higher degree above school*

Source: Author's Field Research

the Mogs (Rakhines). It raised the issue of difficulty living in a land surrounded by Buddhist Rakhines who are entitled to all the economic, social, and political facilities in life, while the Muslim Rohingyas remained completely deprived. In particular, it raised the issue of hunger caused by poverty, especially when watching their babies starve to death. It also indicates their joblessness and poor economic condition in life due to discrimination in education and job opportunities between the Rakhine and Rohingya communities. All these indicators of discrimination painfully exemplify the hierarchical relationship between the powerful and the powerless in society.

The song is a perfect reflection of their stateless life. It illustrates the traumatic experience of why and how they were forced from their homeland. It clearly expresses their sorrows and frustrations in life, and certainly shows their resentment towards the Burmese government and its military as well as towards the local Rakhines. It challenges their domination, especially in asking the question "why". This mode of articulation certainly shows that something went very wrong for them. It serves as a painful memory of their homeland and how their lives have changed. The song is targeted at refugees who share similar experiences.

The Concept of Identity

The following tarana came from an undocumented female refugee named Tonima, a 32-year-old housewife and mother of two living in a mountainous area close to Naitongpara in Teknaf with a family of eight. She came to Bangladesh with her parents in 1998 when she was 19. Her family tried to get a place in the UNHCR registered refugee camps but failed, so they moved to the fishing community of Jaliapara where many other undocumented refugees live.

The text of the tarana reads:

Rohingya Song 2

ARKANI ORIGINAL	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Ara Hoilam Porbashi	***We have become refugees***
Oh Allah Gafure-rahim, *Ara hoilam porbashi* *Ara hoilam refugee (II)*	*Oh God, forgiving and merciful* *We are in exile* *We have become refugees (II)*
Ei murar vitore Allah ar koto kal rakbi *Puker, juger horani ar hoto din hadabi (II)*	*For how long will you keep us in this mountain caves* *For how long will you make us eaten by insects (II)*
Julumer doriyot pori roilam bashiya bashi *Oo Khuda tui chaile paroj arar Arakanor* *Shanti, arar Mog Bormar shanti (II)*	*We remained adrift suffering from tortures* *Oh God make our country peaceful if you wish (II)*

Source: Author's Field Research

The song sounds almost like a prayer calling upon 'merciful' God and seeking his refuge and help. The song appears to be based on their stateless situation and the suffering experienced by having to hide in the jungles of Arakan and on the mountain in Teknaf, Bangladesh. The song is for the Rohingyas who face constant fear and persecution. This is reflected in the lyrics, "we remained adrift suffering from tortures". Their struggles and sufferings in life are also expressed in the plaintive, "for how long will you make us eaten by insects?" The song ends by wishing all a peaceful Arakan, if God is willing. It is amazing to note that they were able to cope despite their adverse situation in life and to keep their hopes alive. Perhaps a tarana works as a form of meditation for them, or, as Tonima noted, it was like their "normal everyday prayer". A song can entertain and satisfy their heart on that level.

The song is a medium for a non-literate community to keep alive their history, given that they are unable to notate or transcribe the music or lyrics. Oral transmission of feeling, sentiment, and emotion through songs is thus an excellent means of preserving identity and displaying passive resistance. It is passive because these people have no means to directly confront their oppressors. For them, tarana is a way out of that frustration as well as a means to express it.

The Memory of Home

For the refugees, songs are used as a glue for community bonding. Besides singing individually, refugees in Nayapara occasionally camp out, once or twice a month, for small singing programmes, usually on a moonlit night, within their small boundary between huts and only with the consent of the Camp-in-Charge.[14] At these gatherings, they use their traditional instruments (*juri* and *tobla*) and sing country songs, religious or philosophical songs, and songs that represent their everyday issues in the camp. Although the group performances in camp are mostly by men, women are welcome as well. As these gatherings take place within the spaces between huts, the women can also enjoy it from inside their rooms. Such occasions not only provide them with entertainment: the impact is greater as they pronounce their frustrations together, recall their memories, transmit them to the new generation, and bond themselves together.

The next song was shared by a group of refugees as they express their love and longing for their 'home'. This extremely melodious and rhythmic song was popular with the crowd and drew much attention as refugees at that gathering stopped talking and some joined in the chorus.

Rohingya Song 3

ARKANI ORIGINAL	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Bangladeshot hijrot gorilam boyonda ghor feli	***We migrated to Bangladesh leaving behind our beautiful homes***
Chalot chaile choyer bora	*On our rooftop there was dried food*
Khetit chaile moricher hora	*In our field we had fresh chillies*
Ghoror dhuare khande kutta girich	*we migrated to Bangladesh leaving everything behind thinking*
Giya feli, Bangladeshot hijrot gorilam, jati vai boli!	*that we are of the same (Muslim) brotherhood*
Deha geli puber thinki,	*Now when we look back to the East,*
desher monot orer chinki	*We remember many things of the past*
Haire ma-bap hore geli?	*O, where are my beloved parents?*
Arare Bangladeshot hijtor gori	*You sent us to Bangladesh*
Hijrot gorilam Burma desh feli (II)	*We migrated leaving behind the country Burma (II)*

Source: Author's Field Research

14 The Camp-in-Charge of Nayapara is a representative of the Bangladeshi government, responsible for law and order as well as the daily operation of the camps. He is assisted by several camp officers.

It is all about their memory of 'home'. Here, the word 'home' has a dual meaning: their current home in the village as well as their home in the sense of their motherland, Arakan. This song does not talk about their reasons for migrating; rather, it is recalling and cherishing the thought that they had to migrate to Bangladesh "leaving behind … our beautiful homes". A home is considered a peaceful place where everyday activities take place. Memories of dried food on the rooftop and, in the back yard or in the field, those fresh green chilli gardens are all symbolic of that concept of life, that stability or peacefulness in life, which the Rohingyas had lost at some point in the past. Now in exile, they do not have the chance to settle down, have their own place, and tend their gardens. Their life today is very different from anything they could have imagined before coming to Bangladesh. When they were forced to come to Bangladesh, leaving behind everything, the Rohingyas thought they would have a peaceful life in this new country; after all, they thought, they belong to the 'same religion'. But that did not work in reality. The politics of state superseded religious sympathy. Instead of accepting them as citizens, Bangladesh recognised only a few thousand refugees and labelled the rest of the undocumented refugees as 'illegal economic migrants'; this subjected the stateless community to constant exploitation and threat. So those memories of 'home', 'dried food', and 'fresh chillies' are now precious memories of a past that was peaceful but is lost now.

When the refugees look to the east from Bangladesh towards Arakan and the mountain range of Arakan Yoma, they 'remember many things of the past'. Many families were split up. Parents had sent their young children outside of Arakan to save their lives while they themselves chose to stay and die in their homeland. These are the painful memories the refugees hide as they go about their daily lives; they continue to cherish these memories in their minds and sustain them by composing songs. They still feel nostalgic for their homeland. Perhaps this tarana served as a constant reminder of their past.

Based on the above discussion of taranas, it is clear that, to a large extent, music has been used as an effective means in the Rohingyas' displaced life to keep alive their memories of the past. Being a non-literate community, the songs have become a medium for them to save their history and pass it on to the younger generations. It is a medium that allows them to avoid direct confrontation with their persecutors and oppressors while at the same time enables them to express their resentments

and frustrations. They are primarily doing this for themselves, but at the same time it can give outsiders an in-depth understanding into their life in exile, their identity, and their culture.

Documentary Record of Arts

Arts, drawings, paintings and so on are strong means of history, social movements, and resistance. This section presents and analyses some drawings that came from individual refugees of Nayapara camp. Although the use of the visual arts is not so widespread among the Rohingyas, it is nevertheless noticeable. In my research, I found that the refugees were not doing these drawing intentionally or with the purpose of sending them on to the authorities as coded messages, as the Rohingyas did not socially construct this as resistance.[15] They are simply doing this to tell their stories to their children and to those outsiders interested in their case. This section, therefore, aims to reflect on the refugees' self-perception and possibly their perception of other people and institutions as depicted in their own amateur drawings. It argues that these artworks demonstrate the Rohingyas' identity and express a different form of everyday resistance without protest.

The first drawing (Drawing 1) was from Abdul Jobber, a 44-year-old documented refugee from Nayapara camp. He and his family came to Bangladesh in 1991 from Andang village of Maungdaw town but were originally from Paththor Killah of Akyab. As Abdul Jobber explains his picture:

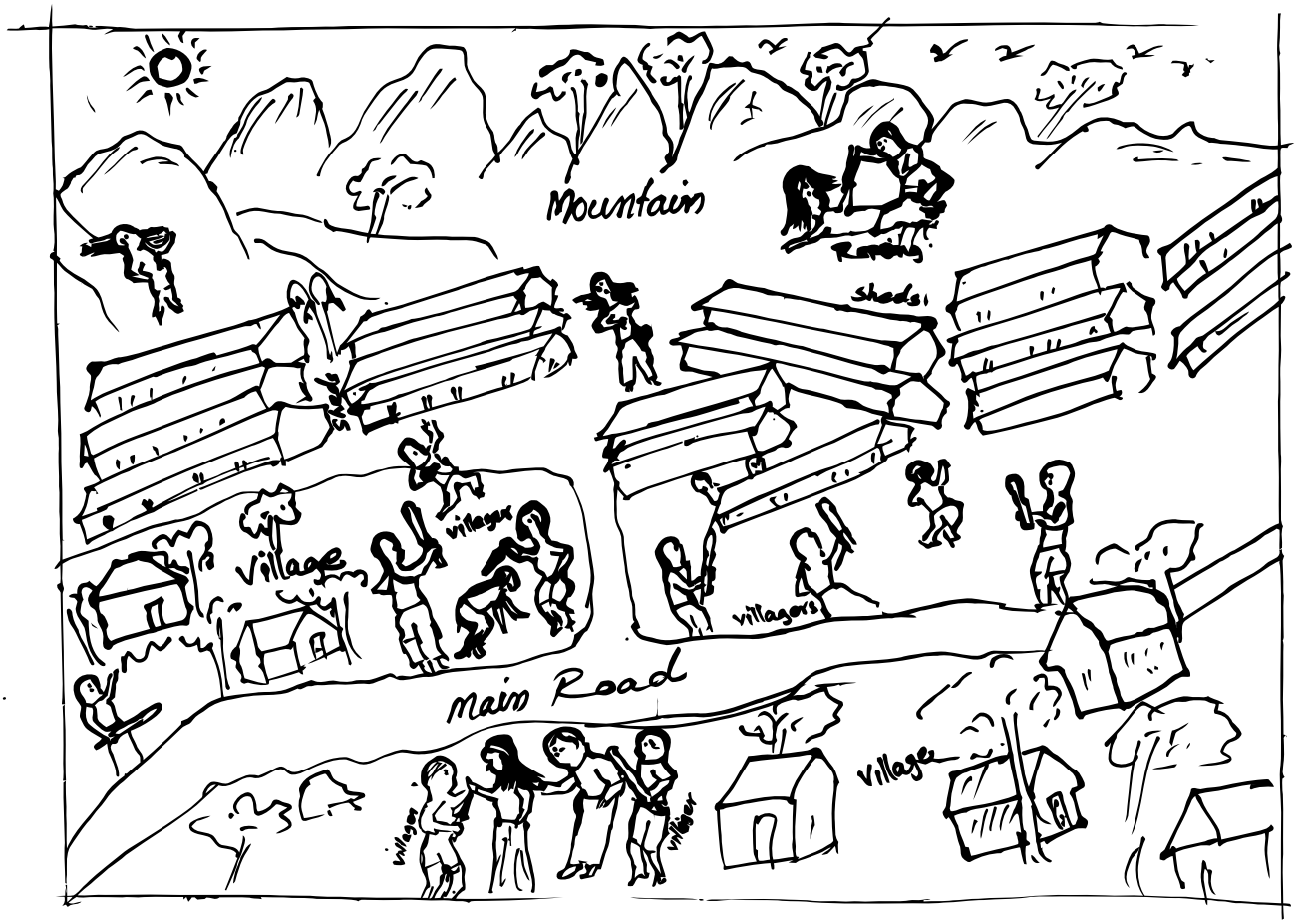
> *This is in Akyab, my birthplace. Not only mine, this is the birthplace of my father and grandfather. The military first destroyed our village (Paththor Killah), and forced us to move to another para [village] in the Maungdaw township. How can we not move … everything happened at gunpoint! They literally hold the gun here on my forehead.*
>
> *In Maungdaw, we were given small huts, row by row, to stay there. They have taken our farm land, but in return we were not given any land in Maungdaw. We were forced to stay in those small huts. We were given just one room for each family. There were no job opportunities for us. We used to cut bamboos, trees for the fuel. Sometimes we sold those to the Bazar. I was married then and I had a child. My wife was pregnant then. We rarely had two meals in a day.*
>
> *The military put restrictions on our movement. We were not allowed to visit even the village next to our place. Rakhine villagers also beat us if they get a chance. Then security forces started to visit us according to their wish to the newly located area. They used bad words humiliating my wife in front of us. They*

15 Perhaps they will notice and realise after a considerable time has elapsed.

could humiliate anyone they wanted to. Families with young girls were often the target for them. And then one day, they announced in our para that we cannot stay there longer. We don't belong to Burma.

We should leave for Bangladesh.

Drawing 1: Eviction from Villages and Torture in the 'Model Village' Area



This artwork illustrates what many refugees complained about, i.e. forceful eviction from their villages and serious persecution in those relocated 'model villages'. As the drawing shows, the villages are becoming empty as the Mogs (local Rakhines) beat the Rohingyas using long sticks, humiliating their females by dragging and physically hurting them in front of their families, and chasing them towards the 'model villages'. Moreover, there were military operations, as Abdul Jobber mentioned in his narrative, which ultimately evicted and displaced thousands of Rohingya families from their villages and forced many to relocate to those 'model village' areas in Mangdaw and Buthidaw. Life in those slum-like areas was basically like in prison. In the picture, the shades in rows represent those areas. It also demonstrates that those areas were

heavily surrounded by the Burmese security forces as they carry weapons. Having no legal rights, these stateless Rohingyas again were subjected to torture, humiliation, beating, killing, and rape within their own country.

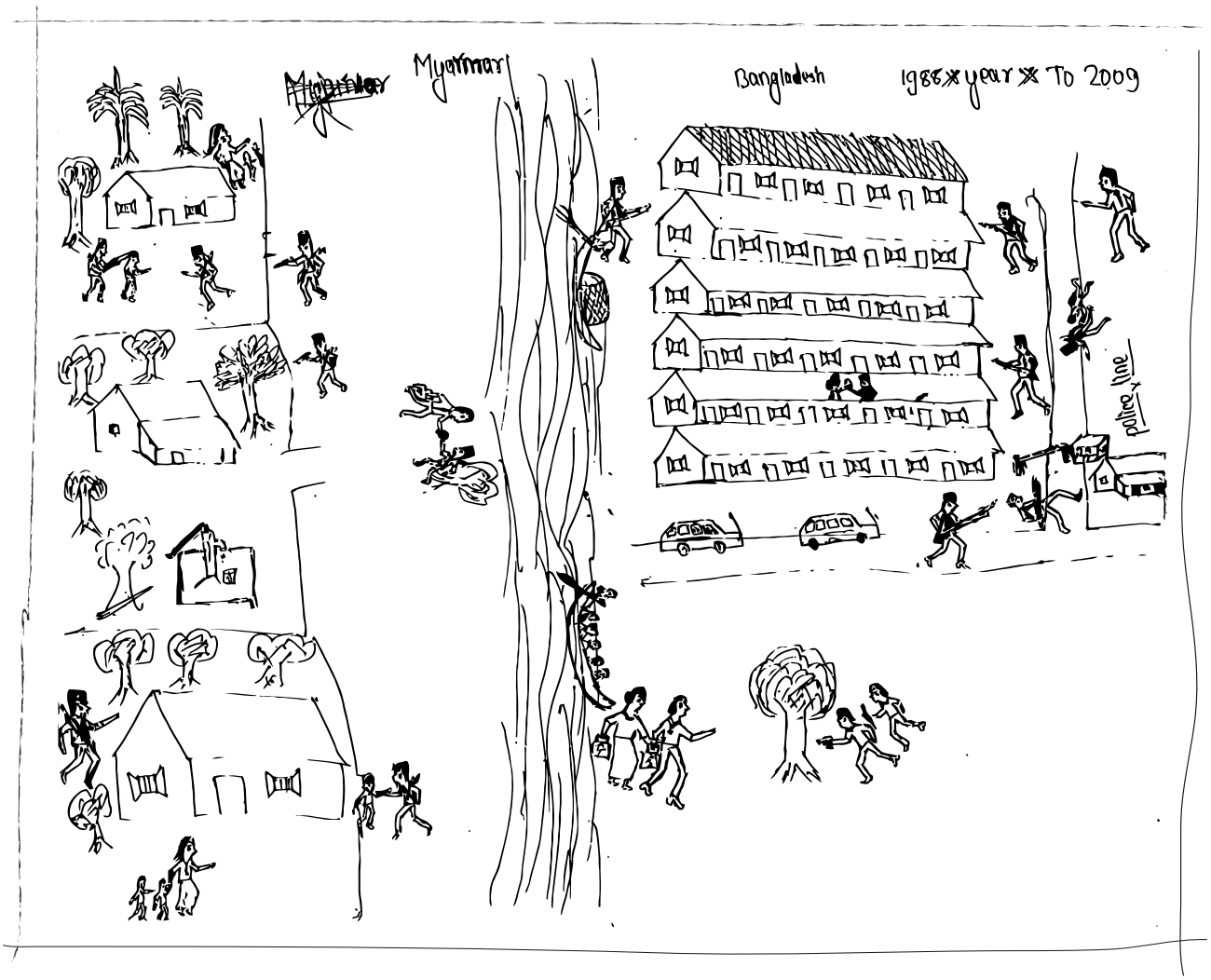
Examples of the eviction of minorities and their forceful relocation to 'model village' areas can also be found in other parts of South Asia and South-East Asia. As Roxana Waterson noted, in the case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladeshi government also evicted indigenous people from their lands by moving 400,000 Muslim settlers to the areas. Many indigenous people were also forcefully relocated into 'cluster villages' where military and paramilitary forces were involved in various human rights violations (1993, p. 14). In Cambodia, under Pol Pot's regime, hundreds of thousands of ethnic minorities became victims of genocide, relocation, and displacement.

The Burmese army's brutal military operations against the Arakanese Rohingya Muslims, their forceful resettlement into new satellite towns, the demolition of their religious sites, and the confiscation of their lands were reported by many UN and humanitarian organisations. By explaining the origins of such injustice, this above artwork was effectively exposing a system of domination as well as subordination. It illustrates that although the ruling power enjoys the control of material resources and puts constraints onto the lives of the subordinates, it could not extend its domination into their culture and ideology. That is why they can present their struggle through these drawings, which allows them to escape fully from the sphere of control of the dominant.

The second drawing was by Mohammad Ismail Hossain, 37, who had come to Bangladesh in 1991. During his exile in Bangladesh, he married a Rohingya woman and became a father of six. His father had died of natural causes in the camp in 2005. His elderly mother is currently staying with him, and nine other siblings live in the huts next to his in the same Nayapara camp. He explains his drawing thus:

> *This picture shows that* Julum *became severe during 1988. That was the time when we were evicted from our own land. Military came and announced in our village that we got to leave this area in seven days. How could we just leave everything? Then one day the military attacked our village. They came to our house. The top left of the picture shows women and children running away on seeing the military. They beat the men and women, disgraced our women and forcefully evicted us from our homes. To escape this Julum, and to save our lives, we crossed the Naff river, and came here [Bangladesh]. Immediately after reaching here, we faced Bangladeshi military! They put us in one place [refugee camps]. And the picture on the right side shows those camps. Many police and military are always guarding this area. Here again we suffer Julum and humiliation.*

Drawing 2: Life on Both Sides of the Border: The Naff River



This piece of art illustrates their life from 1988 to 2009 (as written on top of the picture). It shows that their well-ordered lifestyle, with houses surrounded by trees, with a garden and a tube well, was disrupted by the presence of Burmese military and security forces (NaSaKa), whose identity is distinct in the picture as they wear military uniforms and carry heavy guns. They entered those personal premises and forced the Rohingyas from their homes. During and after the 1990s election, persecution in the form of physical and mental torture such as beatings as well as killings, abduction and rape, economic exclusion, and restrictions on physical movement threatened their livelihood security and physical security to the extant that it forcefully displaced thousands.[16] Moreover, there is a thin river line that offers an easy bor-

16 All the people I talked to, documented and undocumented, complained about persecution, fear, and insecurity in

der crossing facility creating an escape route for the Rohingya people from Myanmar. This generated hopes in their minds while they were still in their homeland about an imagined safe life across the river. However, once they crossed the border, they encountered the crude reality of harsh security forces and camp life which bring them to see the reality of their exile life. As shown in this drawing, the living space on the Bangladesh side consists of congested tin-sheds and is surrounded by heavily armed security forces. The security forces not only confine the living space of the refugees but also control the entry-exit flows. While living in exceptional places like refugee camps or in scattered settlements, the refugees encounter serious life-threatening dangers such as getting killed by police firing on them, beatings and rape, torture, being tied up with ropes, and so forth.[17]

As mentioned earlier, the Rohingyas' production of art forms has not yet reached the level of altercation with the authorities because it would be more dangerous and costly for them.[18] Therefore it remains at the stage of raising their consciousness (Denisoff, 1983, p. 5; Qualter, 1963, p. 99). Yet, such drawings evidently show the power of the visual symbols, as they successfully explain that the Arakani Rohingyas are caught between the politics of two sovereign states – Myanmar and Bangladesh. Their right to exist in their homeland was not accepted by Myanmar, and their right to stay in the borderland was also never accepted by Bangladesh. They have been forcibly displaced from their homes and many have crossed the border several times. Such forcible relocation and involuntary movements have been driven by systematic acts of violence and/or coercion, which have made the community fearful for their existence and which have affected their socio-economic security.

After talking to the refugees and observing their verbal expressions, body language, and opinions, it was clear that, while living in the borderlands, the refugees maintained a psychology of strong attachment to their homeland. Although they were forced to flee in fear for their lives, the homeland across the river remains visible in their mind's eye. Drawing 1 shows a sun that is hidden behind the hill (signify-

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Arakan/Rakhine. A displaced person, who arrived in Nayapara Refugee Camp I in 1990, noted: "Continuous harassment and economic hardships makes life impossible to live in Arakan. It is just like a jail for us."

17 Having no rights before the law, they are not entitled to education, health care, or even to seek help regarding any injustice and violence they suffer.

18 Kerkvilet, in his study on *Everyday Resistance to Injustice in a Philippine Village*, shows that with everyday forms of resistance the target might not necessarily be aware of it. As he mentions: "The target may eventually discover what the resister has done but that need not be the intention of the ones resisting. Indeed, those resisting, often perceiving themselves to be extremely vulnerable [sic]" (Kerkvilet, 1986, p. 109).

ing their past). The sun is shining brightly. The river is seen as the pathway between their past and their present, and the fact that the past (sun) seems so close makes the pain (of their memories) even more poignant. This makes them even more homesick for their homeland.

Their drawings tell powerful stories of their struggles and sufferings and explain their frustration with the authority, who continue to torment them. In their displaced state, they feel both attached to and yet alienated from their homeland and their past. Without a sense of identity in the present, they seek to find identity in (and through) their music and drawings. The music and drawings also play another role: to depict the crimes they have encountered (abuse, etc.) at the hands of the authorities.

Music and Art as Symbols of Resistance and Identity

Resentment and resistance are not always necessarily violent and physical. They can be intellectual and expressed in artworks such as music, the visual arts, and songs. This ethnographic research on the Rohingygas' musical (verbal) expression and artistic (visual) expression suggests that these texts are highly meaningful. They raise the concept of emotion in people's minds and are able to transmit messages which are central to their displaced life. Two things are common in all these documentary records: one is the domination by the powerful, who have power and influence; and the other is the subordination of the less powerful group. Here, these documents assert the Rohingyas' own perceptions about their situation and experiences. It serves to make the suffering of a stateless life in Arakan as well as in Bangladesh very real and alive. These also serve to inspire a feeling of connectedness with the displaced community in a way more effective than any printed statistics could. In this way, these documents can convince outsiders that the conditions of life in Arakan were intolerable, and being stateless, the situation in Bangladesh is also not much different. Therefore, something must be done. A number of points and arguments can be made using the data presented in the preceding sections.

First, these artistic expressions used a certain kind of language. For example, the particular words in their songs such as *Jala*, *Julum*, *Dukh*, *koshto*, or *Nirjato* are indicators of oppressions. When a refugee says *"Ara kichu korti no pari, biyagin shojjo*

goron poribo" ("we cannot do anything, everything has to be accepted"), this refers to their subordinate status and their frustration at all the oppression they suffer. In this regard, James C. Scott in his book, *Weapons of the Weak*, brought to light the importance of everyday resistance by looking at various signs and symbols, and examining the vocabulary of exploitation. According to him, such everyday forms of resistance occur in the form of "footdragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so forth" (1985, p. 292).

When a refugee said, "We [the Rohingyas] are like people without knees", he was referring to their powerless condition in which they are not able to say or do anything against those who have displaced them from their homes and made their lives miserable. Indeed, these musical items and drawings are actual living stories of the Rohingyas' struggle and social experience, of their agony and hatred towards those who cause them to suffer. What these documents convey is resistance, not only to their socio-economic and political conditions, but also resistance to the attributed identity that has been imposed on them from above, making them subjects without protection and outside the law.[19]

Second, the songs, artworks, and poems have a certain spirit that helps sustain the Rohingyas for many years in a foreign land. The refugees produce and memorise them as they typically find them reflections of their own experience. They can also send emotional messages through these songs and artworks which are able to work as a communication bridge among the Rohingyas. Their resources or opportunities to resist openly are less than minimal, but their spirit remains alive and is expressed through these artistic creations. Without these media, it would have been difficult for an illiterate community to keep their memory, identity, and history alive. By engaging in these media, they are also able to communicate with the outside.

Third, this medium of expression shows some kind of action that keeps these people active. These simple things of everyday life, such as music and art, are tools that have been used by the ordinary Rohingyas to show consciousness and awareness about their situation. Simultaneously, they clearly express negation of the system of domination. Weitz (2001, p. 670) referred to these as "actions that not only reject subordination but do so by challenging the ideologies that support that subordination".

19 Hanna Arendt defined statelessness as a situation when people "left their homeland they remained homeless, once they had left their state they became stateless, and once they had been deprived of their human rights they were rightless" (Arendt, 1966, p. 267).

Moreover, it is these people who have complete authority over these artistic productions, and no one else can control or subjugate their songs and artworks (Brodsky, 1992, p. 220).

Fourth, these artworks especially break the complicity of silence. It shows one form of psychological warfare against domination as it provides a sense of opposition (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 538; Hughes et al., 1995). We have seen that refugees are raising questions through their songs about the discrimination towards them in jobs, educational opportunities, and power sharing. Another example was in Drawing 1, where the word 'raping' depicts a military man raping a female at gunpoint. These drawings are more expressive than words. These are certainly observable as expressions of resistance, yet not necessarily recognised by the target (the powerful dominants). The intention here is to negate that domination, talk about the persecution, and effectively expose the songs and drawings to shame the oppressors. This is the voice of the oppressed. It is their form of resistance, and that makes it very significant.

Fifth, these documents exhibit a non-conventional form of resistance which is covert in nature. Similar to Scott's analysis of resistance that is accomplished through symbolic behaviour, the ordinary Rohingyas use music and artworks as symbols of their form of resistance. When a refugee sings "where should I go", not only is it referring to their uncertain destination as a stateless being, it also serves as tools of opposition asking for a social change. According to Brodsky (1992, p. 221), "Art is a form of resistance to the imperfection of reality, as well as an attempt to create an alternative reality, an alternative that one hopes will possess the hallmarks of a conceivable, if not an achievable, perfection".

Sixth, it allows the refugees to escape for a while from the sense of despair by overcoming it not so much through political efforts but through music and art. This modest form of struggle is neither a collective defiance nor rebellion, rather, these should be seen as individual acts of resistance. This form of resistance does not wait for recognition (McCann & March, 1996; Scott, 1985). Because these are people "who have experienced tragedy [but who] do not see themselves as protagonists and do not really care about the means by which tragedy is expressed, being themselves their embodiment" (Brodsky, 1992, p. 221). The Rohingyas are primarily performing these music and artworks for themselves. Although their music and arts are oppositional,

they are deliberately hidden from public view because it could be dangerous for their safety and security. They avoid direct confrontation to stop escalating further persecution. They are opportunistic and accommodate things that suit their situation best.

Therefore, it can be argued that the Rohingya refugees' use of texts in the form of music and art clearly exhibits resistance to the reality they have experienced. The logical question that arises out of this is: Can this form of resistance bring any positive change to the life of the refugees? This covert form of resistance may not bring any revolutionary change in the life of the Rohingyas, yet these are valuable documents, because these have a certain spirit that helps sustain the people who create them: these are expressions of their consciousness of their situation and also expressions of negation of the system of domination, and this allows them to escape from the sense of despair, at least for a few moments, and this is what makes such informal resistance effective and significant. As mentioned before, the refugees create these works for themselves, to vent their frustration, to show their coherent identity, to keep their memory alive, to break the complicity of silence, and to speak out against the injustices that have happened and are still happening to them. Such a humble form of resistance, according to Scott, is perhaps the only "spirit and practice that prevents the worst and promises something better" (1987, p. 452). The real intention of this form of resistance has always been "the hope for survival and persistence" for ordinary people.

Conclusion

Non-conventional resistance using arts and artefacts is increasingly visible in social research on social movements. The article has provided an in-depth understanding about how a displaced community uses music and art to express their resistance. Ethnographic research on the use of music and art by the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh suggests that it plays a very important role in communicating their coherent identity and displaying an unconventional form of resistance to discrimination and oppression. They use music and art to keep their memory alive, to transmit that history to the new generations, and to communicate information about themselves to outsiders. This might be a different approach to protest, but it is their everyday form of local resistance and is central to Rohingyas' life. This approach is important to

consider – not only to understand the weaker groups and their activities, but more importantly to recognise the fact that arts and music are the only way they can resist. Examining these then not only gives us a better understanding of the complex reality of their lives but also suggests a need for reformulation of the concept of resistance, so that it recognises the importance of non-conventional forms of resistance.

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Aktuelle Südostasienforschung / Current Research on South-East Asia

Flouting the Law: Vigilante Justice and Regional Autonomy on the Indonesian Border

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After the Asian Economic Crisis in 1997 and the fall of president Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, rural and urban Indonesia experienced a surge in vigilante killings and the rise of non-state forms of authorities working within the twilight of legality and illegality, assuming the role of the state. Institutional uncertainty, large-scale decentralisation reforms and the deterioration of formal legal authority in post-New Order Indonesia encouraged these processes. This apparent 'lawlessness' became especially evident along the fringes of the Indonesian state where state authority has continuously been contested and in a state of flux. This paper argues that observing these processes of lawlessness and vigilantism from the borderlands provides us with an exceptional window to understand the ambiguous relationship between law and order in post-New Order Indonesia.

Keywords: *Vigilantism; Illegality; Borderlands; Kalimantan; Indonesia*

Nach der Asienkrise 1997 und dem Sturz des autoritären Regimes Präsident Suhartos 1998 waren sowohl in den ländlichen Regionen Indonesiens als auch in den Städten eine Zunahme an Bürgerwehrmorden und ein Anwachsen nicht-staatlicher Behörden zu beobachten. Zwischen Legalität und Illegalität übernahmen sie vielfach die Rolle des Staates. Institutionelle Unsicherheiten, groß angelegte Dezentralisierungsreformen und die Verschlechterung der formellen Rechtssprechung förderten nach dem Ende der „Neuen Ordnung" diese Prozesse. Diese scheinbare Gesetzlosigkeit wurde besonders in den Grenzregionen des indonesischen Staates deutlich, wo die staatliche Autorität permanent in Frage gestellt wird und umstritten bleibt. In diesem Artikel argumentiere ich, dass die Beobachtung dieser „Gesetzlosigkeit" und Selbstjustiz in Grenzregionen eine außergewöhnliche Möglichkeit bietet, die mehrdeutige Beziehung zwischen Recht und Ordnung in Indonesien nach dem Ende der „Neuen Ordnung" zu verstehen.

Schlagworte: *Selbstjustiz; Illegalität; Grenzregionen; Kalimantan; Indonesien*

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Introduction[2]

> *For those living in the borderland, it is a zone unto itself, neither wholly subject to the laws of states nor completely independent of them (Abraham, 2006, p. 4).*

Borderlands have long been the sites of violence, the consequence either of government incapacity or disinterest in marginal regions, or of occasional attempts by states to assert control over 'recalcitrant' border peoples. Borderland lawlessness, or the ambiguous space between state laws, often provides fertile ground for activities deemed illicit by one or both states – for example smuggling and tax-evasion (Tagliacozzo, 2002; 2005). Border space may also allow the growth of local leadership built on those illegal activities and maintained through patronage and violence (McCoy, 1999; Sturgeon, 2005; Walker, 1999). In such situations, border peoples often enjoy a fair measure of autonomy from state interference, which may further complicate their already ambiguous relations with either state (Martínez, 1994a). This paper examines issues of lawlessness and autonomy in Indonesia along the stretch of the West Kalimantan borderland inhabited by the ethnic Iban, focusing on incidents of vigilantism and gangsterism, and how the ambiguity and separateness engendered by the border promote and enhance these practices.

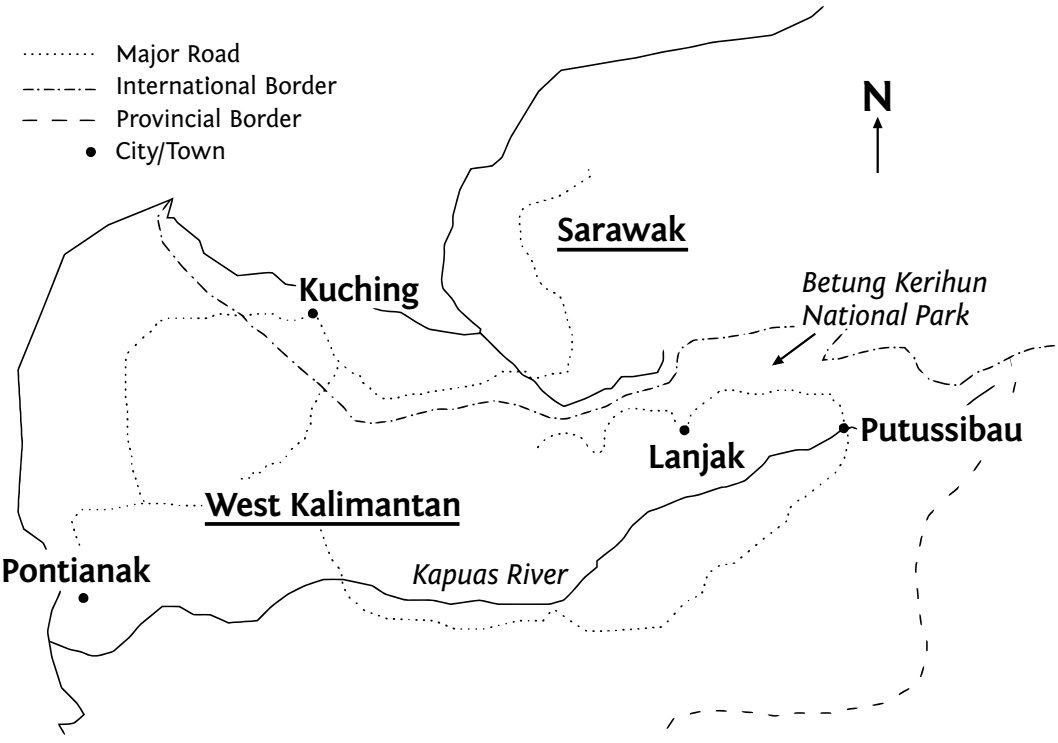
Vigilantism here refers to the taking of or advocating the taking of the law into one's own hands (that is, the circumvention of established channels of law enforcement and justice) in the face of the apparent failure of state authorities to deal effectively with criminal matters. According to Abrahams, acts of vigilantism often appear in 'frontier zones' and here constitute a criticism of ineffectual and corrupt state institutions (Abrahams, 1998, pp. 1-9). While organised vigilante groups seem to have been on the rise throughout Indonesia since the late 1990s, as a result of the Indonesian state's inability to tackle crime, such acts of vigilantism often come with state recognition and are integrated into the broader state apparatus of surveillance and social control (Barker, 2007). Most of these vigilante groups are to an extent legitimated by state authorities, either by assuming the role of informal neighbourhood policing units or by serving as tools of political manipulation of religious and

2 This paper is a revised version of an article co-authored with Reed Lee Wadley and first published in the *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* (Wadley & Eilenberg, 2006).

nationalist sentiments for economic or ideological gain, often with implicit police approval. Vigilante groups in Indonesia have multiple underlying motivations that rely on moral rectitude based on ethnicity, class, and religious affiliation (Wilson, 2006). Vigilante groups are also widely used in conflict areas as paramilitary units (see East Timor, Maluku, Papua) (Coppel, 2005; Hedman, 2008; Thorning, 2005; Wilson, 2010).

However, as I will elaborate on below, acts of vigilantism are not necessarily recognised by the state but instead viewed as disorderly and illicit acts that challenge state authority. Along the fringes of the Indonesian state, where state authority is especially weak, local moral codexes and norms have long collided with formal legal standards resulting in acts of vigilantism. Reinforced by the fragmentation of state authority, such self-help efforts frequently resulted in extra-judicial violence and executions of suspected criminals in the remote borderlands of Indonesia during the first decade following the regime shift in 1998.

Figure 1: Map of the West Kalimantan-Sarawak Border



Source: Author

Historical heredity

> *Persons who find it politic to hurriedly shift from one side of the border to the other can hardly be considered as valuable citizens of either State.*[3]

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, with their efforts to suppress cross-border headhunting and define colonial citizenship, British and Dutch colonial authorities on Borneo partitioned the Kalimantan Iban from the larger population in Sarawak, Malaysia. The Iban borderland was often the focus of contentious inter-colonial relations, and the Iban did their best to take advantage of differing terms and conditions that colonial rule offered on either side; for example, by using the border to escape taxes and resist colonial authority (Wadley, 2004). The independence of Indonesia and the formation of the Malaysian federation in the mid-twentieth century only furthered the partition, particularly under the heavy militarisation along the border during confrontation in the early 1960s and the subsequent Communist insurgency into the 1970s (Eilenberg, 2011). It was not as if this cut off border populations or the rest of the province from the other side; on the contrary, cross-border flows continued largely as they had for decades. However, the building of a road network along the border in the 1980s to 1990s facilitated an increased flow of people and goods – legal and illegal – back and forth across the border (Wadley, 1998).

Nonetheless, along with the remoteness of the region from Indonesian centres, the economic disparities between Indonesia and Malaysia that developed during this period kept the Kalimantan Iban economically oriented toward Malaysia, reinforced by their cultural and historical roots in Sarawak. The Asian economic crisis of 1997 and the dramatic political changes it spurred in Indonesia, including de-militarisation of the border, have only intensified this orientation (Fariastuti, 2002; Riwanto, 2002; Siburian, 2002). The Iban position on the borderland, adjacent to a more prosperous and politically stable neighbour, has meant that their interests lie partly across the border, where they find temporary employment and occasionally immigrate to permanently (Eilenberg & Wadley, 2009). As part of the fallout of the central Indonesian government's loss of power, the on-going boom in 'illegal' logging has also figured

3 Quote from *Sarawak Gazette* (1 October 1895) in Report from Assitant Resident Burgdorffer, 2 December 1914, Verbaal 20 Augustus 1915 No. 41, Politieke Verslagen en Berichten uit de Buitengewesten van Nederlands-Indië (1898-1940), Ministerie van Koloniën, Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, Netherlands [hereafter ARA].

into a mixed, local economic strategy. Yet a critical element in this boom has been the presence of Malaysian Chinese timber entrepreneurs with their local sawmills, logging operations, and Malaysian Iban workers (Wadley & Eilenberg, 2005).

However, the term 'illegal' poses a semantic problem. Especially when understood from the point of view of borderlanders, it glosses too easily over a complex picture (Schendel & Abraham, 2005). 'Illegal' implies a sense of wrongdoing, which may be quite adequate for state-level concerns, but it does not necessarily "represent the ways in which border residents proudly stake their economic claim in transborder trade movement" (Flynn, 1997, p. 324). On the contrary, although aware of being involved in something defined by distant politicians as illicit, borderlanders may feel no moral wrongdoing and regard such laws as unjust and unreasonable (Schendel, 2006). Thus, what is illegal as defined by state law is usually straightforward for agents of the state (though they too may circumvent their own laws), while borderlanders may more routinely engage state regulation with flexibility, not feeling as beholden to adhere to laws they see as imposed from the outside and against their interests (Schendel, 2006). This is most clearly seen in logging operations in the borderland since 1998 – deemed illegal by the state but legitimate by local communities now back in control of their traditional forests.

Case 1: Vigilantes

> *The border area is faced with many problems; in order to deal effectively with these problems I was elected as local judge in settling these local matters. People here do not trust the police and government judges. They believe in customary rule (*hukum adat*) (*temenggong[4] *in Lanjak, personal communication, 25 March 2007).*

The above quote clearly illustrates local suspicion towards external legal authorities, a suspicion that more often than not leads to the internal resolution of local disputes. State law is only recognised to the extent that it is considered to fit local norms of fairness and justice. As I will describe in the case below, when state law and local norms collide, local communities are not slow to actively resist encroachment upon their legal orders.

4 The *temenggong* is a Dayak tribal-head/*adat* leader.

In early December 2000, a courtroom in Putussibau, the district capital of Kapuas Hulu, became the scene of murder as a group of around 300-400 men, armed with shotguns and bush knives, avenged the death of their kinsman.[5] The victim, a Malay man named Usnata, was on trial for the January 2000 murder of an Iban moneychanger named Sandak. The courtroom killing hit the national press as the first vigilante killing inside an Indonesian courthouse. Then-president Abdurahman Wahid met with the victim's family, and provincial officials promised to bring the perpetrators to justice ("400 Massa bersenjata", 2000; "Keluarga Usnata lapor", 2000; "Malaysia belum tanggapi", 2000). Yet in the following months and years, the incident fell 'off the radar' of local and national authorities, and no one of the several hundred who participated has ever been, nor will likely be, charged in the murder.

At its surface, this appears to be another case of *amuk massa*, the seemingly spontaneous killing of people accused of petty crime in the context of an ineffectual justice system (Colombijn, 2002). But its underlying structure and motivation, something not addressed in the press, reveals the interplay of borderland identity, diminished state power, and official corruption.[6] Sandak, the Iban moneychanger, was in fact related by marriage to Usnata, the latter having married Sandak's cousin. It was understandable then that Sandak, his bag filled with 70 million rupiah from his transactions on the border, would board a speedboat with Usnata. On the long journey to the bank, Usnata and the driver, a Padang man named Edi, apparently killed Sandak and dumped his body overboard. It was only after several months that Sandak's body was discovered, and the police began to suspect Usnata (Edi having fled the province): not only was he one of the last people seen with Sandak, but he had also purchased expensive consumer goods after Sandak disappeared.

Sandak's Iban kin demanded that Usnata pay *pati nyawa* or blood money in accordance with Iban customary law (*adat*). He refused, and so the case was passed to the district court for trial. After the first day of the trial, the Iban decided that Usnata would likely be acquitted as they suspected he had bribed the presiding judge, and so they organised the attack, drawing Iban connected to Sandak from both sides of the border. Part of their rationale, besides revenge, was that the court was corrupt

5 The police, who had been on hand to prevent the rumoured attack, were out-numbered and hence retreated. They later negotiated with the vigilantes after the killing and persuaded them not to cut off the victim's head.

6 The following account comes from correspondence with local Iban who were not involved in the incident.

and justice from the government unattainable; they were also incensed that Usnata had refused to adhere to Iban *adat*. Indeed, had he paid the *pati nyawa*, Usnata would probably still be alive.

Thus, though stemming from common perceptions of an ineffectual and corrupt criminal justice system, this vigilante killing is far different from the usual *amuk massa* killings in places like Java, which occur almost spontaneously when someone identifies a thief or similar petty criminal on the street or marketplace; *amuk massa* killings are rapid and immediate following identification and accusation. In contrast, Usnata's killing was planned and organised over several days, involved a force of men mobilised from a wide social and geographical network, occurred in a court of justice which is unique to vigilante killings in Indonesia, and involved direct but non-violent confrontation with police.

Case 2: Gangsters

In January 2005, a team of 26 government officials[7] and one television journalist were investigating illegal logging in the vicinity of the Betung Kerihun National Park on the Indonesian side of the border ("Kail sesali pembiaran", 2005; "Wartawan TV5", 2005). Six weeks prior to this, police had arrested three Malaysian Chinese involved in cross-border logging and confiscated both equipment and timber ("Empat warga Malaysia", 2004), though the 'ringleader', a Malaysian Chinese timber boss named Apeng ("Tangkap Apeng", 2004; "Tangkap Apheng", 2004), had escaped. The new team set out with the hopes of apprehending Apeng but found that their Kijang vehicles could not negotiate the bad roads. So, they commandeered Toyota Land Cruisers (with Malaysian license plates) that were among the equipment confiscated earlier.

After the team had stopped to make camp for the night, two pick-ups with Malaysian license plates and carrying around 20 armed men approached. The leader of the group, a local Iban man, began to interrogate the team, apparently unintimidated by its police and military members. Upon discovering the team's purpose and its use of confiscated vehicles, the man grew angry and blamed them for the loss of local jobs. He ordered his men to seize the vehicles in order to leave the team on foot. But in

7 These officials included district forest rangers, prosecutors, police, and military personnel, some of them well-armed.

a curious twist, the team negotiated transport to the local subdistrict police headquarters in Lanjak, to which the local group agreed. Upon arrival in Lanjak, the locals refused to return the vehicles and fled with them across the border to Malaysia.

The journalist was dumbfounded by the inability or unwillingness of the police and army to intervene; he reported that the security force members of the team had agreed with the Iban leader not to step in, perhaps to avoid further conflict with local communities. Indeed, district officials later told him that the incident was a local matter, with no need to involve outside parties and that there was no need to make it public. Meanwhile, the provincial coordinator of *Kail Kalbar* (an anti-illegal logging consortium) expressed his lack of understanding of how locals could be more loyal and cooperative to a foreigner (Apeng) than to their own government. He suggested that the provincial police would have to take over from the district police if the latter were unable to perform their proper duties.

Perhaps the Kail Kalbar coordinator had 'inside knowledge', because within two months, provincial and national police launched *Operasi Hutan Lestari*, resulting in the arrest of several Malaysians and Indonesians (Chinese, Iban, and Malays) involved in cross-border logging. The operation also placed a ban on transporting already cut timber across the border, a move that upset locals who had derived income from the trade. They sent a large delegation (around 200 people) to the district capital, Putussibau, to promote a lifting of the ban, arguing that the timber came from community forests (*hutan adat*) and that Indonesian markets were prohibitively distant. To date, there has been no resolution; the border towns that had boomed from the cross-border flow of people and goods have become ghost towns. The Indonesian Minister of Forestry, M. S. Kaban, has said that local communities have no legal basis to permit commercial timber cutting ("Masyarakat Kapuas", 2005; "Masyarakat perbatasan", 2005; "Warga protes", 2005).

Vigilantes and Gangsters in Wider Perspective

These two cases illustrate important processes of borderland life that must be understood in order to address the economic and social problems facing the border area in general. But the principal motivations of these instances of 'people's justice' are embedded in a long history of legal autonomy as a consequence of weak state

authority in the borderland.

The Kalimantan Iban have become accustomed to considerable autonomy in dealing with local civil and criminal matters and have not been bashful in challenging attempts to reduce that autonomy. A late nineteenth-century Dutch official referred to them as *een levendig en strijdlustig volk* (a lively and pugnacious people),[8] and though we should be cautious about an essentialised perspective such as this, it does speak to a certain cultural vitality and confidence that has been fostered, in no small part by the unique relationship the Iban on both sides of the border have crafted with the state over the past century and a half. It is no accident that the Iban-inhabited stretch of the border between Dutch West Borneo and British Sarawak produced the most continuous border tensions between the colonial powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[9] because the Iban were so difficult to contain and pacify (Kater, 1883; Niclou, 1887).

Even after formal pacification in 1886, the colonial governments treated the Iban with caution in order not to antagonise them. For example, on both sides of the border, Iban paid less in taxes than other native peoples – in Sarawak, because they were obligated to serve on government expeditions, and in Dutch West Borneo, probably to keep things equivalent with Sarawak practice.[10] In addition, the system of Dutch-appointed leaders – *temenggong* and *patih* – became increasingly autonomous over time, particularly during the great political turmoil and transition of the 1940s to 1950s. Furthermore, the Kalimantan Iban's special affinity for Sarawak was encouraged by the Sarawak government: In 1882, Charles Brooke, the second British ruler of Sarawak, unsuccessfully offered to take the Kalimantan Iban under his control, "even if a certain portion of the land adjoining the frontier where these Dyaks are located, were transferred to the Sarawak rule"[11] – a fact that is retained within Iban historical narratives.

It is not surprising then to see the Kalimantan Iban asserting their interests in particular situations, even when it may be dangerous: During the counter-insurgency militarisation of the border in the 1960s to 1970s, the Iban rejected the Indonesian

8 Letter to NI Governor-General from Resident Tromp, 10 June 1891, Openbaar Verbaal 12 June 1894 No.13, ARA.

9 Letter to NI Governor-General from Resident Tromp, 4 April 1894, Openbaar Verbaal 6 June 1895 No. 12, ARA.

10 The official reason was that Iban "earning capacity" was lower, but this makes no sense as other Dayak groups in the Upper Kapuas District were also poor and distant from good markets (Letter to NI Governor-General from Resident Tromp, 4 April 1894, Openbaar Verbaal 6 June 1895 No. 12, ARA).

11 Letter to NI Governor-General from Charles Brooke, 25 September 1882, Mailrapport 1882 No. 1066, ARA.

military's order to turn in their shotguns. Descending on the army headquarters in full ritual regalia and led by their *temenggong* and *patih*, the several-hundred-strong group of men said that they would turn in their guns if the army promised to post soldiers in their fields to protect them against marauding forest pigs and monkeys. To this day, the three subdistricts dominated by the Iban are the only places in Kapuas Hulu district, and perhaps the province of West Kalimantan, where citizens are allowed to keep their shotguns at home and not registered at the local police stations (Eilenberg, 2012).

In light of this, and in the context of de facto governmental decentralisation, and demoralisation of the police and military following the fall of Suharto in 1998, the revenge killing of Usnata makes much more sense, and we see a number of historical continuities: The strong sense of cultural autonomy is particularly apparent, customary law should precede national law locally, and the forceful pursuit of Iban interests is deemed entirely legitimate. The ability of the Iban to mobilize rapidly also figures prominently and finds its historical parallel in nineteenth-century headhunting expeditions that could number in the hundreds and thousands (Freeman, 1961). Although changes in Indonesian political life provided them additional space to operate after 1998, the Iban involved in the Usnata incident would not have been able or willing to engage in it without the benefit of these historically precedent qualities.

With regard to the case of gangsterism, three additional factors have been at work. First, as a result of national decentralisation processes, district governments throughout Indonesia have had more power than they ever had. Second, Kapuas Hulu district officials have seen cross-border logging as a good opportunity to develop the borderland economy, which had been long neglected by the central government (Eilenberg, 2009). Third, many local Iban (along with some district officials) did and still do not share central and provincial government views on the legality of current logging activities, and they see the interference of 'outsiders', such as the government operation described above, as a breach of local autonomy. The passivity of the local district police and military can be seen then as a careful response to the economic benefits they have derived from logging and a healthy respect for the ability of local Iban to take action. [12]

12 Local civilian, police, and military officials are, by and large, not 'locals' themselves but come from a variety of places – elsewhere in the province or well beyond, such as Java and Bali. Given the link between cross-border activities and illegality, it is difficult to assess how or if local officials are involved beyond simply facilitating and

Following the fall of the New Order government in 1998, Malaysian Chinese timber entrepreneurs crossed the long and porous border into West Kalimantan in order to set up local logging operations. They have routinely co-operated with local communities in need of income and with unofficial approval of district governments. In addition to the economically and politically conducive climate and an international demand for tropical timber, easy access across the border through an improved road network (originally justified by national security concerns) has facilitated such operations. For their part, local communities have viewed the forested areas along the border as their own traditional managed forest, and the harvest of that timber as the result of locally negotiated agreements.[13] To make their businesses run smoothly, the timber entrepreneurs have bribed important district and subdistrict officials, including police, military, and immigration agents at the border, a fact widely known by local borderlanders.

In the Kapuas Hulu District, such processes involving Malaysian entrepreneurs (known locally as *tukei*) and local Iban have been widely in play. As a consequence of their long cultural and economic affinity with Sarawak and having been long marginalised by their own central and provincial governments, many Iban borderlanders have a weak sense of commitment to their own state (Wadley & Eilenberg, 2005). They have seen no dilemma in cooperating with the more familiar Malaysian tukei[14] (and their Malaysian Iban employees), who know much more about Iban customs and language than Indonesian government officials. Local Iban have thus felt comfortable dealing with the tukei and their cross-border cousins. In addition, because the Kalimantan Iban have long engaged in wage labour across the border while their Sarawak kin have felt no similar pull from Kalimantan, these activities have introduced a new set of connections among the partitioned Iban, strengthening the long tradition of cross-border ethnic relations (Eilenberg & Wadley, 2009).

In the years following the initial onset of cross-border logging, the provincial and national press reported only sporadically about these undertakings in the remote Kapuas Hulu (Bider, 2003; "Illegal logging", 2003; "Mafia illegal logging", 2003; Ranik,

collecting fees on such activities on their side of the border.

13 Although communities have been divided on the question of timber harvesting and cooperation with Malaysian timber bosses, most communities were initially happy with the arrangement, although tensions have risen as the side-effects of logging have appeared, such as water pollution ("Warga perbatasan", 2004).

14 Prior to their operations in West Kalimantan, the Malaysian tukei operated for decades in Sarawak Iban areas and preferentially hired local Iban, having learned to trust their honesty and work ethic.

2002). But later, as the volume of cross-border smuggling increased and the loss of resources and state revenue became too high to ignore, media attention was once more directed towards the remote border area.[15] The theme then became the Malaysian exploitation of West Kalimantan resources, with provocative headlines such as "Malaysia eats our fruit, while Indonesia swallows the sap" ("Lika-liku praktik", 2003) and "When will Malaysian 'colonization' of the Kalbar border end?" ("Kapan 'penjajahan' Malaysia", 2004). The stronger nationalist tone to these later reports also included an explicit criminalisation of cross-border activities: The tukei and their Malaysian workers were now seen as gangsters armed with guns, intimidating local communities, with '*Gengster Cina Malaysia*' becoming the buzz phrase ("Belum ada fakta", 2004; "'Gangster' bersenjata", 2004).

As a consequence of this change, national and provincial politicians demanded that district officials take prompt action. Despite district government assurances on dealing with these 'Malaysian gangsters', early attempts to crack down on illegal logging in the border area were few and half-hearted, and the people arrested were mostly "small fry" ("Cukong kayu illegal", 2003; "Operasi Wanalaga II", 2003), especially as district officials were in no hurry to end the lucrative cross-border connections. It seemed that the 'gangsters' would continue their activities unabated, supported by district officials and local communities ("Dukung Kapolda", 2004; "Pengiriman kayu illegal", 2004). *Operasi Hutan Lestari*, however, altered the previous state of affairs. Indeed, what we now see is a national and provincial attempt to wrest control of revenue streams from the districts and domesticate the 'unruly' and 'defiant' borderlands and their inhabitants (Eilenberg, 2012).

Conclusion

Located on the fringes of the Indonesian state and in close proximity to a neighbouring state with which they have long maintained cultural and economic relations, the feeling of being different is predominant among West Kalimantan Iban – a sense of separateness and otherness from the heartland and its population, economically, culturally, and historically. In addition, one of the general characteristics that per-

15 Several incidents over the last several years of border transgressing have also served to keep things 'hot' in the media as well as diplomatically ("Malaysia belum tanggapi", 2000; "Sengketa perbatasan", 2000).

meate Iban borderlander life is the feeling of being pulled in several directions at once, but the strength of the pull depends on the degree of interaction and relations on both sides (Martínez, 1994b). Indeed, the borderlanders with the weakest loyalty to their own national state are often those with the strongest cross-border ties. Politically, the Kalimantan Iban belong to a state that demands their unswerving loyalty but ethnically, emotionally, and economically, they often feel part of another, non-state entity (Baud & Schendel, 1997), the bulk of which is located in another state. For many Iban, the connections across the border remain stronger than those with their own nation state, resulting in a weak sense of national belonging or identity (Lumenta, 2005).

Often, border populations maintain cross-border economic links although they may subvert national law; in many cases, they have little other choice because their national governments have failed to integrate the borderland into the larger national economy (Driessen, 1999). Borderlanders thus exhibit a tendency to bend, ignore, and breach laws that they see as interfering with their interests and special way of life. Rigid laws governing international borders that restrict cross-border interaction may lead to diverse conflict and rule bending (Abraham, 2006). Furthermore, the sense of otherness towards the state as experienced by borderlanders is increased because their interests often diverge from and conflict with national interests. Seeing themselves as being marginal to a larger national unity, many Iban often feel that the distant political centre does not understand the special circumstances of living in a borderland.

Its ambiguous nature of both uniting and dividing characterises the special environment of the border. By its very nature in dividing two separate states with their often different administrative and regulatory regimes, the border thus may generate an 'opportunity structure' for activities, such as smuggling and immigration that both states deem illicit (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). Smuggling and illicit trade is often described as "the borderland occupation par excellence" (Rösler & Wendl, 1999, p. 13). For example, Wilson and Donnan (1999) note how international borders can be both 'used' (trade) and 'abused' (smuggling). On the one hand, borders bring economic opportunity and generate a two-way flow of goods and people, but on the other hand they facilitate economic gain through illegal import and export, such as we have seen with the smuggling of timber from West Kalimantan. Such illicit processes

form "the subversive economy of borderlands" (Wilson & Donnan, 1998, p. 87), often highly important for the livelihoods of many borderlanders and sometimes the most important economic force in the border region.

Yet this typical 'borderland' scenario presents us with only part of the picture with regard to the Iban borderland, as it cannot be fully understood without reference to the special affinity West Kalimantan Iban have developed for Sarawak. Not only are they a minority group within their own province, partitioned from a much larger population in a visibly more prosperous country across the border, they have also received special treatment by successive colonial and national governments on both sides of the border. This has allowed them considerable space to develop a strong sense of autonomy, heightening the sense of separateness that appears ubiquitous with borderlands. Under the circumstances following the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997 and the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, it is perhaps not surprising to see events turn out as they have, given this critically important historical precedent.

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Note from the author: *Not all newspaper articles listed here are available online. For Antara News Agency, Equator News, Kompas, Media Indonesia, Pontianak Post, Sinar Harapan and Suara Pembaruan, the online links to the articles no longer work. I hold copies on file.*

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Sacred Spaces of Karen Refugees and Humanitarian Aid Across the Thailand-Burma Border

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Citation Horstmann, A. (2011). Sacred Spaces of Karen Refugees and Humanitarian Aid Across the Thailand-Burma Border. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 4*(2), 254-272.

In this article, I demonstrate that the Karen National Union (KNU) was able to manipulate and politicise humanitarian aid in the Thailand-Burma borderland. I contend that in the context of the civil war in eastern Burma, Protestant Christianity provides a crucial vehicle for political mobilisation. The article shows that refugee camps in the Thai borderland become centres of proselytisation, and that Protestant evangelical and missionary networks open up passages across the Thai-Burmese border. The article thus considers a case where a homeland is constructed in the liminal space between two nations. Illegal emergency aid that doubles as missionary project reinforces the image of a helpless victim being vandalized by evil Burmese army.

Keywords: *Karen; Nationalism; Civil War; Refugees; Humanitarian Aid*

Dieser Artikel zeigt auf, wie es der Karen National Union (KNU) gelungen ist, die humanitäre Hilfe im Grenzgebiet zwischen Thailand und Burma für eigene Ziele zu manipulieren und zu politisieren. Ich argumentiere, dass das protestantische Christentum ein entscheidendes Vehikel zur politischen Mobilisierung im Kontext des Bürgerkriegs in Ost-Burma darstellt. Der Artikel zeigt, dass die Flüchtlingslager im thailändischen Grenzgebiet als Zentren der Missionierung dienen und dass die protestantisch-evangelikalen und missionarischen Netzwerke territoriale Korridore durch die thailändisch-burmesische Grenze öffnen. Wir sehen hier ein Fallbeispiel, wie eine imaginierte Nation in der Grenzerfahrung zweier Nationen konstruiert wird. Soforthilfe, die mit protestantischer Mission doppelt, verstärkt das Bild hilfloser Opfer, die von der burmesischen Armee vandalisiert werden.

Keywords: *Karen; Nationalismus; Bürgerkrieg; Flüchtlinge; Humanitäre Hilfe*

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Introduction[2]

In November 2010, I assisted in a meeting in which Karen pastors and intellectuals from Thailand and Burma as well as other Karen came together in a Bible School in Chiang Mai in order to read the Bible in a special way, 'through Karen eyes'. Over two days, this circle tried to make sense of their 'fate' and to find ways to explain and to overcome the suffering of the Karen population in eastern Burma. The meeting also involved political discussions on the future of the Karen state. Some Christian intellectuals in attendance served as mediators aiming to negotiate a ceasefire and peace between the Karen National Union (KNU), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), and the Burmese government. They questioned whether violence on the Karen's side was a way to peace. Until now, the KNU sticks to armed struggle and the mantra of never surrendering, although negotiations with representatives of the Burmese government for a ceasefire are underway. Other leaders regard the conflict as a spiritual warfare and see themselves as spiritual leaders and staunch nationalists.[3]

Although debating in a context of a Federal Union of Burma solution, the national narrative of a unified Karen ethnic group remains stronger than ever. In this article, I argue that the Karen example provides a case where a nation is constructed, imagined, and contested in the context of displacement and political exile in the margin of two nations (Dudley, 2007). While the physical space of a Karen homeland, the *Kawthoolei*, has been gradually lost, the spiritual idea of a 'homeland' is still alive. In fact, nationalism and national identity are reproduced in the mission and the 'migration schools' for Karen migrant children. Although the Karen churches have an independent, theological agenda, and their own programs of biblical education and extensive mission, Karen Protestant Christianity provides a crucial vehicle for political mobilisation (Keyes, 1979).

In the following, I theorise moving borders in a new way. The border has moved as

2 In this paper, I draw on ongoing fieldwork on religious spaces and self-identification of Karen migrants across the Thailand-Burma border. Ethnographic research and survey research on Christian, Theravada Buddhist, and Animist movements was done in north-western Thailand and in eastern Burma. Co-researchers in a research project funded generously by the Thailand Research Fund include Kwanchewan Buadaeng and Samak Kosem, Department of Anthropology, Chiang Mai University, Thailand. The first draft was presented in Marseille, France, for the International Burma Studies Conference, 6-9 July 2010.

3 For an exciting perspective on Buddhist spaces and networks in Karen state, see Hayami (in press).

the control of the territory and the border itself has shifted between Thai or Burmese authorities and the Karen, a people that lives in both Thailand and Burma. I contend that religious networks and social support structures, civil society, church networks, and Christian Protestant communities as well as evangelist and missionary ministries create corridors, passages, and spaces of reconstruction in the third space of the liminal, extreme niche in the Thai borderland (Horstmann & Wadley, 2009; South, 2010). Different factions within the KNU, DKBA, and Burmese army fight and compete fiercely over the control of territory and business licences, and religious spaces support consistent efforts of competing warlords to control areas and people. Christian missionary work therefore competes with Buddhist pagoda-planting and Buddhist charismatic authority.

The refugee camp, largely controlled by the indigenous KNU refugee committee and upheld by humanitarian aid, becomes a centre of proselytisation and reproduction of Karen nationalism (Dudley, 2007; Gravers, 2007; Horstmann, 2011). Thus, displaced Karen become part of globalising political and spiritual projects as national and Protestant Christian members of a global Karen *community*. After reconstruction in the Thai borderland, these politicised humanitarian projects re-enter the conflict zone inside eastern Burma to support the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), to support the churches or in the form of humanitarian, yet nationalistic organisations, to support the internally displaced Karen in the Karen state and to provide spiritual worship and emergency aid to them.

Christian spirituality, militarism, and nationalism go hand in hand to fuel the Karen cause, the ideology of reconstruction in the Thai borderland, and the narrative of spiritual warfare. Refugees do not only cross a political boundary but also a religious one. The literate, elite, and intellectual circles of the Baptist Karen become realigned and reordered in political exile. The holy bible and the missionary Karen script provide the basis for Christian interpretation of the national narrative and the transformation of the physical space of Karen land into a transcendent notion of a Karen land. This perspective of a Christian nation conceals the internal diversity of the Karen in Burma, where religious affiliations vary according to region and village (e.g. Gravers, 2007).

Christians make up no more than one third of the Karen population while the majority of the Pwo Karen is ancestral Buddhist. However, the Christian Skaw Karen

are mostly in an economically better situation and better educated than the Buddhist Pwo. From the Karen point of view, Christianity is not seen as a non-Karen tradition but as a new ritual practice or a new worship. Neither is it looked at as a change in tradition or custom. "Christianity and Buddhism have been converted into genuine Karen traditions, replacing former rituals and prayers" (Gravers, 2007, p. 232). The literate nationalist circles emerging in the nineteenth century, described skilfully by Womack (2005), have realigned and are extended to political exile, resettled Karen diaspora in the West and to the internet. Reading the Bible through Karen eyes also means reading the past anew and planning for the future.

In this article, I discuss the role of Baptist networks in the politics of reconstruction in a contested borderland in the context of forced migration. Displaced Karen who cross the border depend on religious networks as social support structures and are politically mobilised by these. I argue that the emerging religious and national narrative cannot be separated from the context of civil war that has plagued the Karen since the escalation of the armed insurgency. It is the thesis of this paper that the emergence of a militarised Karen National Union in the context of the insurgency has consolidated a particular ethno-political national narrative associated with distinctive territorial claims. The KNU claims that the Burmese regime is committing 'genocide' against them and that the Karen have to defend and protect themselves. In this context, I am interested how missionary and evangelical networks respond to the humanitarian crisis in eastern Burma. Not only have their evangelising missions met the refugees when they are in their most vulnerable position, they also mobilise inside the conflict zone across the border and proselytise on the Thai border. Thus, I see missionary efforts on the Thai border as a continuation of earlier efforts of Karen Protestant and Catholic proselytisation in Burma.

Contested Sovereignties Across the Thailand-Burma Border

In Burma, some ethnic minorities (Shan, Mon, Karenni, Kachin, and Chin) in the borderlands have developed their own nationalities and ethnic militia (Gravers, 2007). The Burmese state on the other hand has established a *regime* of differential citizenship in which some people are granted citizenship rights while these are denied to others. The Burmese army has also waged a protracted and brutal war against the

ethnic nationalities' armies at the frontiers (South, 2008). It is important to note here that it is the civil population that has to bear the casualties and terrible consequences of the war. The effects of the war are difficult to bear: They include systematic terror, burning of villages and rice barns, campaigns of relocation, arbitrary arrest and intimidation, summary executions, forced labour, sexual abuse, and rape (Grundy-Warr & Wong, 2002; Smith, 2007).[4] Thousands of people are forced to leave the villages as a result of these severe human rights violations, find themselves in the jungle, on the mountains, roaming around without food and medical attention, and struggle to make their way to the Thai-Burmese border. Hundreds of thousands of people are internally displaced, inhabiting the Burma-Karen frontier region without much hope to return home. The suffering, wounding, casualties, and trauma are immense.[5]

While NGOs and humanitarian agencies in Thailand and in the West report these human rights violations extensively, little is known about the violations on the part of the KNU. The villagers now find themselves intimidated and pressured from several sides and are threatened not only by Burmese soldiers but also by the DKBA and KNLA which demand food, protection, and even soldiers. The protracted conflict also has its own dynamic and there is a number of warlords and war entrepreneurs who compete for business licenses and resource extraction and who do not care much about what side they are fighting for. The KNU regards itself as an army of angels and as a democratic institution, yet individual human rights abuses and extortion also occur on the side of the KNLA brigades.

In the war zone of eastern Burma, Burmese citizenship has probably lost much of its practical value as social welfare and educational infrastructure collapse. While in the past the KNU-controlled territory used to function as a convenient buffer zone between Thailand and Burma, with the KNU being a conservative anti-communist force under the leadership of Bo Mya, nowadays the KNU has become a burden in the diplomatic re-approachment between Thailand and Burma. Today, the borderlands are highly contested, while the Burmese army is constantly building new alliances with break-away factions of the ethnic nationalities factions and is trying to instrumentalise these by transforming them into regular border guard forces (South, 2008).

Rajah (1990) pointed out that the Karen rebel movement is highly unusual in that

4 See the very informative current reports of Human Rights Watch, Karen Human Rights Group, or Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC).

5 See the very insightful report by TBBC (2011) on displacement and poverty.

it is a largely Christian movement in a largely Buddhist environment. Visitors who work with the Karen are welcome, as the Karen hope that foreigners will publicise their 'cause'. This has led to a lack of detachment on the part of travellers, activists, and scholars who have identified with the goals of the Karen. This identification has led to biased reports on the conflict, as Western scholarship, with notable exceptions (South, 2011), sympathised with the KNU that they saw as a democratic organisation with humanitarian goals (Rogers, 2004). The documentation of human rights violations committed by the Burmese army against the non-combatant civil population in the 1990s led to the rise of humanitarian assistance along the Thai border and to the identification of humanitarian aid workers with the KNU. Consequently, critical studies on the everyday life of the refugees, the Karen insurgency movement, and the political administration of the refugee camps are still rare.[6]

This paper presents an attempt to contribute to this field. Humanitarian organisations did not only identify the indigenous refugee committee as their natural partner but also depended on it for the implementation of welfare projects. The KNU was able to manipulate humanitarian aid and to channel the resources into nationalist and Christian education. In this way, the aid industry building up at the Thailand-Burma border provided crucial support and positive media coverage for the KNU that controlled and recruited from the camps, and benefitted from taxes (donations) and supplies from the Thailand Burma Border Council (TBBC). Later, the KNU also benefitted from the remittances from the resettled Karen communities in the West. Many humanitarian aid organisations uncritically supported the KNU during the civil war and thus kept the military machine of the KNU alive (South, 2011). Saying this, I do not position myself for or against the KNU or the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Convention or the Thai Karen Baptist Convention but simply contribute to revealing the facts that have been kept silent in the numerous reports of Karen Human Rights organisations and the KNU.[7]

6 For a similar case of a lack of critical studies on the Shan see Jirattikorn (2011).

7 There is a slight danger of essentialising Karen refugees in the academic exercise of demystifying and deconstructing Karen national or Karen Christian Protestant identity (Malkki, 1992; 1996).

Protestant Christianity and Karen Nationalism

In most analyses, religion has not been part of the picture, although it provides a privileged lens to study the identity processes of refugees. Religion and religious networks critically relate to mobility on the Thai-Burmese frontier. Most of all, missionary networks and humanitarian activism are characterised by movement. Missionaries cross the border against all odds: While Kawthoolei was widely accessible, the Back Pack Health Workers and the missionary Free Burma Rangers (FBR) today, for instance, take considerable risks by entering the conflict zone to provide emergency relief. Movement across the border can thus be interpreted as a religious commitment. The interconnections of missionary work, humanitarian crisis, and forced migration also allow a fresh angle on the movement in the borderland. Where humanitarian organisations cannot enter the conflict zone in eastern Burma, Christian Protestant networks fill the gap.

As many of the ethnic minorities have become partly Christianised, the identity marker of religion becomes key in the conflict as the Baptist and Catholic churches operate in a nation state environment where Buddhism is not a state religion but the predominant one, and where popular Karen Buddhist movements vie with Karen Christian networks for hegemony in the villages. In present Burma, the issue of religion is much politicised as Christianity is regarded with suspicion by the Burmese state authorities. In Thailand, by contrast, the Christian church of Thailand is fully recognised by the Thai government and benefits from religious freedom. This political tolerance has motivated the presence of multiple Christian missionary agencies in northern Thailand, from where they operate in the politically much more sensitive environments of the neighbouring countries. Baptist and Seven Day Adventist networks are not the only missionary networks in humanitarian aid and relief welfare, the Catholic Church is very well established through the presence of churches, schools, and Catholic centres. In addition, Pentecostal churches and evangelical networks, from the US, South Korea, and Taiwan, now have established a presence in northern Thailand as well and have begun to work with the poorest segments of the population, hill tribe minorities, drug addicts, and refugees. They have used the same community churches or established their own churches and have especially attracted young and underprivileged people to their worship services and summer camps.

Historically speaking, American Baptist missionaries played a central role in the development of Karen national imagination (Keyes, 1979). Catholic missionaries and Catholic relief welfare organisations by contrast are not tied to the KNU and the insurgency in the way that Baptist pastors were and are. The largely Christian Karen rebel movement used to control large tracts of territory in eastern Burma, operating from bases in north-western Thailand. This situation changed dramatically in the 1990s when the deterioration of the military situation and the large inflow of refugees, Karen civil population, and Burmese students required a change in strategy. The control of the refugees by the Thai government was heightened and refugees are not allowed to leave the refugee camp, although leaders of the committees go in and out.[8] In the documentation of the Karen, there is a bias on Christianity, although the Christians – in several denominations – are in the minority. In access to humanitarian assistance and resettlement to third countries, notably the US, Christians are privileged against non-Christians. Clearly, the ethnic cleansing of the Karen population in eastern Burma was instrumentalised to further the interests of the Karen rebel movement. Yet, it is the armed rebellion that caused the retribution by the *Tatmadaw*, the Burmese army, on the civil population that endures incredible suffering.

Moreover, the competition of Christianity and Buddhism has become a key issue. The largely Christian KNU is not only in fight with the Burmese army, but also with the Buddhist Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) that has allied with the Tatmadaw. The retreat of the KNU from its bases in eastern Burma resulted in the DKBA's control of the border. The ongoing factionalism within the Karen rebel movement and the withdrawal and growing dependence of the KNU on Thailand has resulted in further fragmentation. International NGOs and a sophisticated network of religious and non-religious organisations and groups provide the social welfare wing of the insurgency movement (Horstmann, 2011; South, 2011).

At the same time, the camp provides a site for mobilisation of young soldiers for the 'revolution' of the Karen. This is why the camps have become dangerous sanctuaries: In various instances, Burmese military and DKBA soldiers stormed the camps, shelling them and burning houses, and searching for KNLA soldiers. Karen nationalism and Christianity are intimately intertwined, reinforcing each other.

8 The best introduction on the history of the camps remains Lang (2002). See also the recent booklet by the TBBC (2011).

Many scholars suggested that evangelical Protestantism is an attractive religious option for many marginal ethnic groups. For Karen displaced people from Burma, this is not entirely convincing as a substantial proportion of the Karen in Burma maintain their local spirit beliefs. But the Baptist minority assumes a hegemonic position in the Thai-Burmese borderland because of the organisational, financial, and communicative strength of protestant churches and the many Karen non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are operated by Christians. This becomes particularly evident in the refugee camps where the Christian missionary networks dominate religious life. The KNU and the KNLA recruit soldiers and supporters from the camps.

While the Baptist church in Burma is not directly associated with the Karen National Union, most of the leadership of the KNU is Christian and many pastors preach directly for the KNU. In the words of their leaders, the Baptist church provides the spiritual umbrella for the ethnic nationalist movement. Furthermore, in the refugee camps administered by the KNU and by the Thai army, the Karen refugee committee is made up of KNU-pastors. When the refugee camps were established in 1984, the Karen refugee committee emerged as a natural partner for the evangelical missionary networks that were directly involved in providing emergency welfare and assistance to the Karen people crossing the border. Moreover, the first refugee camps emerged from the villages of the KNU families. While the population of the camp has become more diverse, the Karen make up the large majority, and churches as well as the Bible school are central institutions of cultural life in the camp.

While many ecumenical Christian and non-religious international NGOs have since joined the consortium, religious networks play a very important role in assisting the displaced people by providing them with food, clothes, and shelter. The KNU has thus established a network in which it is associated with many civil associations and NGOs. But while national identities – Burmese/Thai – do not fit the context in the borderland, where people are neither Burmese nor Thai, the Karen stick to the idea of a Karen homeland and a Karen nation. This is a case of the construction of Karen intellectual circles and publics and the imagination of Karen state spaces. These circles and the public focus on senior church leaders, represented by the theological seminaries on the Thai border and in Burma. The idea of a Karen nation governed by the KNU is now reproduced in and extended to the diaspora. Old Karen war veterans go to church with traditional clothes and full national and KNU regalia. Before the

fall of the garrison of Mannerplaw in 1995, the KNU controlled vast territorial tracts in eastern Burma and thus constituted a quasi state and buffer state. The gate read 'Welcome to Kawthoolei' and the KNU comprised its own army, its own schools and hospitals, as well as its own townships, bureaucracy, and flag (Rajah, 1990). The KNU raised substantial resources by taxing the Karen population and the illicit border market and by exploiting the teak forests. After the military defeat of the KNLA and the resettlement of Christian Karen families to the USA, Australia, and Europe, the religious reconstruction of a Karen imagined community gained importance. The KNU, individual families, and churches gained new income through remittances following this new diaspora. Religious interpretation of the Bible was used to justify a war that is perceived to be 'just'. Metaphors of refugees being 'saved on Noah's ark', 'God's mysterious plan', as well as the promise of the 'promised land' and 'eternal life' were extensively used by Christian leaders to encourage each other. The portrayed heroic behaviour of the KNU was underlined by delivering emergency health services and prayer worshipping to the internally displaced persons in the war zone. In a sense, the imagination of a Christian nation is mentally transported to the refugee camp. Evangelical Christianity can thus be seen as a replacement of the dwindling homeland in south-eastern Burma.

Evangelisation and Proselytisation

Facing massive persecution and violence, and given their loss of citizenship, the Karen from eastern Burma are marginal to Thai modernity. In this situation, the humanitarian aid organisations emerge as crucial allies for the KNU's reorganisation in the camps and contribute to the making of 'ethno-fiction' by the Karen themselves, international humanitarian organisations, and academic scholarship (Rajah, 1990). Far from being passive victims, evangelical Karen become important agents of proselytising, who use their cultural capital to reach out to their relatives, friends, and to the community of Christians. The Karen church not only provides a large selection of services, welfare, and relief; in addition, Christians are able to re-enter the humanitarian space as soldiers-medics-missionaries in a war zone largely inaccessible for international humanitarian NGOs. Fuelled by global alliances with American Christian churches, South Korean Pentecostals, and international advocacy networks, this

project of evangelisation and reconstruction is still in the hands of the educated Christian leadership. I also do not replace ethnic labels with new ones, but look at how identities are constructed in religious and nationalist movements, and contested in 'economies of power' that constitute the 'field'. By forging the ethno-fiction of a united Karen nation, the KNU conceals vast internal differences within the Karen population. I argue that the invention of a united Karen leadership is a very recent one and that this leadership was imposed on an extremely diverse population.

While the Baptists constitute a very eloquent minority within the Karen population, the Buddhists are in the majority. In the Karen state, the ethnic and religious composition can vary from village to village. In the KNU, the leadership is mostly made up of Christians, while the foot soldiers are for the great majority Buddhists. The frustration of being locked up in the lower level of the KNU's hierarchy was effectively used by the Buddhist monk U Thuzana who instrumentalised the status gap by mobilising these grievances to found his own breakaway army, the DKBA (Gravers, 2007).

Religious developments in the Karen state have always been very dynamic and conversion to Christianity was never a straightforward, uniform movement, but was instead characterised by ups and downs and may have encapsulated some villages and regions but not others. Many Karen villages remain animist and follow autochthonous Karen traditions, while indigenous millenarian Buddhist movements developed in parts of the Karen state. In some areas, there was intensive religious competition and that dynamic remains until today. In a landmark study, William Womack showed that this competition of social networks and intellectual circles centred on the development and appropriation of the Karen script and on the contested imaginations of a Karen ethnicity (Womack, 2005). By examining Christian, Buddhist, and syncretised literary groups in the nineteenth and twentieth century in different regions of eastern Burma, Womack shows that the missionary Karen Sgaw script was only one among 11 different scripts, albeit the most influential one. Competing scripts were reproduced in the churches, monasteries, and among syncretic groups such as the Lekke and Telekhon, mixing Buddhist, Christian, and autochthonous elements. The nationalist Christian leadership of the KNU is, according to Martin Smith, only a recent phenomenon (Smith, 1991; 2007). However, this does not make the link between Christianity and the insurgency less important. Religion provides a very

interesting lens to look at the contestation of Karen representation and territorial spaces in the borderland. But Womack's work makes the perspective of Karen nationalism more diverse and cautions us not to make the mistake of producing a unitary perspective where there is none. South (2007) points out that many syncretic Karen in Burma identify neither with the KNU nor with the DKBA but are drawn into a vicious cycle of violence. Womack is certainly right to state that the nationalist narrative is filtered to foreign researchers by the KNU, the Karen refugee committee and Karen NGOs.

While this diversity remains in Burma, I argue that the Baptist Christian network has the strongest lobby in the refugee camps and that the domination of the administration of the camps is reflected in the Christian teaching in the camp schools. Of course, Christianity is not a unified entity either. From the beginning, American Baptist missionaries proselytised along Catholic missionaries, and the Christian landscape of today is characterised by the co-existence of Baptist, Anglican, Seven Day Adventist, and Catholic community churches. In addition, other denominations compete with the dominant Baptist stream, the Seven Day Adventist church being second place. I claim that the privileged position of the evangelic Baptist church and its close association to the KNU in the refugee camp results in a campaign to missionise refugees, and that this is what happens. Refugees, Buddhist and animist, who are socialised in the migrant schools and in the humanitarian networks are exposed to and often convert to Christianity. The reasons for conversion are complex, though, the main reason is that individual refugees want to be part of the collective body of the Karen characterised by faith and nationalism. Christianity symbolises modernity and cosmopolitanism. Not least, conversion to Christianity grants access to social welfare and better access to humanitarian aid and social mobility. Inside the Karen state, the DKBA also offers a perspective and the KNU and DKBA now aggressively compete over the symbols of nationalism. In both guerrilla armies, religious affiliation has become a key symbol and the DKBA is involved in building pagodas and temples while the Baptist network is eager to plant churches. The Karen are not just recipients of humanitarian aid. Unlike former Vietnamese refugees who converted to Christianity, the Christian Karen are old Christians who have a tradition of proselytising among their own ethnic group and other ethnic minorities. Christian missionary networks are not the only religious networks in town. The cultural hegemony of the Karen

in the Thai borderland in north-western Thailand excludes the subaltern Buddhist, Islamic, and autochthonous Karen communities that construct their own religious landscapes in Thailand and in Burma.

State of the Field

My research on the transnational religious lives of the Christians adds to and complements important research on the economic, political, and cultural practices of transnational refugees. Brees (2010) in particular provides very valuable research about the remittance strategies of refugees and the practical difficulties they face. Another important contribution comes from Sandra Dudley whose work on the exiled Karenni in the Thailand/Burma borderland focuses on the transformation of Karenni refugees into modern, educated subjects, Karenni identification, and the rise of a Karenni nationalism (Dudley, 2007, pp. 77-106). The Karenni (red Karen) identity is born in the refugee camp and, similar to Karen identity, conceals internal diversity, contradictions, tensions, and plurality in favour of a united, Christian dominated Karenni-ness. In a recent full monograph on the Karenni refugees in Thailand, Dudley uses a material culture lens to analyse the formations of pre- and post-exile Karenni identity (Dudley, 2010). This article can thus be read in convergence with Dudley's important work. The work of Michael Gravers who focuses on the messianic and Buddhist traditions of the Karen has been decisive for my thinking on sacred spaces of the Karen. This paper thus complements Gravers' path-breaking on-going work on indigenous Buddhist millenarian movements (Gravers, 2007; 2011).

Theoretical Considerations

Castells (1996) argues that the world is reconstituting itself around a series of networks strung around the globe based on advanced communication technologies. He claims that the network is the signature of new society. Networks are driven by modern communication technologies and reorganise geographical space by creating a new material foundation of time-sharing. Networks are social ties that allocate and control resources. They are not simply amalgams of nodes and ties, but are always organised around projects, goals, and values. Each network constitutes its own social

world, and it is the bundle of material and immaterial resources and flexible, yet, coordinated communication, which makes action possible. Clearly, I want to argue that religious networks very much spread through the network logic. In the Thailand/Burma borderland, the Karen Baptist Convention is a network that is organised around the political project of spreading Karen nationalism and Protestant Christianity that is based on a set of material and immaterial religious resources, and that is bound together by use of advanced electronic communication on a local and a global scale. The question of inclusion and exclusion is one of the most fundamental in network society. As Castells writes, the network also acts as a gatekeeper. Inside networks, opportunities are created while outside of them survival is increasingly difficult (Castells, 2000, p. 187). Indeed, for many people outside the existing Karen structures, survival becomes a daily struggle collecting garbage, working in factories, or as labourers under the minimum wage, while Christian networks provide shelter, food, and security in a hostile environment.

The concept of a transnational social formation gives a more coherent frame for explaining the dynamics of durable transnational exchanges. A concise overview of transnational social formations is provided by Stephen Vertovec (1999; 2009). In arguing that the Christian Karen community provides a case study for the trans-nationalisation of the social world, I follow Vertovec's definition of transnational social formations and his proposition for empirical research on transnationalism. The Christian Protestant community is a transnational social formation with a special type of consciousness and national identity of an exiled but 'chosen' people that extends to the Thai borderland and to the Karen diaspora in the West.

The project of the Karen community is kept alive through remittances from transnational humanitarian organisation and church networks and from the growing diaspora. Transnationalism is an arena for transnational advocacy networks, NGOs, websites, and ethno-political formations in the diaspora. The transnational social formation has a durable spatial location in the Karen state, in refugee camps, in the countryside of the Thai borderland, in the migration schools, in the border town of Mae Sot, and in the Karen communities in the USA, Scandinavia, and Australia. The consciousness of a Christian Karen identity in a durable transnational space makes the exiled Karen diaspora a transnational social formation par excellence. This transnational formation takes up the social figuration of an ethnic and religious commu-

nity. The refugee camps, the orphanages and migrant schools are important spaces of proselytisation. The organisation of the refugees in missionary networks often, but not always, collides with the interests of the national order and contributes to what Salemink (2009) calls the 'cosmopolitisation' of the refugees. Cosmopolitisation here means a greater awareness of the world and participation in the public sphere, but does not necessarily translate in de-ethnicisation. While the state puts severe constraints on the movement of the refugees in the borderland by confining them to this area, Christian missionaries present themselves as saviours as they provide crucial access to humanitarian aid, social services, transnational networks and global ideologies that are closely associated with modernity and education. Unlike many other forgotten ethnic minority groups, the Karen have succeeded in reaching substantial public awareness and solidarity in the West.

The Re-Entry of Christian Refugees Into Burma

Christian refugees in north-western Thailand establish strategies to make a living, assist friends and relatives in Thailand and Burma and decrease their vulnerability in Thailand, depending on faith-based organisations. Family-splitting strategies are among the means to spread opportunities and incomes. It is very important to realise that all the different spaces in which the refugees make a living are closely intertwined and that the church provides an institutional umbrella for activities of the diaspora in Thailand. For many Christian refugees, it is not enough to care for their own survival, but the educated Karen activists use their institutional resources in Thailand to re-enter Burmese territory and to actively support displaced people in the Karen state. Diaspora groups, Karen human rights organisations and middle-class activists collect a mass of information on human rights violations and supply international organisations and NGOs in Europe and in the USA with these information. These international groups channel resources to the activists on the ground coordinating education and health services to displaced people. One example is the Karen Teacher Working Group, which comprises volunteers from the communities who had to walk three weeks in the jungle to transport school materials and medicine to schools in war-torn eastern Burma. The Karen Baptist Convention also uses institutional resources to assist the refugees at the border and displaced people in

Burmese territory. Thus, pastors and evangelists who have an intimate knowledge of the area re-enter Burma by foot to distribute the Bible, spread the word, and to assist in church services. The Back Pack Health Workers literally walk into Burma and provide emergency relief, in addition to many other secular and faith-based initiatives and grassroots efforts. The Karenni Social and Welfare Centre collaborates with the TBBC and the Burma Relief Centre to provide emergency relief and training and to document human rights abuses. Another prominent example is the Free Burma Rangers. The FBR was founded by a former US army special envoy who started the operation to provide emergency relief to displaced people in war zones. FBR is a non-armed humanitarian group that prepares nurses to walk into war zones protected by the KNLA or ethnic armies. The volunteers undergo intensive health care training and are able to immediately help people who suffer from illness, starvation and violence. Video cameras and voice recorders are used to document human rights abuses. In the USA, FBR runs a campaign to collect donations and Christmas presents for displaced people in Burma. The FBR is a missionary agent that makes no secret that it operates based on the Bible, but emergency work has been extended to the non-Christian population. In the war zones, the FBR organises a 'Good Life Club' in which the volunteers entertain the children and try to encourage them. The FBR also prays together with the displaced people and provides church service for them. International prayer requests and prayer sessions are organised for Burma. The images that the FBR disseminates in cyberspace provide material for a powerful narrative of the Christian community on the suffering of the Karen and play a central role in mobilising advocacy networks and donations for the work of Karen groups.

Concluding Remarks

In describing the agency of Karen refugee leaders in the Thai-Burmese borderland, I used a concept of borderlands as active spaces that spoke of interconnections as much as of geopolitical boundedness. Rather than seeing borders as fixed zones, it is more productive to see the border as constantly built up and contested through the actions of local agents (Horstmann & Wadley, 2006). In the nightmarish experience of the civil war, the Christian landscape at the Thai-Burmese border uses education as a crucial resource to socialise Karen refugees. Efforts of spreading the gospel in the Thai

borderland and in the growing diaspora are directly following earlier efforts of Christianisation in Burma from which the Karen emerged as keen evangelists who brought the word to other ethnic minorities. The cognitive model and map of Kawthoolei was imposed on the Karen and ignores their internal diversity. In the refugee camp, it is the image of the common 'enemy' and the narrative of suffering that have been exhausted by the Karen. In a hostile environment, and harassed by the state, unable to return home to Burma, the Baptist church provides a key location for mobilising the resources for a better life, solidarity with other refugees and a vision. Far from being passive recipients of humanitarian aid, refugees make careers in the church and emphasise their aspirations by actively participating in evangelical efforts. While the future of Kawthoolei remains locked, Christian Baptist missionaries see new opportunities for spreading the faith. Religious networks have established a presence and remain active on both sides of the border and organise many of the people who become internally displaced, migrants, and refugees. In that sense, the border has indeed moved much closer to the sanctuaries in Thailand and has made returning to Burma ever more difficult for KNU-related activists. The vision of Kawthoolei is an imaginary construction of territorialisation and I argue re-tribalisation in which the suffering and the humanitarian aid provide necessary tools for the reinvention of the Karen as chosen people who make references to a shared history and a shared memory to justify their claims to a country of their own.

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Gendering Cross-Border Networks in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Drawing Invisible Routes to Thailand

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This article discusses human trafficking within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) in relation to the strengthened inter-state economic and infrastructural co-operation and connectivity, taking the life history of sex workers in Thailand into account. Over the last decades, Thailand became known as a hub of entertainment sectors. Traffickers often use socio-economic integration in the GMS to their advantage. A large number of trafficked women ends up in the Thai entertainment industry doing sex work in confined conditions similar to slavery. Poor women are often lured by false promises of well-paid jobs abroad and pay exorbitant fees to agents for such an opportunity. Intermediaries introduce family members to agents who promise to make arrangements for the relevant documentation and transportation across borders. Traffickers use their own marked routes to transport their prey which are more invisible than generally could be imagined.

Keywords: *Trafficking; Borders; Geopolitics; Greater Mekong Subregion; Thailand*

Der vorliegende Beitrag betrachtet den Menschenhandel in der Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) unter Berücksichtigung der Stärkung zwischenstaatlicher wirtschaftlicher und infrastruktureller Kooperation und Vernetzung. Dabei nimmt er Lebensgeschichten Prostituierter in Thailand genauer unter die Lupe. Im Laufe der Jahre wurde Thailand als Drehscheibe des Unterhaltungssektors berühmt. Es ist jedoch weitgehend unbekannt, dass eine Großzahl der Opfer des Menschenhandels in der Sexarbeit und in der Sklaverei ähnlichen Arbeitsverhältnissen landet. Menschenhändler nützen die sozioökonomische Integration in der GMS zu ihrem Vorteil. Diese Studie zeigt, dass von Armut betroffene Frauen in der Regel durch falsche Versprechungen gut bezahlter Arbeitsplätze ins Ausland gelockt werden und für solche Gelegenheiten exorbitante Gebühren an ihre Agenten bezahlen. Vermittler bringen Familienmitglieder und Agenten zusammen, welche die entsprechenden Unterlagen vorbereiten um den Transport über den Grenzübertritt möglich zu machen. Menschenhändler nutzen eigene markierte Routen, um ihre Beute zu transportieren – Wege die unsichtbarer sind, als man sich allgemein vorstellt.

Schlagworte: *Menschenhandel; Grenzen; Geopolitik; Greater Mekong Subregion; Thailand*

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Background

The past decades have witnessed a rapid economic growth in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) brought about largely by trade and tourism. Geopolitical changes in the region's borderlands and border economy have resulted in efforts to strengthen formal inter-state economic and infrastructural connectivity.[3] This rapid growth, however, has led to a massive socioeconomic disparity within the region and created conditions conducive to population mobility within and beyond the region's borders. Today, trafficking in women is one of the most significant offshoots. The general trend of trafficking in women in the region is from Myanmar, the Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam into Thailand (Lao People's Democratic Republic, 1997).

Since many of the trafficked women and children end up in the sex industry (Jayagupta, 2009) there is a correlation between the thriving sex industry in Thailand and the phenomenon of trafficking. The sex industry in Thailand became known when American troops used Thailand as a hub for recreation from the war in Vietnam (Pollock, 2007). Since then, the movement of people and goods has been vastly facilitated by unprecedented advancement in communications and transportation. However, despite positive impacts of communication advancement, trafficking of human beings is often considered to be the result of such contemporary globalisation. Differing understandings of human trafficking have a profound impact on the way both perpetrators and victims are viewed and treated. Therefore, it is crucial to differentiate between smuggling (as related to illegal immigration) and trafficking, in order to better distinguish between victims and willing participants. Though the origins of the trafficking debate date back to the end of the nineteenth century (Derks, 2000), there was no internationally accepted definition of trafficking until the signing of the December 2001 'United Nations' Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons' (Bajrektarevic, 2000; Ullah, 2005a). Trafficking of human beings, internationally agreed upon as a criminal offence, is a serious human rights violation (Department of Justice Canada, 2008).

South-East Asia acts as an important hub in many global trafficking networks, particularly for the purpose of sexual exploitation (Bateman, Ho, & Chan, 2009;

3 Thailand shares about 1,810 km of borders with the Lao PDR, about 800 km with Cambodia, 1,800 km with Myanmar, and 503 km with Malaysia.

ECPAT & Sallie, 2010; Larsen, 2010; Piper 2005). South-East Asia is thus notoriously known as a transit region, significant source, and origin of trafficked people. As part of the migration continuum, many trafficked people consent to the initial movement. Some of them realise only at the last leg that they have been deceived and are being exploited (Larsen, 2010). Human trafficking has been linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS in South-East Asia and operates by exploiting the weaknesses of many poor, homeless, and displaced individuals by promising them a better life. A victim is therefore a person who is subjected to exploitation of a kind that goes beyond what other illegal migrants might experience. A key point is that exploitation is part of the process of trafficking (UNODC, 2003). Most individuals are trafficked as migrant workers, domestic slaves, sex workers and sweatshop workers.

In general, victims are moved across international borders. However, domestic trafficking is less likely to be detected due to definitions of trafficking more restrictive than for international trafficking. Most reported cross-border trafficking activity is between countries of the same region, particularly between neighbouring countries. However, global trafficking is also widespread: According to the UNODC (2009), victims from East Asia were "detected in more than 20 countries throughout the world, including Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa" (UNODC, 2009, p.11).

The typologies of trafficking coined by World Vision (2010) should be considered at this point in order to better frame this discussion. World Vision has distinctively divided trafficking into eight categories: labour trafficking; bonded labour; involuntary servitude; involuntary domestic servitude; forced child labour; sex trafficking and prostitution; child soldiers; and child sex tourism (World Vision, 2010).[4] However, not a lot of research takes the severity of the vulnerability of victims along these catego-

4 "Labour Trafficking is defined as forced labour which does not always involve an economic component. Most instances of forced labour occur as unscrupulous employers take advantage of gaps in law enforcement and legal frameworks to exploit vulnerable workers. Bonded Labour as a form of force or coercion is the use of a bond, or debt, to keep a person under subjugation. In the situation of Involuntary Servitude people become trapped in involuntary servitude when they believe an attempted escape from their situation would result in serious physical harm to themselves or others, or when they are kept in a condition of servitude through the abuse or threatened abuse of the legal processes. In the case of Involuntary Domestic Servitude, domestic workers may be trapped in servitude through the use of force or coercion, such as physical (including sexual) or emotional abuse. Forced Child Labour is defined as the sale and trafficking of children and their entrapment in bonded and forced labour are clearly the worst forms of child labour. Child Soldier is defined as the use of children as soldiers involves the recruitment or abduction of children, through force, fraud, or coercion, in order to exploit them as fighters, labourers, or sex slaves in conflict areas. Sex Trafficking and Prostitution involves the harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. Sex trafficking would not exist without the demand for commercial sex that is flourishing around the world. Child Sex Tourism involves people who travel from their own country to another for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts with children" (World Vision, 2010).

ries to be exploited into account.

Three significant instruments were formed between 1999 and 2000 in order to address this evolving issue. The 'International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention No.182' is one of them, and concerns the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (Dottridge, 2008). The 'Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child' on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was adopted in 2000 and came into force in January 2002. The most significant one is the 'UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the UN Trafficking Protocol), supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime'.[5]

Despite the existence of legislation, protocols, and international pressure, it has obviously become challenging for all the countries (party to the Protocols) to combat human trafficking. However, the financial incentives associated with trafficking make it a difficult activity to diminish, if not eradicate. It has been argued that 200,000 to 225,000 women and children from South-East Asia are trafficked annually (Derks, 2000; US State Department, 2011), the region making up one-third of the total amount of global trafficking in women and children, with South Asia having the second largest number of internationally trafficked persons (Derks, 2000; Htay, 1998; Ullah, 2005b). Cambodia, Yunan Province of China, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, which make up the GMS, are all recognised as major trafficking areas within South-East Asia. In addition, a large number of women who have fled from the regime in Myanmar to Thailand have fallen into the hands of traffickers (Derks, 2000). Human trafficking within and from South-East Asia is likely to remain substantial in the coming years in view of the region's recent slow economic recovery from the Global Economic Crisis, and its weak and porous inter-state borders (UNODC, 2008).

Supang (2003) argues that human trafficking from South-East Asia started in the 1960s during the presence of the United States in Indochina, and that clients of the sex trade at that time were American soldiers who used Thailand as a relaxation point, with some also seeking temporary partners. Even after the withdrawal of

5 "Article 3 of the UN *Trafficking Protocol* contains a definition of human trafficking which applies to cases of both transnational and internal trafficking (although the Protocol supplements a convention about transnational crimes). The definition is different for adults and children (whom the Protocol specifies as anyone less than 18 years of age, whatever the age of adulthood specified by national law). It addresses a range of forms of exploitation (for which people are said to be trafficked), including "the exploitation of the prostitution of others" and "other forms of sexual exploitation" (United Nations, 2000).

the US forces from Indochina in 1975, some women remained in the trade, i.e. some women entered the trade willingly, while others were deceived into believing they would simply have work and/or opportunities abroad. However, they ended up in the sex trade (Supang, 2003; William, 1999).

Thus, over the years, Thailand has become a prominent hub in the conglomeration of entertainment sectors. However, the fact that a large number of trafficked victims end up in sex work in confined conditions similar to slavery is largely unknown. Indeed, Thailand is one of the major source, transit, and destination countries for trafficking in women and children (Piper, 2005). With the increasing economic integration of the GMS since its formation in 1992 as a development project by the Asian Development Bank, the clandestine nature of human mobility has been on the rise across porous and increasingly loosely managed inter-state borders. In some countries, for example Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand, economic growth has brought about greater socio-economic disparities and job competition, leading to an increase in black market economic activities such as trafficking. Piper (2005) argued that trafficking has even gone hand in hand with the economic strengthening and development policies of some countries in South-East Asia. Evidently, it is about demand and supply.

The population of Myanmar has been facing severe social, political, and economic hardships. Many Myanmarese resort to Thailand for survival. Thousands have been escaping to Thailand from the repression against ethnic nationalities by the tyranny. Generally, potential migrants resort to brokers to get to Thailand in order to facilitate navigating the numerous checkpoints and landmines between their home and the border. This is one of the principal ways by which they become vulnerable to trafficking (Pollock, 2007). Also, as the dynamics of the connectivity and human mobility in the region change, traffickers have successfully explored fresh avenues of trafficking in humans, across as well as within the borders of countries in the GMS.

Borders have significant impacts on the economy, culture, and environment of any borderland. However, the majority of the extensive scholarship on the relations between Thailand and the other GMS states considers the impact of the boundary on the borderlands far less than the topic deserves. Although research projects, published scholarly papers, and reports on the dynamics of trafficking in humans in the region are available, there is a lack of systematic research and reliable data. This

is largely due to the clandestine nature of trafficking (Jayagupta, 2009). While the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) produces a lot of important research based on empirical information, the estimates always remain anecdotal. I refer to one study of UNIAP saying that "the actual figure of trafficking incidence is believed to be somewhat larger than the number stated" (UNIAP, 2011, p.6 & p.19).

What is not sufficiently known is by what kinds of promises and premises the victims are motivated to set off, what trans-border networks they take to get to destinations, how long it takes to get there, what hardships they suffer en route, and where a sizeable number of trafficked victims ends up. This paper attempts to answer these questions based on empirical information and conceptual supplementation. The primary purpose of our research has been to better understand the routes taken by the respondents to get to Thailand. The fundamental argument the paper puts forward is that economic and social integration within the region has proliferated and intensified the web of regional networks of trafficking.

All of these factors are of crucial importance for the economic integration and transportation connectivity in the region. One of the sufferings pertaining to trafficking was enlightened by the study of Lisborg and Sine (2009), in which they assert that in debt bondage many of the victims eventually resigned themselves to the situation when they fail to escape. Exorbitant amounts of money, often surreptitious at the initial stage, and artificial debts "well beyond the actual costs of travel and seldom known or agreed to by the woman" (Lisborg & Sine, 2009, p.15) were a significant method of control. Lisborg and Sine argue that even when migrants enter prostitution consensually, it becomes sexual exploitation when a woman is forced to accept unreasonable debt. They obviously experience "physical, psychological or sexual abuse or some other form of labour abuse, including confinement with threats, coercion or force" (Lisborg & Sine, 2009, p.24 & p.33). According to one of UNODC's (2009) studies in 52 countries on the form of exploitation, 79 percent of the victims were subjected to sexual exploitation. "While it remains likely that labour exploitation and male victims are relatively under-detected, the over-representation of sexually exploited women is true across regions, even in countries where other forms of trafficking are routinely detected" (UNODC, 2009, p.3).

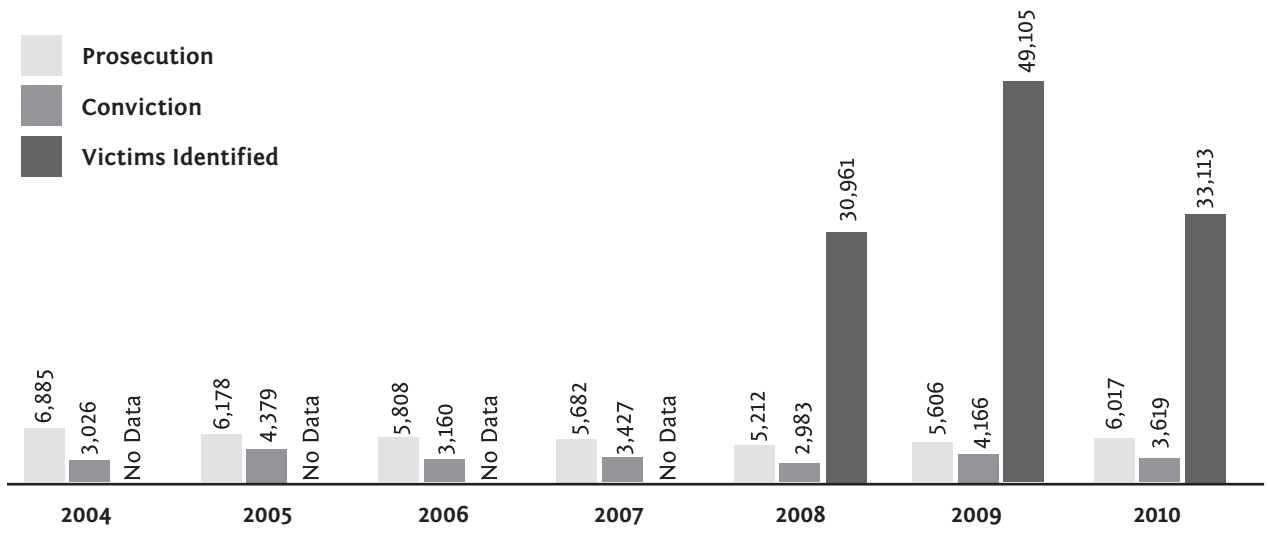
Clearly, the paucity of data on trafficking is largely attributed to the clandestine

nature of this phenomenon. Laczko and June (2003) claim, however, that the police cannot be relied upon to deliver even the trafficking data needed to help fight trafficking. Law enforcement agencies tend to give a low priority to combating trafficking due to inadequate or unimplemented legislation (Laczko & June, 2003, pp.4-5). However, human trafficking is becoming a political priority. In September 2002, the European Union (EU) conference on 'Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings' resulted in the Brussels Declaration, drawing policy recommendations to the EU on trafficking. The United States made trafficking a prioritised political agenda.

Various institutions and groups have made efforts on multiple fronts to combat the human trafficking problem. Legislators, law enforcement, prosecutors, immigrant advocacy organizations, legal advocates, faith-based organizations, victim advocates, and social service providers have responded with a range of prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies to address the crime. (Clawson, Dutch, & Cummings, 2006, p.3)

The 'Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorisation Act' (TVPRA) of 2003 requires that foreign governments provide the US Department of State with data on trafficking investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and sentences. This Act provides the foreign governments with the opportunity to be considered in full compliance for

Figure 1: Global Law Enforcement Data



Source: US State Department (2011, pp. 38-39)

Tier placement[6] with the TVPA's minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking (US TIP Report, 2011). Figure 1 shows the global data on prosecution, conviction and victims identified.

Methodology

A well-designed checklist was used to conduct in-depth interviews prior to which a field-testing was conducted. The selection of respondents was based on their meeting some of the following requirements: a stay in Thailand of at least one year; nationals of ASEAN countries; having resorted to and/or been trapped by traffickers or agents to get to their destinations. The selection of interview spots rested on the decision of *Tuktuk* drivers. For example, we were approached by such a driver in Bangkok's Sukhumvit Road to get us to a so-called 'massage parlour'. We then sought his assistance in doing our research. We explained the purpose of the research, and he comfortably agreed to help us out. We selected him for his good conversational skills in English and Lao, and because Thai was his mother tongue. We recruited four experienced research assistants (from Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Indonesia) for conducting interviews with the respondents from each respective country. They were selected at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Thailand. The researchers had a conversational level of command in Thai. They conducted interviews of the Thai and Laotian respondents, again with the help of the Tuktuk drivers. Deliberately excluded were those who were not from the ASEAN region, stayed less than a year, and/or came on their own to their destination.

Table 1: Sample Distribution

Countries of Origin	*f*	%
Cambodia	29	31
Lao PDR	24	25
Myanmar	19	20
Vietnam	15	17
Indonesia	7	7
Total	**94**	**100**

Source: Authors' Field Data

As Table 1 shows, the study is based on primary information collected through a survey of

6 "US Department of State places each country in the 2011 TIP Report onto one of three tiers, as mandated by the TVPA. This placement is based more on the extent of government action to combat trafficking than on the size of the problem. The extent of governments' efforts to reach compliance with the TVPA's minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking determines which Tier the respective country would be placed. While Tier 1 is the highest ranking, it does not mean that a country has no human trafficking problem. Rather, a Tier 1 ranking indicates that a government has acknowledged the existence of human trafficking, has made efforts to address the problem, and meets the TVPA's minimum standards. Each year, governments need to demonstrate appreciable progress in combating trafficking to maintain a Tier 1 ranking" (US TIP Report, 2011, pp. 404-405).

94 female respondents living in Thailand. The Tuktuk driver hired for initiating the interviews claimed to be familiar with a number of places in Bangkok (Pahurat, Silom, Sukumvit, Mo Chit, and Lumphini), where trafficked victims operate in confined and restrictive conditions. We were estimating to meet more than 150 potential respondents during the six month-period of research. However, we ended up with interviewing only 94. Many more were interested in sharing their experiences, but we had to exclude them, as they did not satisfy the set out criteria.

Generally, multiple visits were required as respondents were not able to spare long stretches of time required for the interview. Some respondents requested to be revisited as they wanted to say something in absence of their 'madam' or 'pimp', under whose control they operate. For some cases, we attempted to revisit the respondents who made such a request and whom we thought had a wealth of information to impart. However, in only two cases we were successful in gaining access again. Other prostitutes were either busy with their clients or overseen by their madam or pimp. However, the second visits were, in fact, requested, as it was later revealed, to share their woes, and they wanted to know if there were ways they could out of their current predicaments, which were remotely linked to the research objectives. In some cases, the madam/pimp offered us access to talk to the respondents when they were assured that the information to be provided would be used only for research purposes. Some of them agreed on conditions that we pay for the time we took talking to them. We would term this condition as normal however, in some cases we experienced verbal harassment and were simply turned down on the gate when we explained our purpose.

In order to analyse the data, qualitative techniques were used and some descriptive statistics were applied to show the magnitude of the phenomenon. As for the major challenges in the research, respondents in many cases were not able to recollect the names of the specific spots/points where they were handed over to another group of traffickers, and the routes they took; some of them also failed to recall how long it took for them to get to Thailand. Since this research involved human subjects, ethical approval was obtained. It was made sure that the consent of the respondents was given voluntarily. They were given the assurance before the consent was given that they could withdraw from the interview anytime. Their psychological issues were taken care of.

Findings

Thailand, located in a strategic position in South-East Asia, has long been attracting tourists and entertainers. The entertainment industry has given new height to the reputation of Thailand among world tourists. However, what is generally known about Thailand entertainers is different from the picture this study has revealed. Women are lured abroad by false promises of well-paid jobs as dancers, waitresses, and domestic workers and have to pay a fee to an 'agent' for these opportunities. Generally, provincial intermediaries introduce members of families to agents who promise to arrange the relevant documentation and transportation across borders (for more see Ullah, 2009). Traffickers specifically target individuals who are vulnerable women because they are often easiest to recruit and control and are least likely to be protected by law enforcement. Most of the respondents were lured out of their localities by traffickers with the help of local illicit agents.

The findings of this study resonate with the findings of many other research projects (Saboreidin, 1993; Lin, 1998; Kabeer, 2003). Most of the women and girls caught in trafficking and forced prostitution in Thailand are caught in debt bondage. Debt bondage makes the trafficked person dependent on their traffickers, since victims often need to pay back the debt, which consequently make some women and girls susceptible to being forced into prostitution (Jayagupta, 2009). Once out of their home country, agents confiscate their documents and they are then sold or taken, by prior arrangement, to brothel owners who force them to work as sex workers. In order to recover their documents they are obliged to pay the 'debt' incurred for their procurement, transportation, food, and housing. Most women are hard pressed to pay for their freedom, whilst some find themselves resold.

As mentioned before, the study subjects differ from generally perceived sex workers in Thailand as they do not have choice or freedom and they operate clandestinely under the strict vigilance of their leaders/pimps. They are stripped of their agency and as a result they cannot protest, refuse demands or disobey. Thailand's Immigration Act is often used not to keep returnees from entering Thailand, but to ensure compliance and obedience once they are there. This is particularly true in the case of women and girls trafficked into prostitution, who enter Thailand under the knowledge of border guards and police (Hayes, 1999; Reddi, 2003).

Any kind of integration helps build trust among neighbouring nations making human mobility trouble-free.[7] Today in the GMS, socio-economic integration and connectivity, in its myriad forms, have become synonymous. Illicit traffickers often use this integration to their advantage. This study demonstrates that poor women are generally lured by false promises of well-paid jobs abroad, and pay exorbitant fees to agents for such opportunities (Ullah, 2009). It demonstrates that the majority of the respondents (68 percent) were promised better jobs either in Thailand; or in East Asian countries (South Korea, Hong Kong or Taiwan) or Europe (29 percent). Most of the respondents (62 percent) were caught in trafficking, forced prostitution, and debt-bondage. Most of them had their documents confiscated by their agents or taken away by owners who forced them to engage in sex work. Their position was made vulnerable to ensure that they remain at the mercy of their employers.

Cross-Border Networks and Trafficking Routes

The migration route is a significant part of the migration process. A great part of migrants' journeys from their home countries to their points of departure for their destinations is inevitably facilitated with the help of networks (Ullah, 2009). However, trafficked-victims' routes are generally not the same as those of other migrants. Thailand's prosperity attracts migrants from neighbouring countries who flee conditions of poverty in the Lao PDR, Indonesia, and Cambodia and in some circumstances military repression such as in Myanmar. Significant illegal migration to Thailand presents traffickers with opportunities to force, coerce, and/or defraud undocumented migrants into involuntary servitude and/or sexual exploitation. Women and children are trafficked from Myanmar, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, Russia, and Uzbekistan for commercial sexual exploitation in Thailand (Ullah, 2009). A large proportion of these individuals, especially from Indonesia, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Vietnam, are trafficked through Thailand's southern border - sometimes through third countries like Malaysia (especially through Johor Bahru) - into Thailand for the purpose of sexual exploitation. One study by Ullah (2009) discovered a number of routes trafficked victims travelled to get to

7 As is true today within the ASEAN and European Union and to some extent in the SAARC.

Kota Bahru, Malaysia, through which they can easily get to Thailand. While many women and children are trafficked into exploitative circumstances, there are also men who go abroad and suffer a similar destiny, which, however, is not considered to be trafficking (IOM, 2004:13).[8] Ethnic minorities who have not received legal residency or citizenship are especially at risk for being trafficked both internally and abroad (Ullah, 2009). Children from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia are trafficked into forced begging and exploitative labour in Thailand. Four key sectors of the Thai economy, fishing, construction, commercial agriculture, and domestic work, rely heavily on undocumented migrants from Myanmar, including children, as cheap and exploitable labourers (IOM, 1998).

This study has mapped out nine routes the respondents travelled to get to their destinations: Cambodia-through Jungle- through Sea- Thailand; Cambodia-through Thai border- Thailand; Indonesia- through Malaysia- through Jungle- through Sea-Thailand; Indonesia-Sea-Singapore- through mountainous Jungle-Malaysia-Thailand; Myanmar-through Lao PDR-through Sea-Thailand; Myanmar—through Thai Border-Thailand; Lao PDR-through Thai border-Thailand; Lao PDR-through Sea-through mountains- Thailand; and Vietnam-through Lao PDR- through Sea-Thailand. The routes identified by the study demonstrate that the respondents did not have any direct routes to take to their destinations. In addition, the treacherous and difficult nature of the routes provide evidence that supports the impossibility of denying the fact that trafficked victims suffer countless hardships on the routes through which they are forcedly transported. At new transit points, the victims were handed over to new groups of traffickers. Of the most dangerous routes, as high as 9 percent of the total respondents (n=94) were trafficked through them from Myanmar; 23 percent from Cambodia, 6 percent from Indonesia and 16 percent from Vietnam (Table 2). Across source countries, the forms of routes vary.[9]

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8 "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." The definition of trafficking in human beings, included in the 2000 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime) illustrates the process character of the phenomenon. This process is a continuum of events taking place in many locations, involving internationally linked criminal operators contributing their "services" (recruitment, transport, accommodation, document forgery, pimping, intimidation etc.) in various stages (United Nations, 2000).

9 Two main overland routes are currently used most often; they are Keng Tung-Tachilek-Mae Sai Chiang Mai route and a route connecting Myawaddy and the Thai border town of Mae Sot, six miles across the Moei border river. The main border outposts along the Thai side of the border are Mae Sai, Mae Hong Son and Mae Sariang in Chiang Rai Province, Mae Sot in Tak Province, and Kra Buri and Ranong in the southern tip of Thailand (Derks, 2000; Bajrektarevic, 2000).

Table 2. Routes Travelled (Multiple Response)

Routes	*f*	%
Cambodia ‹ Jungle / Sea › **Thailand***	22	23
Cambodia ‹ Thai Border › **Thailand**	7	7
Indonesia ‹ Malaysia / Jungle / Sea › **Thailand***	5	4
Indonesia ‹ Sea / Singapore / Mountainous Jungle / Malaysia › **Thailand***	2	2
Myanmar ‹ Lao PDR / Sea › **Thailand***	11	12
Myanmar ‹ Thai Border › **Thailand**	8	9
Lao PDR ‹ Thai Border › **Thailand**	9	9
Lao PDR ‹ Sea / Mountains › **Thailand***	15	16
Vietnam ‹ Lao PDR / Sea › **Thailand***	15	16

***** Refers to most dangerous routes. We consider those routes dangerous by taking some variables into account such as: time taken to get to destination; abuse en route; how smooth was the journey in terms of food supply, obstacles by law enforcing agencies, border guards etc. Respondents often mentioned that it took 10 days to one month to get to the destinations. They were forced to take deep jungles and mountain to avoid the gaze of law enforcing agencies at the dead of night. They reported being bitten by big leeches; had either major or minor wounds by running into trees or stumbling on their way at night. Many others suffered dehydration and some suffered fever and jaundice. The majority reported weaknesses due to lack of sufficient food and due to mental stress, fear and uncertainty (Ullah, 2009).

Source: Authors' Survey

Of the total, 63 percent reported being sexually abused on their routes; 29 percent reported being verbally abused, 57 percent reported being served meagre food; and 36 percent reported receiving threats from the traffickers. The respondents were also handed over to many groups of people at different points. Of the total respondents, 32 percent reported to have been handed over to at least two groups of people who they had never met before at two different points; and 43 percent reported that they had been handed over to other groups at three to four points in the dead of the night.

The data show that 12 percent of the respondents from Cambodia, 58 percent from the Lao PDR, 41 percent from Myanmar and 12 percent from Indonesia reported to have taken one to five days to get to their destinations; and that 67 percent Cambodians, 21 percent Laotians, 29 percent Myanmarese and 12 percent Indonesians took five to 10 days to get to their destinations. Of the total respondents, 23 percent spent more than 20 days to get to their destinations.[10] Obviously, they did not take the

10 Whilst on the Burmese side of the border there have been areas where official state functionaries have not dared to set foot, on the Thai side any movements across the border are quickly picked up by the Thai police.

time normally expected. Here, normal expectation is explained by two factors: first, the promise given to them about the time to be spent on the way by the traffickers and second is the optimal time required in a normal case. Most of the respondents were told it would take one to three days, at best. The ordeals they had on the way were in no way projected and expected. The complex routes speak well as to why the respondents took so long to get their destinations.

Conclusions and policy implications

Border crossing by illicit traffickers is not a new phenomenon. No region in the world goes without experiencing trafficking. Interestingly, while European nations saw a declining trend in the inter-state trafficking of humans, despite the strengthening of economic relations, a reverse picture appears in the SEA region regardless of a similar regional economic relationship. Therefore, it is arguable that borderland geopolitics has tended to work in favour of traffickers. In human trafficking the exploiter takes the form of a recruiter who is generally the person who makes initial contact with the victim and makes the promise of a better life. The victims are highly vulnerable due to a combination of factors, including lack of legal status and protections, limited language skills, poverty and migration-related debts, and social isolation. Traffickers are often from a similar ethnic or national background as the individuals they victimise. The victims are then frequently dependent on the traffickers for employment and/or financial support in the foreign country of destination. Pimps and sex traffickers target young children, as they are skilled at manipulating the children and maintaining control, and can often gain their loyalty through a combination of affection and violence.

Traffickers use their own marked routes to transport their prey, which are often more invisible than generally imagined. The economic, environmental and cultural geography of borderlands are all greatly influenced by their proximity to the boundary (Prescot, 1987). The most important finding of the study is that when all the source countries (in the study) share borders with Thailand, the respondents spent seven days to get to Thailand on average, and obviously en route they were exposed to various forms of abuse. Widespread complaints from the respondents were directed against the border guards and police who allowed traffickers to continue their

trade. Indeed, the trafficking of women and girls into Thailand was done with the knowledge and complicity of border guards and police. The phenomenon of borderlands next to open international borders deserves further attention by geographers.

This study has crucial policy implications regionally as well as globally. However, it is evident from the limited academic literature that it is time to undertake more research initiatives to explore the impact of such invisible routes on neighbouring economies, border relations, and human rights. Trafficked victims need to be acknowledged and entitled to protection, assistance and redress in their own right, regardless of their willingness or capacity to press charges and/or give testimony against their traffickers. It is still very difficult to prosecute those who are responsible for the trafficking of persons due to the clandestineness and networking that occurs whilst people are moved from one place to another.

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Aktuelle Südostasienforschung / Current Research on South-East Asia

The Jungle as Border Zone: The Aesthetics of Nature in the Work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul

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In Thai cinema, nature is often depicted as an opposition to the urban sphere, forming a contrast in ethical terms. This dualism is a recurring and central theme in Thai representations and an important carrier of Thainess (khwam pen Thai). The filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul offers a new take on this theme. Significant parts of his work are set in the jungle, a realm radically different from the agricultural sphere that the mainstay of Thai representations tends to focus on. In Apichatpong's work, the wilderness becomes a liminal space, on multiple levels. This paper focuses on how this liminality translates into Apichatpong's aesthetics of the jungle and on how this aesthetics and the films' narrations negotiate Thai nationhood via the perception of the spectators.

Keywords: *Film Studies; Thai Cinema; Identity Politics; Cultural Studies; Thailand*

Im thailändischen Film wird Natur oft im Kontrast zu Urbanität gezeichnet. Dieser Gegensatz wird dabei auch auf eine moralische Ebene übertragen. Er ist ein wiederkehrendes, zentrales Motiv in thailändischen Repräsentationen und ein wichtiger Träger der sogenannten „Thainess" (khwam pen Thai), der nationalen Identität. Der Filmemacher Apichatpong Weerasethakul nähert sich diesem Motiv anders an. Zentrale Passagen seines Werks spielen im Dschungel, der einen gänzlich anderen Bereich darstellt als die domestizierte Natur der üblichen Landschaftsdarstellungen. Im Werk Apichatpongs wird der Dschungel auf mehreren Ebenen zu einem Grenzbereich. Dieser Artikel untersucht, wie sich dieser Grenzstatus in Apichatpongs Ästhetik widerspiegelt und wie diese filmische Ästhetik und Narration das thailändische Konzept des Nationalstaates kommentieren.

Schlagworte: *Filmwissenschaft; Kino; Identität; Kulturwissenschaften; Thailand*

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Introduction

In an article on the Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul's film *Tropical Malady*, film critic Graiwoot Chulphongsathorn wrote about his impressions after the film's premiere:

> *After the credits ended, I wanted to embrace the film and slowly melt into it. Momentarily, I did not exist and felt no different from the wind in the middle of the jungle at night. Every time I close my eyes, the images of the jungle still haunt me (Graiwoot, 2006).*

It is characteristic for Apichatpong's work that this vivid, sensory experience described as dissolving into the film takes place during a scene set in the jungle. Landscapes and nature play a pivotal role in his films, especially the jungles and forests of Isarn, the North-East of Thailand. This border region has long had a status of marginality and otherness in relation to central Thailand, the seat of the capital, the nation's centre of power and the region that defines the official version of national identity.

Among the various figurations employed to establish and reinforce this sense of state-proposed national identity and locality, nature is an important, recurrent trope. In state-approved, conservative mainstream representations, nature is typically depicted as domesticated or as exotic. The jungle, on the other hand, stands opposed to this mode of representation. As Arjun Appadurai has pointed out, localities, in the sense of relational, contextual communities, are made up of neighbourhoods as social forms. These are often defined in opposition to their other:

> *The production of neighbourhoods is always historically grounded and thus contextual. That is, neighbourhoods are inherently what they are because they are opposed to something else and derive from other, already produced neighbourhoods. In the practical consciousness of many human communities, this something else is often conceptualised ecologically as forest or wasteland, ocean or desert, swamp or river. Such ecological signs often mark boundaries that simultaneously signal the beginnings of non-human forces and categories or recognizably human but barbarian or demonic forces. Frequently, these contexts, against which neighbourhoods are produced and figured, are at once seen as ecological, social and cosmological terrain (Appadurai, 1996, p. 183).*

In this sense, the North-Eastern jungles in Apichatpong's films form a cultural and political other to the centralised state power and the nation. Their liminality is aestheticised and narrated in a way that offers an experience of liminality to the viewer, positioning him or her in a decentred way, producing an alternative point of view to

the official one conforming to central Thai state authorities.

This paper explores the ways that Apichatpong's films as aesthetic and narrative systems create a liminal experience for the viewer. It starts out by sketching a background of more current, compliant modes of landscape and nature depictions found in Thai mainstream cinema, that contrast with Apichatpong's idiosyncratic depiction of the jungle, continuing to examine the cinematography and framing, the plot structures as well as the depiction of the supernatural. The main focus is on the feature films *Tropical Malady* (*Sud Pralat!*, 2004), *Blissfully Yours* (*Sud Saneha*, 2002) and *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (*Loong Boonmee Raluek Chat*, 2010). My interest lies in the way this liminal positioning of the viewer reflects and comments on various figurations of the border zone: the mindscapes of the characters, the aesthetic design and its sensory implications, and the region of Isarn. I conclude by asking about the implications of the spectator's positioning as enabling transgression of official nationhood and citizenship and as creating an alternative locality and identity.

Idealised, Domesticated, and Exotic: Nature in Thai Mainstream Cinema

The idiosyncrasies of Apichatpong's depictions of nature become more evident when seen in the context of Thai mainstream nature representations. As a starting point, I shall therefore sketch out two modes of prevailing landscape representations to provide a backdrop to the following discussion.

The aestheticised depiction and description of nature is a recurrent figure in various Thai intellectual and artistic traditions. A frequently employed motif is that of country life and the agricultural, often depicted as rustic paradise or utopia. The bucolic abundance and purity of nature are opposed to the sphere of the metropolis. As Thai scholar May Ingawanij explains in her study on this topic, the Bangkok-rural divide is

> *a fundamental contrasting trope in Thai intellectual, literary, and artistic traditions . . . . In modern Thai cinema, this contrast has above all been articulated in ethical terms: through devices such as characterization and mise-en-scene, the ideal of inherent rural goodness, morality and beauty is configured as a limited form of ethical critique of the metropolis (May, 2006, p. 81).*

In the moral dichotomy formed by country life and the urban sphere, the city is typi-

cally equalled with materialism, capitalism, human coldness, Westernised modernity, and ecological decay; it is usually a vile and corrupt place lacking basic human values. Country life, on the other hand, is shown as a peaceful, idyllic, holistic way of being, where humans exist in harmony with nature. The rural village is an idealised home, characterised by moral goodness, egalitarian cooperation, and simplicity of life. Nature provides for the humans who clearly position themselves at the centre of this innocent and pure world; the natural is idealised and domesticised.[2]

The appeal of the motif of rural utopia has turned it into a feature employed in various ideological discourses, even by some as opposing as radical left-wing intellectuals and royalist-nationalists (May, 2006, p. 81). It has become an essential cornerstone for the construction of *khwam pen Thai*, the sense of national identity usually translated as Thainess. In its official, state-propagated, conservatively nationalist version, this identity often evokes the mythic rural ideal, used as part of a retro rhetoric to conjure nationhood. In this 'heritage' discourse, also found in modern cinema, the idealisation of country life is linked not only with patriotic love of the land but also with the fantasy of self-sufficiency and autarchy.[3] It nostalgically reimagines a pre-modern past and constructs it as an element of 'authentic' Thainess, as opposed to hybrid cultures of globalised modernities. In this narrative, the imagined ideal Thai village represents the idealised nation state, characterised by unity and traditionalism.

Another mode of nature depictions often employed by modern Thai cinema is the self-exoticisation of landscape. As Yinjing Zhang has observed about so-called world cinema and its position in the global film market, the visual beauty of landscape has become an important selling point of non-Western films to a Western audience (Zhang, 2002, p. 32.). This development goes hand in hand with the commodification of landscape and nature for tourism that has come up since the late 1960s, with the rise of mass tourism and traveller culture. Accordingly, Thai films often revel in the country's natural beauty, presenting iconic images of beaches, palm trees and paddy fields that seem to cater to the gaze of foreign tourists. According to Rachel Harrison, many Western films on Thailand

2 On the imagined ideal Thai village, see Hirsch (2002, p. 262).

3 On the heritage discourse and heritage films, see May (2007).

> *incorporate a . . . set of fantasies in their exploitation of a view of Thailand that has been lodged in the Western imagination and fostered by the Tourism Authority of Thailand's promotion of an "Amazing Thailand": one of exotic landscapes, verdant nature, vibrant colours, serene spirituality, explosive cuisine, balletic martial arts, bucolic peacefulness, total relaxation and sensual pleasures. As Thai cinema of the 21st century seeks increasingly to appeal to international audiences, it is this set of images which it perforce takes as the necessary ingredients for their entertainment (Harrison, 2005, p. 326).*

The self-exoticising representation has been a feature of Thai cinema since the 1970s, when Thai cinema first travelled abroad to European festivals, and is found in the work of directors such as Vichit Kounavudh and Cherd Songsri. Apichatpong describes the impact of the landscape depictions by these directors as follows

The two directors used scenes from the Thai landscape beautifully. Even when they filmed buffalo, they were beautiful. When they filmed the villagers, some fully clothed, some not, you could smell the earth. It was as if I was seeing the beauty of this jungle where I lived for the first time (Apichatpong, 2009, p. 107).

Thus, nature becomes a signifier for Thainess in this representation mode as well, not only for a foreign audience and market but also for a domestic gaze. Although landscape is, in these films, typically shown as savage, primitive and exotic, it is at the same time semi-domesticated, being commodified and made accessible by the tourism industry.

Isarn and the Nation's Borders

Apichatpong's films are set in a geopolitical border zone: Isarn, the North-East of Thailand. The region has a complex history of migration. Before the definite establishment of the border at the beginning of the twentieth century, the borderline was not mapped out and thus more fluid. After the definition of the border in the 1893 treaty between Siam and French Indochina, the region was annexed and became Siamese territory, forming a buffer zone toward the French colonies. Its inhabitants were now newly identified as Siamese, regardless of their ethnic or regional background (Thongchai, 1994, p. 165). Thus, the newly demarcated border created a frontier area with a new identity and a new classification system for its population.

The process of incorporating the region into the nation state continued throughout the twentieth century. In a campaign for 'Thaification' during the 1940s that aimed to homogenise the nation's identity, while omitting the diversification of eth-

nic origins, Isarn's Lao origins were 'deemphasised': the central government forcibly replaced the Lao language and alphabet with Thai. At the same time, the region remained socioeconomically underdeveloped and, being an agricultural area with harsh climate conditions, very poor; the building of infrastructure was neglected, and Isarn people were discriminated against by the population of the central regions.

As Thongchai Winichakul has pointed out, the Thai border is not only a demarcation line between nations but also becomes a symbol of separation between a constructed we-self and otherness, a system of binary oppositions that have at their centre the dichotomy of internal and external (Thongchai, 1994, p. 164 & p. 169). Due to its remoteness and its closeness to the external, the North-East was seen as a critical region in terms of opposition to the centralised power in Bangkok and of resistance in terms of the defence of local identity (Baker & Pasuk, 2009, p. 173). During the Cold War, Isarn was perceived as a breeding ground for communism by the government. It served as a hiding place for members of the Communist Party who fled from state repression to the North-Eastern jungles. In the official discourse propagated by Thai state authorities, communism is situated as belonging to the other, as external, since it is perceived as a major enemy of the state and of Thainess (Thongchai, 1994, p. 169). Regarding communism in Isarn, the 'external' was, in fact, perceived as internal and the region as a potentially dangerous place for the nation's unity. The Border Patrol police and the army oppressed local communities, suspecting them of sympathising with communism

> *[In rural areas,] the term "border", as it turns out, signifies the demarcation of otherness from Thainess, rather than signifying a geographical definition. The discourse on the geobody provides an effective figuration to equate the subversive elements within the Thai society with the external threat. Thus the Border Patrol is the force to safeguard the border of Thainess against the enemy – who are definitely outside such a border, no matter where they really locate. As it happens, this police force can be found operating anywhere from the border areas, among the minorities . . . in a village of Thai peasants well inside Thai territory . . . to an urban centre like Chiangmai. . . . The "external" may not really be external; the "internal" can be made alien or external. In every situation, the discursive domain of Thainess remains homogeneous and unified. In turn, moreover, the terminology of the geographical discourse, terms such as border, becomes ambiguous. It may signify something other than space or geography (Thongchai, 1994, p. 170).*

Until today, Isarn retains the status of backwardness, marginality and potentially renegade. While it is not as disconnected from the perceived unity of the nation as to be considered non-nation, it nonetheless is often perceived as not-quite-nation, as a

region of otherness separated from the official Thainess of Bangkok and the Central region.

Apichatpong's films address the liminality of this region: The rural setting, the distance from the nation's centre, and the cultural otherness are mirrored in various elements of the films such as the importance of local beliefs, the characters' accents, and the departure from official state order. The world of his films is that of small provincial towns with idiosyncratic everyday culture: The style of restaurants, temples, and open-air shows indicate a clear distance from the nation's centre.[4]

The fluidity of the nation's border in this region is present as well in Apichatpong's work. In a scene at the beginning of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, the protagonist Boonmee and his sister discuss the region's language and its Lao roots as well as the fact that it is hard to understand for central Thais. The border issue reappears later in the film when Boonmee visits migrant workers from Laos employed on his farm.

In *Blissfully Yours*, Min, an illegal Burmese immigrant, is a figure of otherness. While he spends peaceful time with Roong, his Thai lover, the border between the nations seems to dissolve.

Of all of Apichatpong's films, perhaps *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* touches on the issue of Isarn marginalisation most directly. It is shot in Nabua, an Isarn village with a history of violence: During the communist persecutions of the 1960s and 1970s, its male population was tortured and murdered by state security forces. This traumatic past is echoed in the film's location, in Boonmee's memories of fighting against communists as well as in the fact that the film was made in the context of a larger project called 'Primitive' that touches on the subjects of remembering and reconstructing the brutal treatment of the Isarn population during this period.

The presence of nature is a pervasive topographical feature of Isarn. Sparsely populated, the region is a rural area spotted with provincial towns and scattered villages. In Apichatpong's films, nature is highly visible – neither as an agricultural landscape nor as the iconic tourist spots that often figure in Thai film but in the form of the jungle.

4 On Apichatpong himself as an Isarn native and a liminal figure in the global film industry, see May & MacDonald (2006).

Splitting Storylines: The Jungle as Sphere of the Other

In Apichatpong's work, the jungle becomes crucial for action and a key element that sets the very tone of the films. It is a radically different world, populated by spirits, mysterious beings, and half-animals. It is the realm of dreams, the non-rational, of secrets and desires. Whoever enters it leaves the safe communal space of the town or home and faces the unknown. While Isarn is a liminal region, the jungle appears as an extension and intensification of this liminality; as the sphere of small towns is still ruled by societal conventions and communality, it is in the jungle that individuality becomes foregrounded.[5] As Apichatpong (2009) explains in an interview, "emotions are revealed by the jungle, it becomes a kind of mindscape. Sometimes it is a character. It is also a stage" (p. 126).

Apichatpong's cinematographic framing depicts landscape as a territory utterly unmarked by civilisation. There are frequent panoramic shots devoid of humans and of any icons of civilisation such as telephone poles, cross-country roads, or distant farmhouses. The countryscape appears as a wild, pre-modern land not yet staked out as anyone's territory. Its unspoiltness is of a much more untamed nature than that of the agricultural rural idyll discussed previously that centres on humans; landscape here is savage, autonomous, and sprawling without a centre.

The narrative structures emphasise the jungle's otherness. In some way or another, the films all feature a shift from a town, a house or a village – a domesticated space – into the wilderness, or vice versa. These shifts structure the films, breaking them into halves and changing their mood. Besides being a change of setting, the shift is also a move into irrationality, into a radically different space where the familiar order of society is no longer valid.

Apichatpong's first fiction feature *Blissfully Yours* sets out in a provincial town, showing Min and Roong, an illegal Burmese immigrant and a young Thai woman, preparing to leave town for a day trip. After various errands and preparations, they drive to a nearby forest where they spend the day wandering about, eating, swimming, and having sex. With this transition, the film shifts in setting, and the mode of togetherness between the protagonists changes. The forest enables their being to-

5 For an in-depth discussion of liminality and the jungle in *Blissfully Yours*, see May & MacDonald (2006).

gether without having to hide Min's illegality; it becomes a space where lovers from two different sides of a highly problematic border – the Thai-Burmese one – can be together without restrictions (May & MacDonald, 2006).

Tropical Malady is evidently split in two parts. The first half of the film focuses on the budding love story between Keng and Tong, two young men living in a provincial town. After more than 50 minutes, this storyline abruptly ends, and a new part begins, clearly marked with a black shot, credits, and a title (*The Spirit's Path*). The film now follows a young forest ranger (who might be Tong) in search of a tiger spirit (who might be Keng) in the jungle. During this search, he gradually assimilates to the jungle, gradually losing his soldier's clothes, his weapon, and his sense of identity. Finally he confronts the tiger spirit: Shaking with fear, he recognises his own self in it and surrenders, or succumbs, to it.

The split is equally remarkable in *Syndromes And A Century* that sets out in a provincial hospital, depicting a series of episodes. After roughly the first half of the film, the mood and tone change suddenly, as does the setting: Another hospital appears, this time technologically up-to-date and with modern decoration. While some of the characters and dialogue echo the first part, the episodes change. The lush verdant exteriors of the first half are substituted by the stark white interiors of the modern hospital. In this sense, *Syndromes And A Century* reverses the shift from civilisation to nature found in the other films.

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives tells the story of a dying elderly man who returns to his farm in the countryside to spend his final days there. After encountering the ghost of his wife, who passed away years ago, and his son, who has turned into a monkey spirit, he wanders into the nocturnal jungle in their company and lies down in a cave where he dies. The shift into nature here marks the beginning of his transition from life to death.

Inner Wildernesses: Obscurity and the Soundscape

The shift from a space of communality and civilisation into the space of nature is a break in the storyline, not merely in terms of geographic relocation; it also marks an inner shift of the protagonists' mental and emotional states. Leaving societal conventions behind and immersing themselves in solitude, the jungle becomes a bor-

der zone where the protagonists access their inner worlds and open themselves to changes. They experience various kinds of existential borderlines: Boonmee meets supernatural beings and confronts death; Min and Roong from *Blissfully Yours* each open up to someone from a foreign country and escape the societal restrictions this relationship faces (May & MacDonald, 2006); in *Tropical Malady*, the ranger follows his obsessions, fears and desires, looking into his own soul.

In these physical and psychic transgressions, the jungle is at once a catalyst and a mirror of inner states. As Apichatpong explains, this idea stands at the very centre of *Tropical Malady*.

> *Everything is a part of the landscape, the jungle. The jungle leads us beyond social and cultural codes, to a state of nature where humans must confront themselves to find themselves. Society increasingly makes us forget our inner lives and concentrate on the outer ones. In the second half of the film, the jungle is omnipresent, darkness reigns, and the heightened awareness of the soundscape lets mental images arise. In the first half, daylight and the sense of sight dominate. This coexistence of two very different, incompatible spheres and the tension between them is the idea behind and the topic of the film, it shows in its structure. (Mandelbaum, 2004, p.21;* translation by N. Boehler*)*

Darkness is in fact a remarkable feature in the jungle scenes. There are many night shots and even in broad daylight, the dense foliage filters the light. The murkiness of the images makes it hard to discern the action at times. While sight is the primary human sense and the sense most addressed by the medium of film, Apichatpong's cinematography in the jungle scenes seems to subvert this primacy. Its obscurity makes us rely much more on the aural than on the visual. As if entering a different sensescape, the characters and we as spectators must adjust to the darkness, letting our awareness shift to the soundscape.

Many elements of the soundtrack are recorded with a microphone held very close to the objects. This lends the scenes a strongly textured sound quality and a highly visceral feel: the closeness and three-dimensionality of the sound heighten our awareness of the cinematic space and of the corporeal. If, as Michel Foucault has pointed out in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), the dominant, rationalising mode of seeing links the gaze with power, supervision and control, the obscurity of the jungle here can be understood as its Other, the irrational and sensual. Thus, the inner shifting that the protagonists experience also happens on the level of the senses: the soundtrack is accented while the image, which usually is cinema's prioritised level of expression, is obscured, causing visual disorientation. This disorientation is further emphasised by

the soundscape's frequent use of an indefinable, diffuse noise as ambient sound. Its source is unclear, not located in the image. This lends the images an intense depth of space and, at the same time, makes this space highly diffuse and puzzling in terms of orientation.[6] Thus Apichatpong, by realigning the usual channels of sensual perception and confusing spatial orientation, enables us to renegotiate our use of the senses, much in the way his characters renegotiate their sense of self.

Transgressions: Decentred Characters

Being such a different sphere than the characters' everyday world, the jungle requires a slow approach. Getting there is a journey, entering it a transgression from the familiar into the wild and unknown. Accordingly, Apichatpong shows these transgressions at length and with attention to atmospheric detail. A recurrent element of his films is long drive scenes in which the characters' faces are shown in close-up shots, framed by car windows and the landscape zipping by. Typically, these scenes are accompanied by music and have a dreamy feel, evoked by the characters' silence and pensive gazes.

Another typical element is shots of the characters walking into or wandering around in the jungle. The style of these shots is consistent throughout several films: the characters are typically shown from a distance, appearing small amidst the magnificent vegetation. They are framed by the camera in a decentred way – in the frame's corners, along its edges –, adding to the impression of their marginalisation. While classical cinema style basically centres on the human figure, these non-anthropocentric images seem to suggest a decentring of the human world on a figurative level: entering the jungle, the protagonists face a sort of higher being which they are subjected to. The cinematography underlines the characters' marginalisation by painting these scenes in monochrome colour schemes that sometimes even let the characters appear camouflaged. Appearing in brown and green tones and low lighting, the characters seem to disappear into the foliage as if being absorbed by nature or perhaps uniting with it. Both the driving scenes and the scenes showing wanderings in the jungle typically appear hypnotic, almost trance-like.

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6 On the use of surround sound as disorienting, see Flückiger (2001, p. 320).

Spirits: The Jungle and the Supernatural

The decentredness of the human character in the frame is echoed in the cosmology that organises the world depicted in Apichatpong's work. In Thai folk belief, which is rooted in local animism, nature is strongly linked to spirit belief: all natural beings have a soul, a spirit, and can thus connect to the human world. Nature and its spirits form a higher order that pervades human life, nourishing and influencing it. The fact that there exist essentially good and bad spirits shows a strong ambivalence towards spirit life. The relationship between humans and nature, and human communication with the spirits of animals and plants are crucial to Thai folk belief and the attitude towards nature: man is not opposed to but assimilated into his natural environment via the spirits, both benevolent and malevolent (Phra Anuman, 2009; Suvanna, 2004a; 2004b).

In this way, the jungle is a liminal sphere where the human and the spirit world meet. The borderline between the natural and the supernatural is fluid; humans can transgress it. The strong connectedness between humans and nature spirits stems from local non-dualist belief systems that originate from before the introduction of Buddhism and its establishment as state religion.

In Apichatpong's work, the jungle is inhabited by spirits and ghosts. Animals and animal spirits interact with humans. In *Tropical Malady*'s second part, the tiger spirit plays a crucial role. He lures the male protagonist Tong through the jungle appearing in various ways: as a human figure with a tiger's tail, a mysterious man-like creature, and a tiger. Besides, Tong meets a monkey during his search that advises him, speaking to him in monkey language, which Tong magically understands – unlike the spectator who must rely on the subtitles the film provides. Later on, Tong is guided along his path by a firefly and by the ghost of a dead cow. Nature seems to watch over and lead him. In *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, Boonmee is reunited with his son, Boonsong, who has gone missing years ago and now returns to him as a monkey ghost, a half-human, half-monkey character. After telling him about his transformation, Boonsong accompanies Boonmee during his last days and his journey to his final resting place. Another episode in the same film tells the story of a princess who mourns her lost youth and is consoled and seduced by a catfish that makes love to her in a forest pond.

The non-anthropocentrism that appears in the films' decentred framing of the human figure also shows in sequences that focus on animals, casting them as characters and as agents in the films' plots – such as the catfish and the monkey mentioned above. Another animal protagonist appears at the very beginning of *Uncle Boonmee Cho Can Recall His Past Lives*: we see a water buffalo grazing in a field, then breaking loose and running into the jungle until it is finally found by its owner. It is not entirely clear to us how this sequence is linked to Boonmee's story. Eventually, we figure out that the buffalo might have been one of his past lives. However, this is never clarified. This unspecified status of this episode renders it all the more mysterious and establishes the buffalo as an independent protagonist of its own, self-contained short story in which it plays the main role as a non-human agent.

Remarkably, both spirits and animals are integrated into the image and the narration with utter casualness. They seem to inhabit their own space in the narrative alongside human characters, not rivalling them nor being of minor importance, either: the narrative treats them as equal, without the hierarchisation of humans over other beings.

Also, there is a very sparse or sometimes even non-existent marking of the supernatural. The usual filmic codes such as fades, whoosh sounds, shock effects or similar, are hardly employed. Instead, Apichatpong's aesthetic cultivates a kind of naturalism of the supernatural. Ghosts and spirits appear on screen without much spectacle. The tiger spirit in *Tropical Malady* simply emerges, just as the firefly and the cow ghost. In *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, Boonsong, the protagonist's long-lost son, comes home for a family dinner as if he had never gone missing. It is in the same manner that he is greeted: 'Have something to eat', he is told, and asked, 'Why did you let your hair grow so long?'

By juxtaposing the supernatural beings and the humans, the narratives stress the co-existence of both. The naturalist aesthetics, meanwhile, emphasises the casualness with which the films let their spectator see the invisible, immaterial, letting the spectator partake in the liminal position of the films' characters, human and supernatural.

Being the sphere of the supernatural, the jungle becomes the realm of pre-modern, local belief systems that exist alongside Buddhism, which is by state declaration the official religion and a strong carrier of the state-proclaimed version of national

identity. Forming a sphere different from this identity, the jungle here becomes a carrier for local identity, that of a marginalised region. The jungle and the spirits that populate it transport local cultural memory that returns through the liminality of the jungle.

Conclusion: Alternative Aesthetics, Unofficial Identities

In Apichatpong's work, the jungle becomes the figuration of a border zone on multiple levels. Besides being set in an actual geopolitical frontier region, the films address the border zone between the living and the dead, the human and the non-human, the modern and the pre-modern, and between Thainess and the non-nation. The boundaries between these dichotomies are not rigid but instead appear fluid and at times even dissolving. The jungle as non-domesticated landscape is an in-between space that invites liminality, providing a setting for the transgression of these boundaries. Its role refers to that which is, in official discourse, usually marginalised and othered: obscurity, the irrational, the repressed, and the sensual.

Apichatpong's aesthetics of the jungle emphasise obscurity, the aural, and the decentredness of the protagonists, recreating an experience of liminality through the positioning of the spectator. With this defamiliarisation of nature, Apichatpong creates an alternative mode of representation that resists the conventional gaze on Thai landscape and strongly differs from the aesthetic of nature depictions in recent mainstream cinema, where nature is shown as domesticated, beautified, and anthropocentric, or as exoticised. The alternativeness aligns itself with the status of Isarn as a border region seen as ethnic and cultural other and discriminated against by the central Thai government. In this way, the films confront official Thainess with localness and otherness, making alternative identities visible that are rooted in a pre-modern age before the establishment of the modern Thai nation state. These alternative localities, in Appadurai's sense, revise the concept of the nation from a peripheral perspective, from which the traumas inflicted onto the marginalised by state power become speakable.

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„Normalisierung“ der Verhältnisse? Eine Analyse der Parlamentswahl 2011 in Singapur

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Überblick zur Parlamentswahl 2011

Trotz weiterer Stimmenverluste hat die seit der Unabhängigkeit Singapurs unangefochten regierende *People's Action Party* (PAP) auch in der jüngsten Parlamentswahl am 7. Mai 2011 81 der insgesamt 87 Sitze und damit eine komfortable Parlamentsmehrheit errungen. Gleichzeitig verzeichnet die seit Jahrzehnten eher schwache Opposition mit dem Gewinn von 6 Parlamentssitzen einen als historisch zu bezeichnenden Wahlerfolg. Dies umso mehr, als es der *Workers' Party* (WP) erstmals gelang, den Sieg in einem Gruppenwahlkreis (*Group Representation Constituency*/GRC), in dem gleich fünf KandidatInnen aufgestellt werden müssen, zu erringen.

Lange Zeit galt die Einrichtung solcher Gruppenwahlkreise als eine der vielen Maßnahmen, mit der die regierende PAP – bisher sehr erfolgreich – versuchte, die Wahlchancen der Opposition zu behindern. Denn Kandidaturen in solchen GRC mit ihren je nach Wahlkreiszuschnitt bis zu sechs aufzustellenden KandidatInnen, die noch dazu aus allen ethnischen Gruppen[2] stammen müssen, bündeln eine hohe Zahl an politischem Personal, über das die Opposition bisher nur in begrenztem Maße ver-

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2 Nach Angaben des statistischen Amtes Singapurs sind von den ca. fünf Millionen EinwohnerInnen des Stadtstaats 76,8 Prozent ChinesInnen, 13,8 Prozent MalaiInnen und 7,9 Prozent InderInnen, während 1,4 Prozent keiner dieser ethnischen Gruppen zugeordnet werden.

fügte. In früheren Parlamentswahlen stellten Oppositionsparteien zwar in allen Einzelwahlkreisen (*Single Member Constituencies*/SMC), KandidatInnen auf, allerdings nur in einer begrenzten Zahl an GRC. Und bisher war es Oppositionsparteien auch nur in Einzelwahlkreisen gelungen, Parlamentssitze zu erringen. Dies schränkte die Möglichkeiten der Oppositionsparteien auf nennenswerte Sitzgewinne bei Parlamentswahlen bereits von Beginn an deutlich ein.

Hier zeigt sich auch einer der wesentlichen Unterschiede zu früheren Parlamentswahlen: Erstmals hat die Opposition in nahezu allen Gruppen- und Einzelwahlkreisen KandidatInnen aufgestellt und damit die regierende PAP umfassend herausgefordert. Lediglich im GRC Tanjong Pagar, traditionell der Wahlkreis des früheren Premierministers Lee Kuan Yew und seines KandidatInnenteams, stellte die Opposition auch 2011 keine GegenkandidatInnen auf. Damit wurden aktuell für 82 der 87 zu vergebenden Parlamentssitze OppositionskandidatInnen aufgestellt. 2006 waren es nur 47 der seinerzeit 82 Sitze. Begünstigt wurde dieses Erstarken der Oppositionskräfte vor allem durch eine große Zahl junger, gut ausgebildeter KandidatInnen, die 2011 für Oppositionsparteien antraten und das Vertrauen der WählerInnen in die politischen Fähigkeiten der Opposition stärkten („Victory in Singapore", 2011).

Dieser Umstand führt jedoch dazu, dass sich die Stimmengewinne der Opposition und damit auch die Stimmenverluste der Regierungspartei nur sehr begrenzt mit den Ergebnissen der letzten Parlamentswahl vergleichen lassen. 2006 konnten noch lediglich 56,5 Prozent aller Wahlberechtigten in ihren Wahlkreisen zwischen KandidatInnen der Regierungs- und mindestens einer Oppositionspartei wählen. 2011 waren es nur noch knapp sechs Prozent im Wahlkreis Tanjong Pagar, die keine wirkliche Wahl zwischen unterschiedlichen KandidatInnen hatten. Lediglich hier kam es zu einem so genannten *Walk-Over*, einer automatischen Wahl der PAP-KandidatInnen, die bei früheren Wahlen für viele Wahlkreise die Normalität darstellte.

Gleichzeitig macht auch die erneute Veränderung der Zahl und der Zuschnitte der Wahlkreise (vgl. Jordan, 2007) einen direkten Vergleich der Ergebnisse der jüngsten Parlamentswahl schwierig. Waren es 2006 noch 14 Gruppenwahlkreise mit fünf bzw. sechs aufzustellenden KandidatInnen und 9 Einzelwahlkreise,[3] so war für die Parlamentswahl 2011 wieder ein Trend zu kleineren Wahlkreiszuschnitten zu beobachten.

3 In neun dieser Gruppenwahlkreise waren dabei jeweils fünf, in den anderen fünf GRC jeweils sechs KandidatInnen aufzustellen.

Neben nun 12 Einzelwahlkreisen gab es auch insgesamt verkleinerte Gruppenwahlkreise.[4] Dies hat die Möglichkeiten der Opposition in nahezu allen Wahlkreisen KandidatInnen zu nominieren zusätzlich begünstigt.

Es ist ein – vor allem für die Opposition – wichtiges Ergebnis, dass der amtierende Premierminister Lee Hsien Loong auch in der zweiten Parlamentswahl seiner Amtszeit deutliche Stimmenverluste seiner Regierungspartei PAP zu verbuchen hat. Bereits 2006 verzeichnete die PAP Verluste von nahezu 9 Prozent; 2011 fiel ihr Stimmenanteil abermals um 6,5 Prozent von 66,6 Prozent auf nun noch 60,1 Prozent. Dass die PAP trotz dieses niedrigen Wählerzuspruchs weiterhin die ganz überwiegende Mehrheit der Parlamentssitze beanspruchen kann, verdankt sie einzig dem herrschenden Mehrheitswahlrecht, das die bisher noch schwache Opposition in besonderem Maße benachteiligt.

In dieser Hinsicht ist es besonders bemerkenswert, dass die Opposition der PAP auch in anderen Wahlkreisen zum Teil sehr knappe Siege bescheren konnte. Neben den Einzelwahlkreisen Potong Pasir und Joo Chiat, wo sich die PAP mit 50,5 Prozent bzw. 51 Prozent nur knapp behaupten konnte,[5] fielen die Siege der Regierungspartei auch in Gruppenwahlkreisen wie East Coast (mit 54,8 Prozent) und Marine Parade (mit 56,6 Prozent) nur bescheiden aus.[6] In weiteren Gruppenwahlkreisen, wie etwa Tampines und Sembawang, verzeichnete die PAP Stimmenverluste von mehr als 10 Prozent.

Bereits bei der letzten Parlamentswahl verfolgte die Opposition die Strategie, durch eine partielle Bündelung der Kräfte – etwa durch die Allianz zweier weiterer Oppositionsparteien in der *Singapore Democratic Alliance* (SDA)[7] – und Absprachen über die Aufstellung von KandidatInnen zur Vermeidung von Konkurrenzsituationen

4 Zur Parlamentswahl 2011 gab es nur noch zwei Gruppenwahlkreise mit jeweils sechs KandidatInnen, weiterhin fünf GRC für Gruppenkandidaturen von jeweils fünf KandidatInnen, und weitere zwei GRC, in denen Teams von jeweils vier KandidatInnen nominiert werden mussten.

5 In Potong Pasir hatte bei der Parlamentswahl 2006 die oppositionelle *Singapore Democratic Alliance* (SDA) mit einem Ergebnis von 55,8 Prozent der Stimmen einen Parlamentssitz erringen können. Der Abgeordnete Chiam See Tong trat 2011 nicht mehr in Potong Pasir, sondern als Kandidat der *Singapore People's Party* (SPP) in einem anderen Wahlkreis an. Der Einzelwahlkreis konnte 2011 nur knapp von der PAP zurück erobert werden.

6 Marine Parade ist der Wahlkreis von Goh Chock Tong, der im November 1990 den langjährigen Premierminister Lee Kuan Yew im Amt ablöste und seinerseits im August 2004 von dessen Sohn, dem jetzigen Premierminister Lee Hsien Loong, abgelöst wurde.

7 2006 hatte die SDA, zu der seinerzeit auch die *National Solidarity Party* (NSP) und die SPP gehörten, knapp 13 Prozent der Stimmen und einen Parlamentssitz erringen können. 2011 haben die drei Oppositionsparteien zusammengenommen ihren Stimmenanteil zwar auf 17,9 Prozent steigern können, aber lediglich die NSP konnte mit 12 Prozent der Stimmen einen nennenswerten Anteil verbuchen, während SPP und SDA mit 3,1 Prozent bzw. 2,8 Prozent nach der Auflösung der Parteienallianz wieder deutlich schlechter dastehen. Parlamentssitze konnte keine der drei Parteien erringen.

in einzelnen Wahlkreisen ihre Chancen zu erhöhen. Auch 2011 gab es mit Punggol East nur einen einzigen Wahlkreis, in dem gleich zwei Oppositionsparteien gegen die PAP antraten („Opposition makes," 2011).

Aus der Wahl ist die WP unter ihrem Generalsekretär Low Chia Khiang eindeutig als stärkste Oppositionskraft hervorgegangen. Die WP konnte sich nicht nur im Einzelwahlkreis Hougang behaupten, dessen Parlamentsmandat sie bereits seit Jahren innehat, sondern auch die fünf Mandate des Gruppenwahlkreises Alljunied erringen und dabei dem PAP-KandidatInnenteam unter George Yeo, einem führenden PAP-Politiker,[8] eine Niederlage zufügen. Bereits 2006 hatte sich die PAP in Alljunied nur knapp gegen die WP behaupten können, 2011 erzielte sie in dem Wahlkreis nur noch wenig mehr als 45 Prozent der Stimmen. In Hougang konnte die WP ihren Stimmenanteil von 62,7 Prozent (2006) auf nun 64,8 Prozent weiter erhöhen.

Für die anderen Oppositionsparteien bedeuten die zum Teil guten Wahlergebnisse in ihren Wahlkreisen allerdings keine Mandatsgewinne, auch wenn Oppositionspolitiker wie James Gomez, der für die *Singapore Democratic Party* (SDP) angetreten war,[9] der *People's Action Party* mit seinem Team im Gruppenwahlkreis Sembawang einen deutlichen Stimmverlust von minus 12,8 Prozent bescherte. Einen ähnlich hohen Gesamtstimmenanteil wie die *Workers' Party*, die auf 12,8 Prozent aller abgegebenen Stimmen kam, erzielte aber allenfalls noch die *National Solidarity Party* (NSP) mit einem Anteil von 12 Prozent, während die Singapore Democratic Party, die *Reform Party* (RP) von Kenneth Jeyaretnam,[10] die *Singapore People's Party* (SPP) und die *Singapore Democratic Alliance* demgegenüber nur sehr geringe Stimmenanteile zu verbuchen hatten.

Zentrale Themen der Parlamentswahl

Zu den zentralen Themen der aktuellen Parlamentswahl gehörten die steigenden Le-

8 Georg Yeo war zur Zeit der Wahl amtierender Außenminister Singapurs und hat sich in Reaktion auf seinen Mandatsverlust unmittelbar nach der Parlamentswahl aus der aktiven Politik zurückgezogen.

9 Der Generalsekretär der SDP, Chee Soon Juan, konnte, wie schon 2006 auch 2011 nicht als Kandidat für seine Partei antreten, da er zuvor zu einer hohen Geldstrafe verurteilt worden war, weil er ohne Erlaubnis der Behörden in der Öffentlichkeit gesprochen hatte. Aufgrund der Tatsache, dass er die Geldstrafe nur mit Hilfe von Spendenmitteln seiner UnterstützerInnen begleichen konnte, wurde er offiziell für bankrott erklärt, was ihn von einer Kandidatur für das Parlament ausschließt (vgl. Jordan, 2008).

10 Kenneth Jeyaretnam ist mit der von seinem im September 2008 verstorbenen Vater, dem langjährigen und bekannten Oppositionspolitiker Joshua B. Jeyaretnam, erst im Juni 2008 gegründeten Partei im Gruppenwahlkreis West Coast angetreten und konnte dort bereits im ersten Anlauf 33,4 Prozent der abgegebenen Stimmen erringen.

benshaltungskosten in Singapur, die nicht nur die unteren Einkommensgruppen, sondern zunehmend auch mittlere Haushaltseinkommen betreffen, und eine wachsende Arbeitsmarktkonkurrenz durch eine anhaltend hohe Zahl ausländischer Arbeitskräfte („Singapore to hold,“ 2011). Weitere Themen waren die weiterhin fehlenden parlamentarischen Kontrollen in einem seit Jahrzehnten von der PAP dominierten Regierungssystem, aber auch die im internationalen Vergleich hohen Vergütungen von MinisterInnen und anderen hohen StaatsbeamtInnen in Zeiten, in denen viele SingapurerInnen Lohn- und Gehaltsverluste zu verzeichnen haben.

Mit einem Anstieg des Bruttoinlandsprodukts um 14,5 Prozent gehörte Singapur 2010 zu den am stärksten wachsenden Ökonomien Asiens. Doch für die meisten Haushalte bedeutet diese hohe Wachstumsrate vor allem auch steigende Lebenshaltungskosten und einen spürbaren Verlust der Kaufkraft. Zwischen Mai 2010 und Mai 2011 sind die Preise für Lebensmittel nach Angaben des statistischen Amtes Singapurs um 2,8 Prozent angestiegen. Ohne Kosten für Wohnen verzeichnete der Index der Verbraucherpreise in diesem Zeitraum einen Anstieg um 3,3 Prozent, unter Einbeziehung der Wohnkosten betrug der Anstieg sogar 4,5 Prozent.[11] Im April 2011 stiegen darüber hinaus die Preise für Elektrizität landesweit um ca. 6,5 Prozent. Insgesamt erreichte die Inflationsrate in den Monaten vor der Wahl die Marke von sechs Prozent, was zu einer massiven Entwertung der Kaufkraft, vor allem von mittleren und unteren Haushaltseinkommen, beitrug (Seah, 2011).

Gleichzeitig sehen viele Menschen in Singapur durch diese Entwicklung auch den Wert ihrer Ersparnisse und vor allem ihrer Altersversorgung gefährdet. Die Verzinsung ihrer Rücklagen in der staatlichen Altersversorgung, dem *Central Provident Fund* (CPF), lag mit zuletzt jährlichen 2,5 Prozent deutlich unter der Inflationsrate. Vor allem BezieherInnen niedriger Einkommen, die ohnehin nur mit knappen Altersversorgungsbezügen rechnen können, müssen nun mit einer noch einmal deutlich niedrigeren Altersrente rechnen, die angesichts der steigenden Lebenshaltungskosten kaum zum Leben reichen könnte. Die wachsenden Risiken der Verarmung immer größerer Teile der Bevölkerung wurden von allen Oppositionsparteien in ihren Wahlkampagnen aufgegriffen und als ein wichtiges Wahlkampfthema gegen die regierende PAP genutzt. Dies umso mehr als es die PAP bisher versäumt hat, auf diese Problematik

11 Alle Angaben nach: Department of Statistics Singapore (http://www.singstat.gov.sg).

angemessen zu reagieren, etwa durch die Verabschiedung von Mindestlohnregelungen zum Schutz unterer Einkommensgruppen („Ruling People's Action Party," 2011).

Zu dem enormen Wirtschaftswachstum beigetragen hat nicht zuletzt auch die große Zahl ausländischer Arbeitskräfte, die aufgrund vereinfachter Zulassungsbestimmungen in den letzten Jahren Zugang zum Singapurer Arbeitsmarkt gefunden haben. Allein zwischen 2007 und 2009 vergab die Regierung jährlich bis zu 130.000 Arbeitsgenehmigungen für ausländische Arbeitskräfte, sowohl im unteren als auch im oberen Beschäftigungssegment, sodass 2010 bereits mehr als 1,3 Millionen AusländerInnen im Stadtstaat lebten – bei einer Gesamtbevölkerung von ca. 5,1 Millionen. Eine Folge dieser starken Zuwanderung von Arbeitskräften ist eine wachsende Arbeitsmarktkonkurrenz, auch für die insgesamt gut ausgebildete Mittelschicht, deren Angehörige zunehmend Schwierigkeiten haben, eine ausreichend gut bezahlte Beschäftigung zu finden. Gleichzeitig sind vor allem schlechter qualifizierte ArbeitnehmerInnen durch die Zuwanderung von ArbeitsmigrantInnen mit stagnierenden Einkommen konfrontiert, die kaum noch ausreichen, die steigenden Kosten für Wohnen, Transport und vor allem Lebensmittel zu decken.

KandidatInnen verschiedener Oppositionsparteien, und hier vor allem der NSP, der SDP und der RP, aber auch der besonders erfolgreichen WP, haben entsprechende Ressentiments in der Bevölkerung im Wahlkampf erfolgreich aufgegriffen und mit ihrer Kritik an der Politik der regierenden PAP um Wählerstimmen geworben. Angesichts der Tatsache, dass die Opposition dieses Thema massiv für ihren Wahlkampf nutzte, sah sich die Regierung bereits vor der Wahl zu der Ankündigung gezwungen, die Zahl der jährlich zu vergebenden Arbeitsgenehmigungen für ausländische Arbeitskräfte in den kommenden Jahren drastisch zu reduzieren. Ob es der Regierung mit diesem Schritt gelingen wird, verlorenes Wählervertrauen zurück zu gewinnen, ist eine offene Frage. Auf jeden Fall wird eine Halbierung der jährlichen Arbeitsgenehmigungen, wie sie von der Regierung nun angekündigt wurde („Singapore concerned," 2011), Auswirkungen auf die zukünftige wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Stadtstaates haben.

In diesem Kontext ist sicherlich auch die Stärkung der Position des alten und neuen Finanzministers, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, zu sehen, der im aktuellen Kabinett auch die Führung des Arbeitsministeriums von Premierminister Lee Hsien Loong übernommen hat und zugleich in den Rang des stellvertretenden Vorsitzenden der

PAP aufgerückt ist. Damit verfügt Tharman nach Ansicht von ExpertInnen über ausreichende Kompetenzen, um sowohl die drängenden Probleme einer drohenden Inflation anzugehen als auch die möglichen Folgen der jüngsten Restriktionen bei der Zuwanderung von Arbeitskräften zu bearbeiten. Beide Problembereiche werden nicht nur für die weitere wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Stadtstaats, sondern auch für die zukünftigen Wahlchancen der PAP von großer Bedeutung sein.

Entscheidend dürfte im Hinblick auf zukünftige Wahlchancen aber auch die Ankündigung sein, die hohen Einkommen der Kabinettsmitglieder zu beschneiden. Unmittelbar nach Vereidigung des neuen Kabinetts richtete die Regierung eine Kommission zur Überprüfung der MinisterInnengehälter ein, die aktuell zwischen 1,5 und 3 Millionen Singapur-Dollar betragen und damit zu den höchsten weltweit zählen („Singapore cabinet,“ 2011).[12] Eher kosmetischer Natur erscheint dagegen eine weitere Reaktion auf die hohen Stimmenverluste der Regierungspartei: Nur wenige Tage nach der Wahl legten mit dem ersten Premierminister Lee Kuan Yew und seinem Amtsnachfolger, Goh Chok Tong, zwei führende PAP-Politiker ihre Parlamentsmandate nieder, um – so die offizielle Begründung – einer jüngeren Generation von PolitikerInnen innerhalb der Partei den Weg frei zu machen („Lee Senior’s departure,“ 2011; „Ruling People’s Action Party,“ 2011).

Auf dem Weg zu mehr Demokratie?

Insgesamt müssen die sinkenden Stimmanteile der regierenden PAP als deutliches Anzeichen für einen schwindenden Rückhalt der Regierung in der Bevölkerung gedeutet werden. Eine Einschätzung, die auch durch eine Telefonumfrage des *Institute of Policy Studies* unmittelbar nach der Wahl bestätigt wurde. Auch hier zeigte sich eine hohe Unzufriedenheit der Befragten mit steigenden Wohnungspreisen, stagnierenden Einkommen und einer anhaltend hohen Zahl an ArbeitsmigrantInnen im Stadtstaat. Offensichtlich wachsen die Zweifel daran, dass die PAP in der Lage (oder auch gewillt) ist, diese Probleme adäquat zu bearbeiten, denn gegenüber 2006 ist ein Rückgang der Zustimmung zur Politik der PAP-Regierung von 87 Prozent auf 73 Prozent zu verzeichnen („Ruling People’s Action Party,“ 2011).[13]

12 Dies entsprach im Mai 2011 umgerechnet 850.000 bis 1,7 Millionen Euro.

13 Beim *Institute of Policy Studies* handelt es sich um einen politikwissenschaftlichen Think Tank der Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy an der National University of Singapore (NUS).

Einzig das Mehrheitswahlrecht stellt sicher, dass die PAP trotz eines Stimmenanteils von lediglich rund 60 Prozent noch immer 93 Prozent der Mandate und damit eine äußerst komfortable Parlamentsmehrheit verbuchen kann. Die zum Teil sehr knappen Ergebnisse in einigen Wahlkreisen machen aber deutlich, dass es der Opposition bereits bei der nächsten Wahl gelingen könnte, in weiteren Gruppenwahlkreisen zu gewinnen und damit die Zahl ihrer Mandate so weit zu erhöhen, dass die PAP die absolute Parlamentsmehrheit, und damit auch die Möglichkeit Verfassungsänderungen durchzuführen, verlieren könnte. Dies hätte auch Auswirkungen auf die bisherige Politik der PAP, durch Wahlrechtsänderungen oder die Neustrukturierungen von Wahlbezirken die Wahlbeteiligungsmöglichkeiten der Opposition einzuschränken.

Die PAP bleibt auch nach den Stimmverlusten in der jüngsten Parlamentswahl die politisch dominante Kraft im Stadtstaat. Gleichwohl hat die Workers' Party mit dem erstmaligen Sieg einer Oppositionspartei in einem Gruppenwahlkreis ihre Position als wichtigste Oppositionspartei weiter gefestigt. Und möglicherweise markiert das jüngste Wahlergebnis auch bereits eine Veränderung in Richtung einer stärker demokratischen Kultur und einem Zweiparteiensystem in Singapur. Politische Kommentatoren, wie der Singapurer Soziologe Chua Beng Huat, sprechen in diesem Zusammenhang bereits von einer „Normalisierung" der politischen Verhältnisse. Aber weder die Tatsache, dass erstmals in nahezu allen Wahlkreisen OppositionskandidatInnen zur Wahl antraten noch das insgesamt sehr gute Abschneiden der Oppositionsparteien können darüber hinwegtäuschen, dass sich die Opposition gegenüber der regierenden PAP insgesamt weiter in einer Position der Schwäche befindet. Nur wenn es der Opposition gelingt, aufgrund klarer politischer Zielsetzungen für potenzielle WählerInnen als wirkliche Alternative zur PAP wahrgenommen zu werden, wird es ihr gelingen, auch in zukünftigen Wahlen Stimmengewinne zu verbuchen.

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Im Dialog / In Dialogue

Rethinking Conceptions of Borders in the Greater Mekong Subregion: An Interview With Chayan Vaddhanabhuti (RCSD)

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Dr. Chayan Vaddhanabhuti is Director of the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Thailand. The RCSD was established in 1998 at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, in response to the need for integration of social science and natural science knowledge in order to gain a better understanding of sustainable development in upper Mainland South-East Asia. Chayan Vaddhanabhuti has long been dedicated to the field of social sciences, development issues, and engaged himself extensively with ethnic groups both within Thailand and beyond. In this interview he introduces the work of RSCD and discusses the changing perceptions of the concept of 'border' in the context of Thailand and the Greater Mekong Subregion.

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Napakadol Kittisenee: We recognise that the 'border' has emerged in the forefront of social sciences as one of the promising themes among scholarly debates. According to the experiences of RCSD, both in terms of academic and activist involvement, what is and how do you make sense of this popular term?

Chayan Vaddhanabhuti: I think we have to understand that before Thailand became integrated into the Greater Mekong Subregion in 1995, most Thai scholars tended to carry out their studies within the national boundary. It was an effort to understand our own society - maybe with different perspectives, we can say, the perspectives of the 'insiders' as opposed to the perspectives of the 'outsiders' as studied by scholars from overseas universities. This led to an ignorance of what happened in the neighbouring countries. We did not pay much attention to history, culture, and

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society for example in Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Burma. And again, during that time – during the Cold War – most of the countries in the Mekong Region were undergoing drastic change – they became socialist countries. I think academia has kept itself distanced from those socialist countries. Moreover, socialist countries often did not allow researchers to carry out fieldwork. When we started to develop the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development in 1998, we thought that it would broaden our understanding if social scientists crossed the border to do research or to learn about those countries which were moving towards development and modernity, linking more with the market economy, like Thailand. Also, we realised that this particular region is geographically and ethnically much related. So, if we would like to understand ourselves in Thai society, we should also study what has happened to Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam as well as Burma. We should understand those neighbouring countries. I believe that we can learn a lot from looking at how, for example, Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian governments deal with issues like resource management, culture, ethnic minorities, or even health and media. We can learn more about these issues and, particularly, we will be able to learn how the history, of both each country and the region, has an impact on Thailand, on the way Thailand tries to position itself, or on the way Thailand has been trying to define its national identity.

NAPAKADOL: It is remarkable that within RCSD's name, two parts or themes are encapsulated: 'Social Science', for the first part, is a category of knowledge or conceptual level while the latter, 'Sustainable Development', deals with practical issues or activism. Is that the proof of the 'border' RCSD has been trying to cross, travelling back and forth between the two sides?

CHAYAN: There are two spaces. First, we put 'Social Science' in the name because we experienced that most of the times when we talked about development, economic, political, or sometimes ecological aspects were emphasised while we did not see the people. People as social actors have not been much recognised in the discourse of development. Our intention is to create a dialogue between Social Science and Non-Social Science or Physical Science by adding social perspectives to the analysis and understanding the issues of development. And second, of course, we value both

'theory' and 'practice'. Theory about the social world comes from training and has to be learned. We think that if we want social science to be powerful, if we want it to be used as a means to understand the world – the social world, we need to emphasise the theoretical part, the theoretical knowledge of the society at large. But, at the same time, we cannot remain in academia or the ivory tower, we should also try to link theories and concepts to practice or the other way around, bringing some practical phenomena and everyday practices into theoretical discussion. We should move back and forth between these two spaces, these two worlds. The border between theoretical understanding and practical enquiry should be crossed back and forth to enrich each other; and we hope that by reflecting upon this kind of relationship, we would be able to come up with an idea on sustainable development.

NAPAKADOL: As some may discern that 'border' has been playing important roles in shaping and transforming or even affecting lives of the people in this region, according to RCSD's experiences, what does 'border' mean to this region?

CHAYAN: We have to recognise that this region has been divided into nation states mostly after World War II and, as you know, prior to that in Thailand the border was not conceived of as a static or a concrete border. The borderline was imposed by the colonial powers. Since then, the border has become something that prevented connections between the countries in the region, preventing the movement of people and preventing the movement of goods despite the fact that people, who live in the borderland, share the same culture or a similar ethnic background and also trade with each other. The border has become something like a barrier for those people. So I think it was in 1989, when Prime Minister Chatchai Chunhawan came up with the slogan 'Turning Battle Fields into Market Places'. This slogan also said something about how the border has become an obstruction for economic co-operation, for the flow of goods, and the movement of people.

NAPAKADOL: Did such a policy affect the areas beyond the Mekong Region, for example Peninsular South-East Asia?

Chayan: Even though there was no battlefield in the area of our South, there was the national security concern during the Cold War period. Thailand was very much concerned about the Communist Party of Malaya and also the separatist movement dating back to the 1970s and 1980s in the Deep South of Thailand. Therefore, during that time the border became not only a barrier for communication, interaction, and connectivity among these countries and people living in these areas, but it also reinforced the national identity and nationalism, so people started to feel that they are the people from the North-East of Thailand while other people felt that they are from the Lao PDR despite the fact that they speak the same language, eat the same kind of food, share similar cultural practices, and believe in the same religion, that is Buddhism. In the case of Thailand's Deep South, there was an attempt to separate the *Melayu* Muslims from the Malay people in Malaysia due to security reasons:

Napakadol: Now the border seems to be more open and flexible, especially in the context of gearing up towards ASEAN re-integration in 2015. What do you think about this campaign that promotes a free trade area within the ASEAN countries?

Chayan: I think it was in 1995, when the GMS or Greater Mekong Subregion was proposed as a plan to integrate this particular region. We have seen a diminishing role of the border where the respective countries changed their concepts towards national boundaries, allowing people to move across borders. Particularly in response to the expansion of the Thai economy and industry, Thailand's policy has allowed free movement of labourers from Burma, Laos, and Cambodia. The Thai fishing industry, and the agricultural production of certain cash crops like corn, cassava, and sugarcane, all of these activities needed more workers. The same phenomenon of this new interpretation of the 'border' holds true for the expansion of the construction industry where many workers from Thailand's neighbouring countries are employed. We also have to keep in mind, however, that irregular migration and informal labour play an important role. Another important sector for Thailand and the whole region is the international and Asian tourism sector. Thailand attempts to attract more tourists whereas at the same time Thai tourists increasingly cross the border to places like Luang Phrabang in Laos, Ha Long Bay in Vietnam, or Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Thus, Thailand tries to open up the border as well as set up many check points along the

Thai border with Laos, Burma, and Cambodia to allow the flow of people and Thai commodities. All of these countries are more or less buyers of Thai commodities, ranging from motorcycles to fish sauce or plastic sheets. Consumers in our neighbouring countries like these products and the value of trade has increased much since the opening of the border.

NAPAKADOL: So let us say not only the border has an impact on our lives but also do our lives define how we look at the border?

CHAYAN: Yes. Opening up the border in this particular region has led to more investment by foreign investors, namely from China, Korea, Singapore, Japan and so forth. Infrastructure has been built to link different regions through so called North-South and East-West corridors in order to facilitate the flows of commodities and people. And more than that, we have observed that in the last almost twenty years, because of the opening of the border, there have been many kinds of investment which have led to the intensification of the use of natural resources. You have heard about dam projects in the Mekong River, rubber plantations in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, or the expansion of corn production by Thai businessmen in Laos, Cambodia, and Burma. All of this leads to a greater exploitation of natural resources. Moreover, we have also observed that there is something what we call extractive economy. There have been attempts to extract more natural resources, namely oil and some minerals, for example Potash. There are plans to set up Potash plants in Udon Thani, Thailand, Bauxite mining in Laos and Cambodia as well as gold and coal mining in Laos and Burma. All of these resources have been exploited in order to support the growing economy, not only within the region but also for countries like China and also Thailand which need more energy and more natural resources for industrial development. So we maybe start to see that what is called 'regional integration' does not bring positive aspects. The economic integration of this region needs to be questioned as it has also led to a non-sustainable use of natural resources. Another issue concerns the increasing flows of cross-border migrant workers. There is a large migrant population in Chiang Mai, Mae Sot, and Ranong. You can find migrant workers in several provinces in Thailand, and they do not come alone but bring with them their children and family. Who is going to be responsible for the education of their

children, who is going to be responsible for their health service? These are questions we need to answer. More than that, there is an issue of human trafficking. There is an increased number of persons who have been trafficked.

NAPAKADOL: You mentioned prior to the interview that you are going to Mae Sot, the borderland between Thailand and Burma, in order to facilitate a project initiated by RCSD under the name of 'Burma Concern'. Can you tell us more about this project?

CHAYAN: When we talk about opening up the border, it means that the border becomes more important. The borderland becomes something we should look at. In Mae Sot, where we have conducted a research project on the issue of displaced persons, these displaced persons came here after the election in Burma in November 2010. It was estimated that at the beginning there were about 22,000 persons staying along the border but now this number is reduced to 10,000 persons. These displaced persons are hiding because they might be sent back or pushed back to Burma by Thai authorities. We also know that even though there is a civilian government in Burma now and many groups of people are trying to promote what is called 'reconciliation', the fighting is still going on along the border. Many parts of the borderland on the Burmese side are mined. You can find landmines in these areas, so the displaced people cannot go back to their home villages as they are afraid of landmines.

NAPAKADOL: During your work in the last decades, you might have seen other cases of displacement, migration, and refugee issues. There was also a case of Cambodian refugees along the Thai border thirty years ago. How is it different from what is currently going on at the Thai-Burma border?

CHAYAN: The situation along the Burma-Thai border is rather different from the Khmer refugee issues thirty years ago. At the borderland of Mae Sot, we have observed that there are three layers of activities or phenomena. First, people living along the borderland are connected. They cross the border visiting each other very often, they belong to the same ethnic group, only a small river separates them. In everyday life, they benefit from collecting forest products, vegetables and growing rice at the borderland. Some of the Thai Karen people go to the Burmese side to grow rice. Some of

Burmese Karen people come to the Thai side to buy goods or to work for Thai farmers and Thai landowners. That is one layer of the phenomenon. Another is the political layer: This area was formerly controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU). Today, it is not the KNU anymore but the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKPA), so the area has been controlled by Karen armed forces for a long time. These groups are fighting with each other and with the Burmese groups or the Burmese State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The lives of the people are constantly in danger because they do not know when the fighting is going to break out and they do not know where the landmines are. On top of this, you can see the borderland which becomes expanded agricultural area owned by mostly Thai businessmen growing corn and so forth. You will see that these three layers are going on all the time, making life there quite dynamic as well as sometimes dangerous if you do not know how to avoid the fights between the two armed groups. So the borderland area has become contested, not only among the armed groups but also among business people who want to invest in the production of corn and cassava and at the same time want to make use of cheap labour from Burma. I do not know much about the situation along Thai-Khmer border thirty years ago, but I suppose there was not be much economic activity there. Was there any?

Napakadol: There was some.

Chayan: But was it illegal?

Napakadol: Yes.

Chayan: So the aim of the project in Mae Sot is to understand the complexity in the borderland area as well as to demystify the notion of displacement. If we understand the context, we will see that people whom we call 'refugee' or 'displaced person' are not just the ones who run across the border; they have been in contact with different groups of people, they have participated in cash crop economy or contract farming. I thus hope that this project will help to understand people at the border in a better light.

NAPAKADOL: In a more realistic one?

CHAYAN: Yes, not just simply as those who fled across the border, leaving everything back home, the way they have often been painted by certain organisations.

NAPAKADOL: So let us move further to the South. Since you have mentioned life in danger along the borderland, lives of the people over there also seem to be at risk. What is there about RCSD projects dealing with this issue?

CHAYAN: The situation in the South may be the same. It has often been told that the conflict in southern Thailand is caused by the 'separatist movement' or the 'clash of civilizations', as Samuel Huntington termed it. We thought that if we take another look at the situation in the South, trying to understand everyday practice among the local people, particularly those who are *Melayu* Muslims, depending on natural resources, for example, small fishermen in Patani Bay, rice farmers in the middle zone or farmers who engage with plantations - a kind of what they call 'orchard' in the forest, *Suan Somrom*, or *Suan Duzong* meaning mixed garden, then we may have a better understanding of how the lives of people in the Deep South have been affected by the imposed development scheme of the central government. My hypothesis is that people in the Deep South have not only been looked at as the 'Muslim other', but their lives have more or less been shaped by a development policy which neither derived from the local need, nor from the understanding of their culture, or raised as a result of the problems they had. The development projects have been designed by the central Thai government, and then subsequently assigned to the government officers who do not understand their context, culture, and ecology. Most of the development projects tend to fail. So our project there is called 'Kampong Research Project', which means that the research project is done for the village community of the *Melayu* Muslim people and through participation by the local people.

NAPAKADOL: As you address the term 'Kampong', referring to the village community in the Deep South of Thailand, this term can not only be found in southern Thailand but is also prevailing in the Malay World, which does not only mean Malaysia, but also Indonesia, for example. So what happened when the borderline was imposed on

the southern Thai borderland? Did it cut off the connection among the Malay people?

Chayan: I think the border in the Deep South seems to be much more porous than in the other parts. Maybe it is similar to the Burma-Thai border because of what we call 'ethnic integration' or 'ethnic linkages' – ethnic ties among the *Melayu* Muslims in the southern part of Thailand and their Malaysian counterparts. There has been a long relationship through economic activities. For example, people in the southern part of Thailand, when they need to get some amount of money they go to work in Malaysia. Since they speak the language, they can seek employment over there, particularly working at Thai restaurants, working in rice cultivation or rice harvest. They become wage labourers and during the religious ceremonies such as Ramadan, we can find people travelling back and forth across the border. So they have a lot of connections and activities going on. These are everyday life practices among the local people.

Napakadol: Last but not least, we have just recently heard through media and academic writings about the slogan: 'The World without Border' or 'The Borderless World'. Plus, these campaigns come in the same fashion as the promotion of the idea of 'ASEAN+3' which means the much more solid integration and co-operation among most South-East Asian countries plus China, Japan, and Korea. You made an observation earlier regarding the regional integration, but within this particular context, what do you think about these campaigns?

Chayan: I would not say that we have a 'borderless world' but there will be something what we call 'new regulations'. We still have borders but with new mechanisms allowing the flow of people, commodities, and information to cross borders. Of course, this is a part of what we understand as 'Globalisation'. For some of us, we look at this as 'Neoliberalism', to loosen up the border, allowing more connections between people and nations. My observation is that we seem to have the illusion of the positive side of economic integration without understanding that we are dealing with unlimited flows of investment, and new forms of capitalism. And I would like to emphasise that when we talk about the capitalist development in this particular region, it is not something like the 'free market' as Adam Smith argued. It is capital-

ism which allows - depending on or making use of several forms of politics - different forms of informality and different types of mechanisms which can facilitate capital. You can have corruption as a part of capitalism. You can have a group of people who can monopolise natural resources and at the same time they can displace people from the land they have subsisted on. Because of capitalism you can exploit 'cheap labour' from the neighbouring countries. You can build up new dams so that you can have more energy to support industry or even the rapid train that China is proposing. We will see the economic integration for what? Such a kind of capitalism may not benefit a large number of people, such a kind of capitalism allows certain groups of people to reap the benefit from this neoliberal market but at the same time exploit natural resources, labourers, and especially women and children. So I am very concerned and quite sceptical about what is called ASEAN economic community, which will happen in the year 2015, because when they talk about ASEAN economic community they do not talk about inequality. ASEAN economy is not going to eradicate poverty, on the contrary: It will make a group of people richer whereas other people have to be sacrificed.

Napakadol: My home town is in Nong Khai, a Thai-Lao border province, that has recently been looked at as a new channel or opportunity for economic activities after a long period of 'sleeping border' since Laos became a socialist country and the border got strictly controlled. The local people now have been informed that in post-ASEAN 2015 they will have the golden age of border trade again. Now we have seen more investments there, for example, China has pushed huge economic activities in Laos plus several proposed 'development' plans for the near future. There is a saying that Nong Khai border will be 'boiling up' with commerce. Some people may regard this as the chance for the periphery to become the centre. Do you think the 'border' could become the 'centre' both in terms of economy and politics?

Chayan: I am not sure whether I understand the term 'centre' here properly but I would say the social scientists and scholars should pay more attention to borderlands because this is where the intersection of market, culture, and people happens. Also, the border is more or less the peripheral area of the country, so not many people are interested in looking at borderlands closely. Many things can happen, as

I said, the interaction between legal and illegal activities, between armed groups, between people from different cultures and from different ethnic backgrounds. It has to be the 'centre' of our attention, and the centre of studies in the next decade since it has been left out for a long time, so centre in that sense. And you may have heard that there are trends that have been coined as 'Economic Zone at the Border' like in Trat province…

Napakadol: Yes, connected to Cambodia…

Chayan: Trat province now becomes what is called 'CP Empire' creating big investments there such as shrimp farming, meaning that the mangrove forest there will be destroyed or that some parts of it have already been destroyed. The new airport is being built by Bangkok Airways to host the tourists before going to Koh Chang. Mae Sai is also *the* economic zone at the border as well as Tavoy in Burma. So not only from an academic perspective but also from economic, cultural, and political aspects you can realize that borderlands become increasingly important as the arena for contestation, investment, and exploitation.

Napakadol: Thank you very much for your time.

Südostasien sehen / South-East Asia Visually

Capturing Singapore's 'Little India': The Search for Identity in Traditional Photo Studios

Kuba Ryniewicz[1] & Christian Bothe[2]
Photos & Text Text

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In popular iconography, in media, advertisement or touristic images, Singapore is popularly seen and depicted as a multinational space peppered with world-finance institutes in hi-tech skyscrapers symbolising growth, development and progress. Often, visual and pictorial representation of the city focuses on future imagination, or on present achievements- virtually banning any signs, symbols and spaces from the past. When tourists walk around looking for postcards, the ones they will find will most probably depict recent architectural icons or scenes of modern or urban landscapes.

Besides a pictorial conflict between modernity and traditions of the past one can also observe a cultural dichotomy. In this sense, most cultural influences stemming from Singapore's ethnically heterogeneous citizens run the risk of becoming marginalised, especially in the city centre which presents itself in a Westernised appearance, dominated by an aura of the internationalisation. One of these unique cultural marks, the mere existence of which contradicts the visual hegemony of Westernised interna-

1 Kuba Ryniewicz, former student of Philosophy at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland, finished Contemporary Photographic Practice at Northumbria University in Newcastle, England. He is interested in aesthetic mutations in photography & film, works in Independent Cinema, as freelance photographer, and writes for *Polish Quarterly Fotografia*. He would describe himself as highly inspired by street pop culture, wild camping, solo travels, spirits and ghosts of nature and cemeteries. Photo works have been published in magazines such as *Tiny Vices* (USA), *Capricious* (USA), *Holy Ghost* (UK), *Punkt* (PL), *Fotografia* (PL), *Things Magazine* (UK), *Dust & Dessert* (Australia) and exhibited in the UK, Poland, Malaysia, and Indonesia. He visited Singaporean Little India in July. For this project he used various 35mm cameras such as Nikon EM, Zenith, and compact cameras. In addition, he applied a number of self-made lens filters from non-photographic materials such as trash or dust that he collected on the streets surrounding Little India. These additional elements helped to achieve a distinct visual appearance alluding to the era of analogue photo production and produced and transmitted a hypnagogic reflection of a pop photography past - when the real meets the surreal or something in-between. Contact kuba.ryn@gmail.com. Website: http://photo-bubblebath.tumblr.com/

2 Christian Bothe is the director of SEAS and a member of the ASEAS editorial board


CENTRE
READYMADE
&
TAILORING

tionality, is Singaporean Little India located east of Singapore River near Chinatown. The Indian community in Singapore is a living carrier of a distinct variant of Tamil cultural heritage and – within the local Tamil community - is know as *Tekka*.

According to the recent census data Indians account for nine percent of the country's population, which makes it Singapore's third largest ethnic group after Chinese and Malays. Over 348,000 citizens in Singapore are of Indians descent[3] – which is one of the largest Indian overseas population (Singapore Departmen of Statistics, 2010, p.35).

Entering Singaporean Little India is like entering a separate island, where the law of time functions differently from the outside world and almost mystical elements and images of a past decade appear in front of the visitor, which actually only seems to be so long gone because of the huge contrast to the encircling quarters that makes the latter appear as long forgotten already. Some elements of Singaporean Little India appear especially outstanding for representing almost disappeared cultural practices and visual codes. These were the traditional photo studios just off the Serangoon Road, the main commercial street in Little India. Two of them were selected as icons of cultural identity production and witnesses of cultural adherence. *Sajeev Digital Studio* and *Gandhi Video* are loci of traditional cultural ethnic practices situated right in the heart of Singapore and they are extraordinary examples of some rare places that could manage to endure in spaces whose economic logic would usually deprive them of any right to coexist. The proximity of these studios to Singapore's spatial testimonials of modernity makes the appearance of traditional photo studios even more superficial and has them constitute a kind of borderland/zone not only between different economic and cultural logics but also between progress and past, digital vs. analogue era and techniques. Usually we would have expected these places to be vanished from the streets already some time ago, but in certain cases they are sustained by people appreciating the cultural goods and practices they produce and constitute themselves.

Traditional photographic studios release dreams into reality and through this produce a new world of memories. Surprisingly the rapidly rising number of digital cameras and therewith the "empowerment" of the home and amateur user as a photo & visual producer did not change the popular demand for traditional photos in Hindu and Muslim communities. These communities still rely on professional photographers and

3 The Census Report specifies ethnic group as referring to a to "a person's race . . . as declared by the person. *Indian* refers to persons of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan origin such as Tamils, Malayalis, Punjabis, Bengalis, Singhalese, etc" (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010, p.35).

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GANDHI VIDEO
விஜயகாந்த் உறுப்பினர் கார்டு
இங்கே கிடைக்கும்.
விஜயகாந்த் நற்பணி மன்றம்
$3
PASSPORT
PHOTO
FAX
XEROX
PASSPORT
PHOTO
$3.
காந்தி
சிங்கப்பூரில்

the culturally distinct representation of reality which is also uniquely framed through the technical means of production. Through hand painted backdrops, plastic flowers, pillars and other props these photo-studios keep traditions alive in their own spirit. Each photograph presents a particular aesthetic appearance – often so different from the visual character of everyday life – that extends these lives to a sphere through culture and time specific image production and extends the visual frame of human life. The traditional photo studies discovered and depicted in this photo submission mark a cultural, traditional and visual oasis in buzzing metropolis. They constitute places, where everything is possible, where dreams come true. For Indian photo-studios, Singapore is a foreign land and a frontier. Seeing their mutations within that border zone is pretty unusual and it is worth to consider it as a pop heritage by which I understand a fusion between tradition and pop culture, a kind of informal consensus within mainstream culture, where the second one can be called a modern tradition, but is still not classified as part of the official heritage. There are not many cultures like the Indian one where folk and visual documents are so firmly connected to the photographic industry, making photo studios and their products strong rich symbols and carriers of cultural identity.

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Singapore Department of Statistics. (2010). *Census of Population 2010. Advance Census Release*. Last retrieved 5 December 2011, from http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/c2010acr.pdf

1 LITTLE INDIA - Little India is located pretty much in the centre of Singapore. Judging from the look of the area one weirdly has the impression of actually being in India, not Singapore. Initially I did not know where in particular to go, but the crowd and hand-painted street adverts told me that I am in the right place to search for traditional Indian photo studios.

2 POST JEWELLERY - Despite the fact that Little India was not affected too hard by the recession of 2008 many shops in the area empty. Here bright red velvet showcases without items rest as relicts of a jewellery shop. No gold, no silver any more. Although these jewellery shops are strongly associated with Indian culture, a lot of them did not survive while others managed to successfully continue their existence.

3 IN FRONT OF GANDHI VIDEO - Looking deeply into many streets of the Indian quarter in Singapore, only two studios were found, surprisingly both on the same street. *Gandhi Video*, a very modern studio and *Sajeev Photo Studio* of a rather traditional type. Both appeared in strong contrast to the modern and international encircling quarters but within their visual tradition and production technique also contrasted each other. While one

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focuses on traditional techniques, uses hand-painted backdrops and real props, the other one mainly applies digital techniques for crafting a background and the overall motive creation. Other photography shops were found in the neighbourhood, too, but unlike these two the others did not provide any portraiture space. From a cultural identity perspective this seems to be quite relevant since from representation of gods in Hinduism to Bollywood Indian culture the visual code is extremely portraiture orientated. Over the years, many traditional studios were converted into photography related multitasking shops and service providers with fax, Xerox, and other devices. Similar to such shops in India, studios adapt to market needs and go multifunctional but some of them, like *Gandhi Video* still keep their service of producing traditional portraits – although nowadays the backdrops used in the photos are often pure digital creation instead of hand-made paintings.

4 INSIDE GANDHI VIDEO - *Gandhi Video* has very limited space. Customers can not enter the premises unless they have previously arranged an appointment with a photographer. Only one person at a time is allowed.

5 INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - During my short visit to the studio, I noticed the extreme popularity of this place amongst the Indian population. There were moments when one had to line in the queue already outside the front doors. Partly adapting to modern demands, *Sajeev Digital Studio* offers digital prints and photo copying but does not give up the production of intensively modified and stylised portraits.

6 ALMOST ICONIC - INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - These images depict extremely popular trends back from the 1970ies. Often popular aesthetics of portrait photos consist of a mixture between religion, folk tradition and cinema. To many Indians, Bollywood, Lollywood, and other local film industries have a much stronger influence than Hollywood or Western

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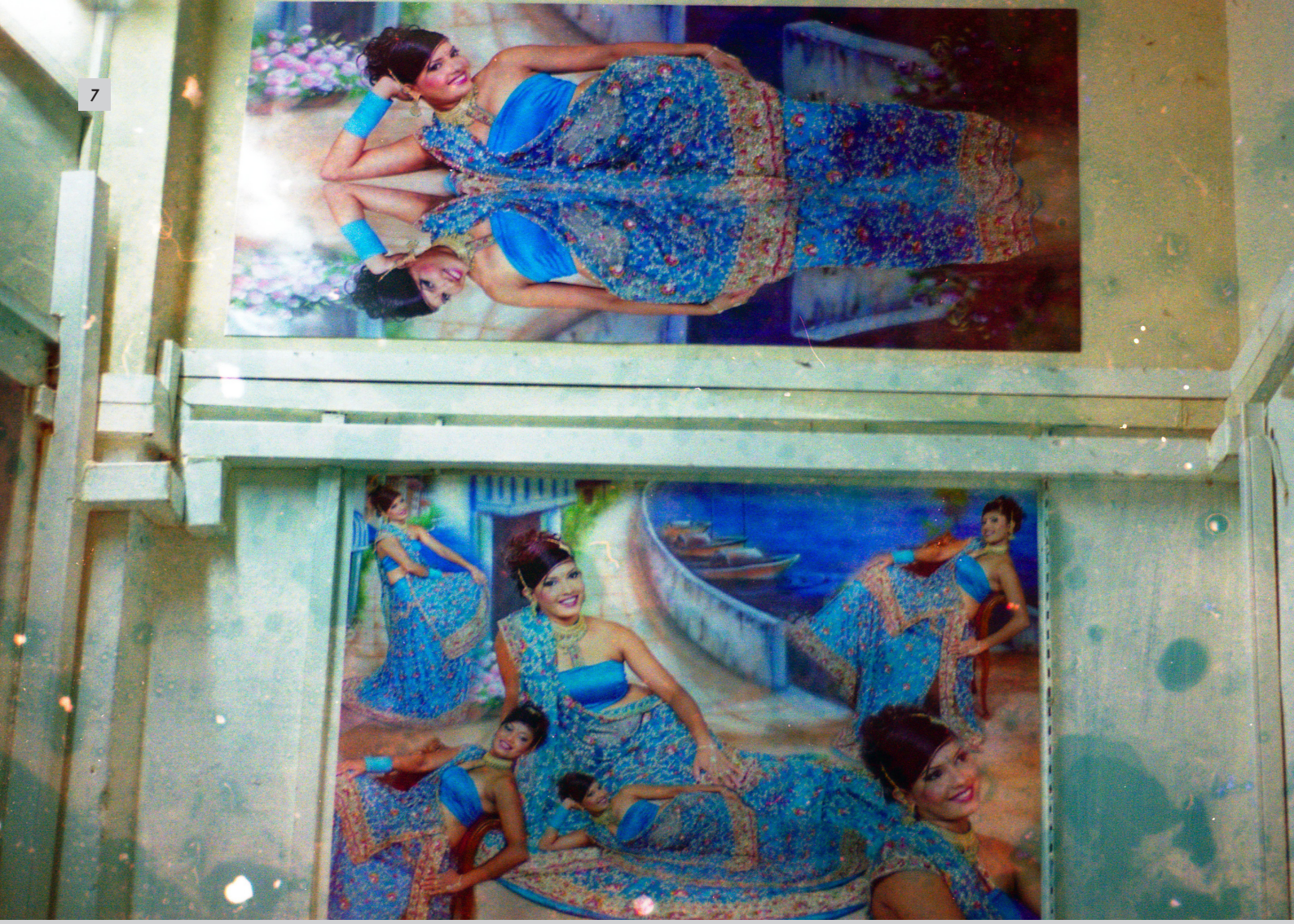

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culture in general. To outsiders, these portraits might appear funny and sometimes ridiculous – to Indians they are common visual cultural code. Above the photo of the young boy one can find a portrait of the studio owner - working in a dark room which does not exist anymore today.

7 DIGITAL MUTATIONS - INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - Variations in photographic trends and image styles are visible everywhere in the studio - probably the most common style is to multiply the motive. Can this be interpreted as a sign of the time? In any case it seems clear that digital technology pushes the popular aesthetics and visual imaginations into new spheres that further depart from reality or real world visual appearances. Often in contemporary Indian photo studios digital backgrounds nowadays replace the formerly hand-painted backdrops. Background can also become totally abstract or sometimes laced with obscure details. In the analogue past 'being multiplied' on the photograph was possible but not so common due to the enormous technical effort. In Indian pop photography one can however find some examples of this technique- mainly in wedding photographs. Back in the day photographers or developers used scissors and glue instead of Photoshop or other photo retouching software. Some of the images were nevertheless done so well that is hard to believe they were hand retouched.

8 WALL OF PORTRAITS - INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - Copies of the passport photos shot in the studio were pinned on walls and ceiling and filled the whole studio. Surprisingly almost all of them present males only. Even though most of them are serve as common and functional portrait shots most are done in front of traditionally hand made backdrop landscapes. I have been told by the photographers inside the studio that the most common portraits these days are just simple passport style shots - often with the various backdrops though. Although stylised photography lives on in Little India some

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trends to more neutral photography can also be found. For example traditional photographs created in professional studios in India often contain colourful and patterned borders. Both studios I visited in Singapore do not do that anymore. I was told that there is no need for this these days. This was probably the biggest difference to studios in India itself, particularly to Rajasthan, where borders are an inseparable element of the photograph.

9 THE PHOTOGRAPHER - INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - I was pretty surprised when I asked where the upwards stairs would lead to: there was another studio in the studio. Inside the upstairs studio, I was not allowed to take more than one photo. The reasons were not clear, but I felt I had to respect this decision. For making the best of it I asked the photographer who took a photo of me to now also pose in front of my camera.

10 ANALOGUE REMNANTS - INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - Although digital medium has a total monopoly in the studio, there are plenty signs of the past analogue photographic techniques. Already the front doors serve as a stock of used negatives and films - it is a trace of the romantic and nostalgic to chemical photography past when photography was much more a craftsmanship. Even though I could buy negative film in Sajeev's place, there is no more usage of analogue film cameras there anymore. Next to empty negative film cases some analogue shots were still displayed in the shop's windows – but not changed for several years and already bleached by the sun.

11 36 IN 1 - INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - It was quite surprising- why this man appears on the window display on so many exactly the same photographs? Later I realised this is Mr Sajeev, founder and owner of the studio. What could better represent the importance of portraits as this decorative choice?


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MICHELIN
MOTUL

12 MR. SAJEEV & A CLASSICAL CHINESE PORTRAIT - INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - Even in busy Singapore there seems to be some spare time to keep up the habit of visiting a photo studio like Mr. Sajeev's. Main customers are of course Indians who live here, but on the walls one can also find photographs of ethnic Chinese couples and others. Their photos appear to be of a somehow different character. They are more classical in their posing and have more sincere facial expressions. It appears as if they choose these classical poses because the photo studios seem to have a different value and purpose for them. Most portrait photos of non-Indian ethnic communities found in the studio depict a specific or special occasion, such as a degree ceremony or the wedding. In contrast to that, the photos depicting members of the Indian community seem to have a cultural dimension of their own – not depicting a cultural scene or rite. Next to the portrait of the Chinese couple and in the centre of the picture: a photograph of Mr. Sajeev - the owner of the studio - residing in a glamorous picture frame above the counter. In the foreground- his daughter who works on the front desk but also does passport portraits in the back room. In the picture, Mr. Sajeev is proudly presenting his at that time state-of-the-art and passionately desired VHS camera.

13 KUBA RYNIEWICZ – INSIDE SAJEEV DIGITAL STUDIO - Photo Studios in Poland, which disappeared rapidly after 1989 and the end of the communist era had an enormous impact on my approach to photography and to the visualisation of my memories. Visiting a photo studio was something unique and always associated with special occasions such as First Communion, weddings or birthdays. For a number of years I did not realise how strong their impact on my personal memories was. In 2008 I visited the western coast of India and Rajasthan. It was hard to believe that in one of the central production countries of globalised digital camera industry, so many traditional and popular photo studios survived. This journey made me recall nostalgic moments of my childhood and pushed me to search for more information about this tradition in India. For the above photo I simply asked if the staff at Sajeev Digital Studio could take a beautiful portrait of me. This is the result. For 15 Singaporean Dollars (around 9 Euros), I got three copies of the same photograph, for a scan I would have had to pay an additional fee.

Rezensionen / Book Reviews

Phraxayavong, Viliam (2009).
History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts.

Chiang Mai, Thailand: Mekong Press. ISBN: 978-611-90053-0-3. 322 pages.

Citation Schippers, L.-K. (2011). Book Review: Phraxayavong, V. (2009). History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts. *ASEAS - Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 4*(2), 338-342.

With his book *History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts*, Viliam Phraxayavong offers an outstanding and insightful analysis of the impact of more than fifty years of development assistance on Laos. It can be regarded as a soon-to-be classic for anyone from students and academics to development practitioners interested in understanding foreign aid in Laos.

The book emanates from Phraxayavong's PhD thesis at the University of Sydney, Australia, and much of the book's authority can be attributed to Phraxayavong's personal experience in the field of development assistance in his former position as director of international economic co-operation in the Royal Lao Government (RLG) from 1965 to 1975 and as aid co-ordinator under the Lao PDR government from 1981 to 1984. Therefore, his personal life and work experience strongly inform his writing.

Phraxayavong embeds his analysis in a sophisticated discussion of development assistance. Debates surrounding dependency, conditionality, poverty alleviation, and governance are consulted and serve as his framework of interpretation. He thereby draws a complex picture of the motivations and impacts behind more than half a century of foreign aid to Laos.

The outstanding achievement of this book is the empirically rich analysis of how aid was (and indeed still is) tied to different external interests during different periods and the mapping of the various conflicting interests between the donor agents. In Phraxayavong's words "the Lao political battlefield" (p. xvii) is characterised by antagonistic external interests. However, the author manages to overcome a one-sided analysis of the dynamics of external assistance by shedding light on the motivations of the different Lao governments in receiving aid. Instead of solely focusing on the

external interests vis-à-vis the Lao state, the motivations of the Lao elite in receiving aid are considered as well. Phraxayavong thereby deconstructs the "hidden agendas of giving and receiving aid" (p. 277).

The first chapter aims at clarifying the various theoretical concepts about development assistance. Aid is conceptualised as a mirror of the donor's commercial and political interest, and it is generally tied to specific interests and conditions (p. 32). Phraxayavong's critical stance towards foreign aid is made clear by the following statement: "Foreign aid has therefore been a force for anti-development in that it retards growth through reduced savings and worsens income inequalities" (p. 41). Hence, the negative effects of foreign aid on Laos receive special investigation in this publication.

After discussing theoretical concepts in the first chapter, the following chapters of the book are chronologically divided into four blocks to which Phraxayavong attributes the major turning points in the history of aid to Laos.

Phraxayavong describes the first phase from 1950 to 1954 as being characterised by the changing spheres of influence to Laos. In 1949, Laos became independent from France, albeit still a member of the French Union as an Associated State. During this phase the financial dependence of the RLG towards France was still strong and accompanied by US economic assistance.

The focus of assistance was in the field of military aid, and development aid only played a minor role. The Geneva Conference in 1954 gave independence to the Indochinese states of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and forced France to withdraw from these countries. Yet, the discontentment with years of French colonialism led to insurgencies by the *Lao Issara* ('Free Lao') movement. The subsequent instable political situation drove the RLG into the arms of foreign, especially US, assistance. As a result, US aid became highly influential in Laos in the mid-fifties.

The strength of the analysis in the next chapter lies, first, in uncovering the consequences that US political involvement had on the internal political stability of Laos, and second, in the detailed discussion of the various sources of aid to Laos, as well as the highly diverging objectives and rationales behind giving aid.

The second turn in the history of aid relates to the phase from 1955 to 1975. This period was marked by the attempt of the US and its allies to contain Communism in the region and to exclude the communist *Pathet Lao* movement from the governing

coalition. During the 1960s US aid was still mainly understood as military aid. The US financed the Royal Lao Army (RLA) and the CIA created a Hmong Clandestine Army in order to create a military force against the Pathet Lao and the Northern Vietnamese communists. Additionally, some kind of "parallel government" (p. 129) was installed. The author's discussion of the congressional hearings of 1971 reveals the appalling fact that a large amount of official US aid was actually diverted to CIA's paramilitary efforts in Laos. Thus, the US used the financial dependency of the RLG and RLA "as a tool to shape Laos' politics and government" (p. 78). Phraxayavong depicts how accepting aid from the US forced Laos into the Secret War with its disastrous consequences for the Lao people.

When the Pathet Lao took over state power in 1975, the US Agency for International Development's mission to Laos closed down with the result that the entire Lao state and economy collapsed. Together with other stark examples, Phraxayavong proves with impressing detail how dependent the RLG was on the US interest in the region. He even claims that because of aid mismanagement, the Pathet Lao eventually replaced the RLG, although this claim might seem a bit overstretched.

An additional strength of the chapter is the discussion of the various bilateral as well as multilateral donors and their diverging interests vis-à-vis Laos. The author presents an elaborated and precise account of the various motivations behind aid giving and also considers the economic, social, and political impacts of foreign assistance on Laos.

The third major transformation in the history of aid occurred from 1976 to 1985 and is linked to the communist regime and its dependence on aid. The communist leaders depended heavily on foreign assistance from the very beginning. The assistance from the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), also known as the 'communist bloc', was crucial for its survival. Especially revealing is that aid was not given out of mere socialist solidarity, but loans were expected to be paid back and the commercial and business interests attached to aid were not any different from 'Western' donors. Communist Vietnam took a special role in Lao political affairs and the author illustrates well the different forms of aid aimed at securing its influence.

The fourth turning point relates to the period from 1986 to 2005 with the transition from a centralised economy to a market economy. With the adaptation of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986, the influence of 'Western' donors and

international financial institutions increased again. Finally, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Lao government mainly relied on development assistance from donors such as the various UN agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and bilateral organisations. The author again presents an in-depth analysis of the impact of various interests articulated through the manifold bilateral and multilateral development programmes. Accepting foreign aid did not only prove beneficial for Laos, rather the author makes clear that each apparent 'benefit' was also accompanied by a detriment. Yet, Phraxayavong holds foreign actors as well as the Lao elite responsible for the failure of the development agendas to bring about social improvement to the Lao people.

Throughout the book Phraxayavong takes a critical stance towards the continuing dependency on aid. His point of view is that the various commercial interests and ideological visions inscribed in the foreign development agendas have made Laos especially prone to foreign interest. At the same time, however, the Lao elite has been using aid to pursue their own personal, economic, and political objectives.

In his conclusion, Phraxayavong draws a grim picture of the possibility for Laos to lessen its dependency on aid. In his opinion, Laos has become a "tool of the donor" (p. 280).

It is very questionable, however, if such a labelling is appropriate, as any victimisation of 'Laos' oversees that there are actually parts of the Lao society that highly benefit from the condition of aid dependency. Although Phraxayavong at times adheres to such a differentiated analysis, sometimes the analysis of who benefits and who loses from the condition of dependency does not go deep enough.

To sum up, despite such minor shortcomings, Phraxayavong lives up to the expectation he raises at the outset of the book. The impressive empirical data used to support his thesis come along with an excellent analysis of the impact that development aid had on Laos. The central tenor of the book is that "for Laos, aid brought considerable harm to the country and the people as a whole. For almost fifty years, the impacts upon Laos were unimaginable and their costs immeasurable" (p. 30). This reproach still holds true today, especially in regard to the controversial aid-funded mega-projects such as in hydropower, transportation infrastructure, and mining with their inestimable consequences for generations of Lao people.

The fact that development assistance has a major influence on the functioning of most states in the global South make it a topic of continuous attention. Phraxayavong's *History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts* is a prime example of a critical investigation and indeed can serve as an impetus for similar well-grounded analyses in other parts of the world.

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Rezensionen / Book Reviews

Schröter, Susannne (Hrsg.) (2010). Christianity in Indonesia: Perspectives of Power.

Münster, Deutschland: LIT Verlag. ISBN: 978-3-643-10798-5. 420 Seiten.

Citation Warta, C. (2011). Rezension: Schröter, S. (Hrsg.) (2010). Christianity in Indonesia: Perspectives of Power. *ASEAS - Österreichische Zeitschrift für Südostasienwissenschaften, 4*(2), 343-348.

Der Sammelband *Christianity in Indonesia* ist das Resultat der 2003 an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt abgehaltenen, gleichnamigen Konferenz, deren Resultate, wie die Herausgeberin Susanne Schröter bemerkt, in Abstimmung mit ihrem damaligen Mitveranstalter Edwin Wieringa, nicht publiziert wurden. Der Grund dafür war die Schwierigkeit, aus unterschiedlichsten Wissenschaftsrichtungen kommende Beiträge in einer Publikation zu vereinen. Stattdessen entschied sich die Herausgeberin für einen Sammelband aus sozialanthropologischer Perspektive „in the broadest sense" (S. 5), der auf der besagten Konferenz aufbaut und im Laufe der Jahre durch zusätzliche Beiträge ergänzt wurde. Schröters Anspruch blieb jedoch bestehen, nämlich sozial- und kulturwissenschaftliche, politikwissenschaftliche, philosophische, historische und letztendlich auch theologische Zugänge im Rahmen eines interdisziplinären Ansatzes mit sozialanthropologischem Fokus zu vereinen und dadurch neue Erkenntnisse zum Christentum in Indonesien bereitzustellen. Das Ergebnis ist ein thematisch äußerst weitgefasster Sammelband, dessen Beiträge sich nicht nur qualitativ unterscheiden, sondern auch die Grenzen des Regionalgebiets Indonesien sprengen. Trotz der etwas schwierig nachvollziehbaren Auswahl der Beiträge und den nicht immer zu erkennenden Zusammenhängen beurteile ich den vorliegenden Sammelband gerade aufgrund seiner vielfältigen Zugänge als durchaus lesenswert und bezeichne ihn als einen ersten gewagten Schritt in die interdisziplinäre Beschäftigung mit dem Christentum in Indonesien.

Bevor ich näher auf den Inhalt eingehe, bedarf es noch einer kurzen Erklärung zur Anthropologie des Christentums: Innerhalb der Sozialanthropologie entwickelte sich in den letzten Jahren ein zunehmendes Interesse am Christentum, was an einer

Vielzahl an Publikationen sichtbar ist und Fenella Cannell 2006 dazu veranlasste eine *Anthropology of Christianity* zu etablieren. Dieses Interesse entsprang unter anderem Debatten über die Rückkehr des Religiösen als Reaktion auf die Globalisierung und den damit verbundenen Umbrüchen bestehender Weltordnungen. In diesen durchaus kontroversen Auseinandersetzungen wird nicht nur das Fortbestehen des Nationalstaats in Frage gestellt, sondern auch ein Ende des säkularen Zeitalters thematisiert. Folglich befasst sich die Anthropologie des Christentums vorzugsweise mit transnationalen, politisch-religiösen Kräften, die, in lokalen Kontexten analysiert, als Einzelstudien zum Gesamtbild eines sich neu formierenden Christentums beitragen. Besonderes Augenmerk gilt dabei den religiösen Bewegungen in postkolonialen Gesellschaften. In manchen Regionen, beispielsweise in Melanesien, manifestierte sich das Christentum oft auch in sogenannten Ethno-Theologien, die von westlichen theologischen Auslegungen abweichen, sich jedoch wesentlich an biblischen Inhalten orientieren und diese auch zur Grundlage politischen Handelns machen. In diesem Umgestaltungsprozess, in dem sich traditionelle religiöse Vorstellungen mit christlichen arrangieren, spielen neuere transnationale religiöse Bewegungen, wie beispielsweise das charismatische Pfingstlertum, eine bedeutende Rolle. Letzteres kennzeichnet sich teilweise durch eine relativ stark ausgeprägte Intoleranz gegenüber anderen religiösen Auffassungen, was sich auch in Indonesien in einem zunehmend angespannten Verhältnis zum Islam bemerkbar macht. In Verbindung zu diesen transnationalen religiösen Kräften ist auch die landesweite Revitalisierungsbewegung von Tradition und Brauchtum (*Adat*) zu sehen, die seit dem erzwungenen Rücktritt von Präsident Suharto im Jahre 1998 im Rahmen der derzeitigen Dezentralisierungspolitik zunehmend an Einfluss gewinnt. Interessanterweise ist die Revitalisierung von *Adat* dort am stärksten, wo der Islam vergleichsweise schwächer ausgeprägt ist, was sich auch in den ethnographischen Beiträgen dieses Sammelbandes reflektiert, von denen sich die meisten mit ethno-religiösen Konflikten im Osten Indonesiens beschäftigen. Wie sich transnationale religiöse Strömungen gepaart mit der Revitalisierung von *Adat* auf die Zukunft Indonesiens auswirken und mit dem pluralistischen Nationalstaat vereinen lassen, ist daher die primäre Frage der Gegenwart. Vor diesem Hintergrund sollte *Christianity in Indonesia* gelesen werden.

Bereits in der Einleitung wird deutlich, dass der Sammelband auf religiöse Konflikte fokussiert. Nach einem kurzen historischen Überblick führt das Überblickskapitel

in die Gegenwart, wo es mit einer Darstellung der Revitalisierung des indonesischen Islam und damit verbundenen interreligiösen Spannungen abschließt. Spätestens hier wäre die Erwähnung eines sich ebenfalls „revitalisierenden" und keineswegs passiven Christentums wünschenswert.

Eine genauere Auseinandersetzung mit der Geschichte des Christentums bieten die ersten drei Kapitel. Den mit über 50 Seiten längsten Beitrag verfasste der Theologe Olaf Schuman, der nicht nur Indonesien, sondern auch Malaysia und Brunei miteinbezieht. Schuman zeigt vor allem die Verflechtungen von Kolonisierung und Missionierung auf, betont aber gleichzeitig, dass diese keine neue Erkenntnis sei. Diesem kirchengeschichtlich durchaus interessanten und detaillierten Beitrag folgt eine Exkursion ins Britische Malaya der Jahre 1890 bis 1928. Auch dieser vom Südostasienwissenschafter Holger Warnk verfasste Text, der sich der Produktion von malaiischen Schulbüchern widmet, zeigt auf anschauliche Weise, wie koloniale Bildungspolitik und Mission sich ergänzten, nicht zuletzt um westliche Werte und Konzepte zu verbreiten.

Mit dem Beitrag des interkulturellen Theologen Karel Steenbrink verlagert sich dann der Fokus – dem Buchtitel entsprechend – wieder auf Indonesien. Mit Hauptaugenmerk auf die katholische Kirche thematisiert Steenbrink die Macht des Geldes. Dabei zeigt er auf, wie die katholische Kirche sich durch internationale Entwicklungsprojektgelder einen weitgehend autonomen Status aufbauen konnte und zu einer mächtigen Institution in den Schlüsselbereichen Bildung, Gesundheit und Medien heranwuchs. Internationale Finanztransfers, die dies lange Zeit ermöglichten, wurden 1978 von der Regierung strikten Reglements unterworfen und mehr oder weniger zur Staatsangelegenheit gemacht. Steenbrink erwähnt in seiner Conclusio auch die islamischen Bildungseinrichtungen, die seit den 1990er-Jahren zunehmend mit den kirchlichen Institutionen gleichziehen und gibt seiner Verwunderung Ausdruck, dass diese auffällige Konkurrenz im innerkirchlichen Dialog bisher kaum Erwähnung fand. Damit kündigt Steenbrink auch schon den Schwerpunkt des zweiten Teils dieses Sammelbandes an, nämlich die gegenwärtige Konkurrenz von Islam und Christentum in Indonesien.

Zuvor aber betonen die Beiträge von Susanne Schröter und Raymond Corbey die innerchristliche Konkurrenz und die unterschiedlichen Auswirkungen protestantischer und katholischer Missionstätigkeit auf lokale religiöse Vorstellungen. Während

Schröters ethnographische Studie zum indigenisierten Katholizismus der Ngada auf der Insel Flores die Toleranz der katholischen Kirche gegenüber traditionellen Glaubenselementen positiv hervorhebt und darin einen wesentlichen Unterschied zur protestantischen Kirche erkennen lässt, greift Corbey in seinem undifferenzierten, historischen Beitrag das bereits ausführlich behandelte Thema der destruktiven Auswirkungen missionarischer Tätigkeit auf.

Im Gegensatz zur eher indirekten Befassung mit religiösen Konflikten im ersten Teil des Bandes, weist der zweite Teil bereits in der Überschrift explizit auf diese hin: Lokale Konflikte, religiöse Rhetorik und praktizierter Pluralismus in Indonesien sind behandelte Themen. Die kulturanthropologischen Beiträge von Susanne Rodemeier und Dieter Bartels betonen vorerst die Rolle des lokalen *Adat* und sehen dieses als Grundlage friedlicher Koexistenz. Während Rodemeier den Verlust einer auf gemeinsamen Ahnenvorstellungen aufgebauten Identität als mögliche Ursache für zukünftige religiöse Konflikte im Alor-Pantar-Archipel interpretiert, zeigt Dieter Bartels anhand der Molukken, wie der regulierende Einfluss des lokalen *Adat* mit zunehmender staatlicher und religiöser Institutionalisierung zu schwinden begann, und erkennt darin auch die primäre Ursache für den im Jahre 1999 zwischen ChristInnen und MuslimInnen ausgebrochenen Molukken-Konflikt.

Die Sozial- und Kulturanthropologin Birgit Bräuchler untersucht hingegen die Repräsentationen des Molukken-Konflikts im Internet. Deutlich zeigt die Autorin auf, wie ethnische Zugehörigkeiten durch religiöse Identitäten überlagert wurden und die ursprünglich für ihre guten interreligiösen Beziehungen bekannte Bevölkerung sich entlang religiöser Linien spaltete. Moderne Kommunikationstechnologien spielten dabei eine wesentliche Rolle, denn sie ermöglichten nicht nur Allianzen mit außenstehenden AkteurInnen, sondern auch ein Forum für die Repräsentation des Konflikts im virtuellen Raum. Über die lokale Ebene und den Einfluss des Staates hinaus beeinflusste das strategisch eingesetzte Internet nicht nur den Konflikt selbst, sondern ermöglichte auch die Betonung religiöser Identitäten auf nationaler und transnationaler Ebene. Bräuchlers Beitrag ist äußerst zeitgemäß und richtungsweisend, obwohl er bereits in ähnlichen Versionen internationale Bekanntheit erlangte. Konflikte werden heute zunehmend auch über das Internet ausgetragen und können daher nicht mehr als lokale, von globalen Einflüssen unberührte, Phänomene verstanden werden. Insofern wäre es wünschenswert, wenn Bräuchlers Zugang auch in anderen

Konfliktregionen Anwendung finden würde. Mit muslimisch-christlichen Rivalitäten und religiös gefärbten nationalistischen Ansprüchen beschäftigt sich der informative Beitrag der Kulturanthropologin Lorraine V. Aragon, die davor warnt, den in den späten 1990er-Jahren ausgebrochenen Poso-Konflikt in Zentral-Sulawesi als rein religiös motiviert zu interpretieren. Vielmehr definiert die Autorin Transmigrationsbewegungen und den Kampf um natürliche Ressourcen als wesentliche Grundmotive. Dabei beschränkt sich ihr Blick keineswegs auf das Lokale, sondern betrachtet auch nationale und transnationale Faktoren, um zu verstehen, wie Migration, wirtschaftlicher Druck und Staat auf die unterschiedlichen religiösen Gruppen einwirkten. Aragon zeigt hier hervorragend auf, dass lokale Phänomene erst durch diesen transnationalen Blick erklärbar werden. Einen ähnlichen Weitblick weisen auch die Beiträge des Kulturanthropologen Sven Kosel und des Islamwissenschaftlers Hasan Noorhaidi auf, die sich beide mit Themen beschäftigen, die heute das östliche Indonesien in Bewegung setzen. Sven Kosel geht der Frage nach, inwieweit die vorwiegend christlichen Minahasa im Norden von Sulawesi aufgrund ihrer religiösen und ethnischen Identität eine Unabhängigkeit von Indonesien anstreben. Dazu konzentriert er sich auf religiös-politische Bewegungen, insbesondere auf christlich-paramilitärische Gruppen. Diese sehen sich selbst als Verteidiger des durch die *Pancasila*-Staatsideologie garantierten religiösen Pluralismus und formieren sich gegen eine befürchtete Islamisierung. Kosel relativiert hier das Bild eines defensiven Christentums und zeigt am Beispiel von Nordsulawesi, was auch in Papua für Zündstoff sorgt, nämlich die Verbindung von Christentum und Unabhängigkeit. Hier schließt auch der Beitrag von Hasan Noorhaidi an, der sein Augenmerk auf die Christianisierungsvermutungen fundamentalistischer islamischer Gruppierungen legt. Noorhaidi kommt auf die vorwiegend im östlichen Indonesien verbreiteten Verschwörungstheorien einer gegen den Islam gerichteten jüdisch-christlichen Allianz zu sprechen. Die Annahme einer globalen zionistisch-christlichen Verschwörung, so der Autor, dient radikalen islamischen Gruppierungen als Legitimation für ihr gegen das Christentum gerichtetes Auftreten. Davon, dass derartige Gerüchte nicht nur in Nordsulawesi, sondern auch in den Molukken und Papua zirkulieren, konnte ich mich bei meinen aktuellen Forschungen selbst überzeugen. Auch in diesem hervorragenden Beitrag werden die essentiellen Zusammenhänge von lokalen Konflikten und nationalen bzw. transnationalen Bewegungen ersichtlich.

Religionsfreiheit wird heute mehr denn je infrage gestellt, resümiert schließlich der Philosoph und Jesuit Franz Magnis-Suseno, der im Schlusswort dieses Sammelbandes über den religiösen Pluralismus in Indonesien reflektiert. Ob bzw. wie die Wahrheitsansprüche abrahamitischer Religionen mit dem Ideal einer pluralistischen Gesellschaft vereinbar sind, werde die Zukunft der indonesischen Gesellschaft wesentlich mitbestimmen. Noch sieht Magnis-Suseno die lange Tradition der interkulturellen und interreligiösen Koexistenz als wichtigste gesellschaftliche Kraft für ein friedliches Miteinander. Inwieweit religiöse Radikalisierung dieses Miteinander in ein Gegeneinander umkehren kann, werde laut Magnis-Suseno davon abhängen, wie sehr Korruption die Schere zwischen Arm und Reich noch öffnen wird.

Die Herausforderung dieses vielfältigen und lesenswerten Sammelbands liegt nicht zuletzt bei dem auf die Sozialanthropologie fokussierten, jedoch interdisziplinären Anspruch der Herausgeberin. Ein derartiger Ansatz ist wichtig, denn die Ansicht, dass eine Anthropologie des Christentums von der Zusammenarbeit mit anderen Wissenschaftsdisziplinen profitiert, setzt sich immer stärker durch.

Nicht nur in der postkolonialen Welt durchläuft das Christentum heute grundlegende Veränderungen – die zahlreichen nordamerikanischen evangelikalen Megakirchen, deren Einfluss auch in Indonesien von Bedeutung ist, stellen dies lebhaft unter Beweis. Einen Beitrag zu evangelikalen, prophetisch-charismatischen, pfingstlerischen Strömungen vermisse ich in diesem Sammelband. Ebenso wünschenswert wäre es gewesen, wenn Papua etwas mehr Erwähnung gefunden hätte, zumal es sich bei dieser Region im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes um eine von den transnationalen Strömungen betroffene religiöse *frontier* handelt.

Zweifelsfrei macht sich im heutigen Zeitalter der Globalisierung und im Zuge des Neoliberalismus ein Trend zum Religiösen bemerkbar, der als Reaktion auf sich verändernde Normen und Ordnungen zu verstehen ist. Davon ist auch Indonesien nicht ausgeschlossen, wo lokale Konflikte keineswegs unabhängig von nationalen und transnationalen religiösen Bewegungen zu verstehen sind. Insofern lese ich *Christianity in Indonesia* primär als eine interdisziplinäre Auseinandersetzung mit religiösen Konflikten, denn darin erkenne ich den roten Faden, der die unterschiedlichen Beiträge verbindet.

Christian Warta
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Rezensionen / Book Reviews

Fjelstad, Karen & Nguyễn, Thị Hiền (2011).
Spirits Without Borders: Vietnamese Spirit Mediums in a Transnational Age.
New York: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 978-0-230-11493-7. x + 219 pages.

Citation Pokorny, L. (2011). Book Review: Fjelstad, K. & Nguyễn, T. (2011). Spirits without Borders: Vietnamese Spirit Mediums in a Transnational Age. *ASEAS - Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 4*(2), 349-351.

In 1986, the Vietnamese government entered the era of *Đổi Mới* (renovation), entailing a resurgence of popular religiosity, in particular after the adoption of liberal reforms in the early and mid-1990s. This 're-enchantment' of contemporary Vietnamese society has not only aroused the interest of numerous local scholars, producing a vast amount of ethnographic research, but has attracted attention among a number of foreign anthropologists who embarked on introducing Vietnamese religions to a Western audience. Until recently, religionists were only (somewhat) familiar with institutionalised religion in Vietnam (*Cao Đài* and *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo*), whilst the plethora of folk-religious beliefs remained widely uncharted. In the previous years, various scholars (K. Endres, K. Fjelstad, B. Norton, Q. Phạm, O. Salemink, P. Taylor, and others) have thus attempted to shed light on the popular religious landscape. The rich pantheon of Vietnamese folk traditions is often seen to be represented by *Đạo Mẫu*, the 'Mother Goddess Religion', which comprises a variety of beliefs and practices, associated with legions of deities and spirits. Central to *Đạo Mẫu* is *lên đồng*, a spirit possession ritual that is slowly overcoming political proscription and social ostracism, and, despite re-emerging urgent concern by the authorities, seems to develop into a veritable 'cultural heritage' (*di sản văn hóa*). *Đạo Mẫu* and *lên đồng* have strikingly evolved amid the Vietnamese diaspora, thereby turning into a transnational religious phenomenon that gradually extends to the non-Vietnamese population.

The study at hand endeavours to investigate the concomitant ritual and doctrinal transformation of this cross-border expansion. The authors aim at providing a sophisticated ethnographic account of *Đạo Mẫu* and *lên đồng*, as encountered in the United States among overseas Vietnamese (*người Việt hải ngoại*), highlighting the am-

biguous, and yes, estranged relationship between Vietnamese (*người Việt*) and American Vietnamese (*người Mỹ gốc Việt*) spirit mediums.

Karen E. Fjelstad, a PhD graduate from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (1995), is a Lecturer in Anthropology at San José State University (United States) and a distinguished expert of Vietnamese spirit mediumship, focusing her research on the diaspora in California. Nguyễn Thị Hiền, a PhD graduate from Indiana University (2002), is a researcher at the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in Hà Nội, and a specialist in Vietnamese folklore.

Fjelstad and Nguyễn's latest collaboration is an impressive and needed continuation of their previous work.[1] The first chapter (pp. 1-16) sets the agenda, briefly delineating the theoretical backdrop and rationale of the study, whilst chapter 2 (pp. 17-38) depicts the authors' personal involvement in the subject and introduces the research setting including a number of protagonists. The following section (pp. 39-75) lays the foundation for the subsequent discussion, portraying key themes such as the pantheon of *Đạo Mẫu*, *lên đồng* and its topography, and the changing socio-political and legal framework. The authors put an emphasis on the adaptability and flexibility of *Đạo Mẫu*, which, they reason, is decisive for survival in times of rigorous suppression and persecution of *lên đồng* practitioners. Chapter 4 (pp. 77-98) overviews several conversion narratives and exhibits how people are called to be initiated as spirit mediums (*căn đồng*). The next chapter (pp. 99-136) proceeds to the crucial part of the study, examining the history, transformation, and characteristics of *Đạo Mẫu* and *lên đồng* in Silicon Valley (California). The authors stress the step-by-step metamorphosis of the religious/cultic context in the light of modernisation, Americanisation, and 'rejuvenation', that is, the emergence of a second generation of overseas Vietnamese spirit mediums who were largely or entirely socialised in the United States. Chapter 6 (pp. 137-168) continues with an intriguing discussion of *Đạo Mẫu* and *lên đồng* 'in a transnational age'. It is shown in which ways various (cultural, doctrinal, and ritual) challenges need to be met when US-based mediums encounter their Vietnam-based coreligionists. Skilfully weaving together multiple facets of this tense relationship, the authors underline the fact that religion is always being altered and adapted in

1 See Fjelstad, Karen and Thị Hiền Nguyễn, ed. 2006. *Possessed by the Spirits: Mediumship in Contemporary Vietnamese Communities*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications.

keeping with a changing environment.

The concluding chapter (pp. 169-185) finally accentuates the amenability and portability of *Đạo Mẫu* by referring to the 'concept of flooding' that serves as an overarching metaphor. In fact, *lên đồng* can be performed by a spirit medium (*thanh đồng*) at any given time (provided that the most basic ritual supplies are at hand), and – as many mediums suggest – irrespective of place and ethnicity, making *Đạo Mẫu* a truly universal religion.

In terms of formality, this study lives up to the demands of high-quality research, being indeed a valuable contribution to our understanding of transnational religions (p. 184). The volume contains excellent and refreshing recent scholarship by two leading academics in their fields, providing a multitude of vivid and instructive information for scholars and the general reader alike. I thus highly recommend this book to anybody who brings along sound interest in spirit mediumship and Vietnamese religions in general.

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