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The India-Myanmar Relationship: New Directions after a Change of Governments?

Pierre Gottschlich

Abstract

Despite a promising start after independence, bilateral relations between India and Myanmar have had a long history of mutual neglect and obliviousness. This paper revisits the developments since the end of colonial rule and points out crucial historical landmarks. Further, the most important policy issues between the two nations are discussed. The focal point of the analysis is the question of whether one can expect new directions in the bilateral relationship since the election of new governments in India in 2014 and in Myanmar in 2015. While there have been signs of a new foreign policy approach towards its eastern neighbour on the part of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it remains to be seen if the government of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy will substantially alter Myanmar's course on an international level.

Keywords: India, Myanmar, Burma, foreign policy, bilateral relations

1. Introduction

Recent political developments in Myanmar[1] have led to hopes for ground-breaking democratisation and liberalisation processes in the country (Bünte 2014; Kipgen 2016). In particular, the landslide victory of the former oppositional National League for Democracy (NLD) under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi in general elections in 2015, with the subsequent formation of an NLD government in early 2016, is seen as a turning point in the history of Myanmar. With a potentially major political and economic transformation, there might also be room for a reconsideration of Myanmar's foreign policy, particularly with regard to its giant neighbours, China and India (Gordon 2014: 193–194). Likewise, international actors may reassess their strategy towards a changing Myanmar (Singh 2012: 26). In such a period of transition,

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new and unexpected opportunities might open up to either readjust or even drastically alter foreign policy doctrines and traditions. In some cases, a complete fresh start of bilateral relations might occur, ideally to the benefit of both parties involved.

This article deals with the bilateral relationship between India and Myanmar as an example of a possible new beginning in international diplomacy. It argues that a reassessment by India and a shift in the relations between New Delhi and Naypyidaw is not only conceivable but, from an Indian perspective, absolutely necessary. For India, the current situation might present a unique opportunity to rectify some foreign policy failures of the past and overhaul an attitude of obliviousness and neglect towards Myanmar that has marred the relationship for decades. After a short historical overview, this paper assesses the state of India–Myanmar relations in six different policy areas. It will look at India's role in Myanmar's process of democratisation and at its interest in stability in Myanmar. Following that, security in India's Northeast region and the issue of illegal migration from Myanmar will be considered. The next three topics the paper looks at are closely interconnected: trade and infrastructure, access to energy resources and development cooperation are interdependent issues that can hardly be addressed in isolation from each other. As a final policy area, the role of China and its influence on India–Myanmar relations is scrutinised. The next section deals with the changes of government in India and Myanmar and asks which new developments have already occurred or can be expected in the future. Naturally, this chapter focuses primarily on the two most prominent figures in the bilateral relationship, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and State Counsellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs Aung San Suu Kyi. Additionally, three specific questions will be looked at more closely: Can Myanmar be a balancing factor in the India–Myanmar–China triangle? Is there a future for India–Myanmar–Bangladesh trilateralism? And what are the prospects for Myanmar to become a full SAARC member? The conclusion summarises the findings and offers a glimpse at the road ahead.

Apart from a review of scholarly studies, policy papers and journal and newspaper articles, this paper is based on a number of interviews with Indian diplomats, including three former ambassadors to Myanmar, and with some of the leading experts on India–Myanmar relations from Indian think tanks, research institutions and universities.[2] Here, a glaring limitation of this study becomes obvious. The history, current state of and prospects for the bilateral relationship between New Delhi and Naypyidaw are analysed from an Indian

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1   I am going to use the official name "Myanmar" throughout the study. The English term "Burma" will only be referred to in a historical context, for events before the renaming in 1988, or in direct quotations, following academically accepted patterns (e.g. Renshaw 2013: 30). For the purposes of this article, there is no political connotation in the use of either "Myanmar" or "Burma".

2   Interviews were conducted in October 2014 and in June/July 2016. Some of the interviewees were questioned on both occasions.

point of view. This somewhat biased perspective of course invites criticism but is also an invitation to complementary research shedding more light on the Myanmar side of the relationship.

2. Historical overview

Today's Myanmar was formerly part of the British Empire in South and Southeast Asia. After its political separation from British India in April 1937, Burma was administrated as an independent unit and became a strategic buffer safeguarding the Indian heartland in World War II (Egreteau 2003: 19–26; Singh 2012: 27–28). After the war ended, Burma lost this role. Its importance to the British Empire was further diminished when India and Pakistan were granted independence in August 1947. Burma itself became independent on 4 January 1948, but in contrast to India, Pakistan and Ceylon did not join the Commonwealth. In the period immediately following independence, bilateral relations between India and Burma were strong. The shared cultural and religious heritage was intensely emphasised by leaders of both nations. The deep bonds between the countries were reflected in Jawaharlal Nehru's famous words on the occasion of Burma's independence:

> As in the past, so in the future, the people of India will stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Burma, and whether we have to share good fortune or ill fortune, we shall share it together. This is a great and solemn day not only for Burma, but for India, and for the whole of Asia. (Jawaharlal Nehru in Routray 2011: 301)

In 1951, India and Burma signed a Treaty of Friendship, which, according to Nehru, was to last "for ever thereafter" (Lall 2006: 431). After 1954, New Delhi's relations with Burma, as well as India's rapprochement with China, were guided by the "Panch Sheel" (the five virtues) of peaceful coexistence: respect for the other nation's territorial integrity; respect for the other nation's sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in domestic affairs; and equality and efforts for mutual benefit (Mitra 2011: 187). Throughout the 1950s, bilateral relations between India and Burma remained stable, partly because of common interests within the Non-Aligned Movement and further bolstered by a strong personal relationship between Nehru and Burma's Prime Minister Nu (Myint-U 2012: 268). The Buddhist connection also played a role in nurturing mutual bonds, for instance in February 1950 when Nu visited Calcutta to accompany the transfer of a Buddhist relic to Burma. Furthermore, New Delhi supplied the Nu government with arms and ammunition in the early 1950s. In the form of development cooperation, India granted Burma a loan of 46 million USD in 1958. The military coup in Burma in 1962, however, changed the nature of the two nations' political and eco-

nomic relations. While there was not necessarily an open rift between them in the following decades, a lasting mutual indifference developed, furthered by Burma's self-imposed isolation (Egreteau 2003: 33–36). The stern repression of the Burmese democracy movement in 1988 led to a further deterioration of relations, resulting in a short diplomatic ice age between New Delhi and the newly named Myanmar (Dörffel 2003: 379–380; Singh 2012: 31–32).

The 1990s brought a substantial new orientation in India's foreign policy (Mitra 2011: 183–196). Following the severe economic crisis of 1991, which almost resulted in the total bankruptcy of India, the government of Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao (1991–1996) recalibrated India's foreign relations in order to foster economic development. New Delhi's so-called "Look East Policy" focused on Asian markets and an extension of Indian trade relations towards Southeast Asia. Under this new framework, a fresh start in India–Myanmar relations was possible (Egreteau 2003: 102). For New Delhi, economic and strategic interests now trumped democratisation and human rights considerations that had previously been widely viewed as crucial to any rapprochement (Haacke 2006: 34). The new policy of "constructive engagement" (Egreteau 2003: 132) led to the Common Border Trade Agreement of 1994 and a gradual improvement of the bilateral relationship. In 1995, India and Myanmar even conducted a joint military operation against ethnic guerrilla groups along the Mizoram border (Myint-U 2012: 71). When Indian Prime Minister I. K. Gujral (1997–1998) promulgated the "Good Neighbour Policy", Myanmar's prospects were further enhanced. Now, India was abandoning the principle of strict reciprocity in its foreign relations within its immediate neighbourhood. Instead, New Delhi announced that it was willing to invest considerably more while at the same time assuring its respect for the "Panch Sheel", particularly with regard to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring countries. Regional economic cooperation became a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. For Myanmar, this development resulted in its integration into the organisation BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand - Economic Cooperation)[3], which aimed to establish more effective collaboration in the Bay of Bengal region (Wagner 2005: 281).

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998–2004) and the government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) brought a "real shift in India–Myanmar relations" and a much more pragmatic approach to, for instance, military-to-military contacts and economic ties (Lall 2006: 432). In 2000, both nations became founding members of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) group. Two years later, India and Myanmar reopened diplomatic representations and consular offices. Under the subsequent government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2004–2014), bilateral economic relations between In-

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3   After the integration of Bhutan and Nepal in 2004, the organisation was officially renamed Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

dia and Myanmar cautiously improved further without, however, resulting in a significant political rapprochement. A rare foreign visit of General Than Shwe to New Delhi in July 2010 led to the signing of many economic agreements, yet fell short of truly bringing relations to a new level (Myint-U 2012: 221, 270–271). When Myanmar's new president, Thein Sein, hosted Prime Minister Singh for a state visit in Naypyidaw in May 2012, it marked the first visit of an Indian prime minister to Myanmar in 25 years and was widely regarded "a historic milestone" (Singh 2012: 26). While once again many memorandums and agreements were signed, it seems that the visit was just a hint of the greater shifts to come.

Given the change of government in India in 2014, there is an opportunity for a much more fundamental transformation or even a completely fresh start in relations between New Delhi and Naypyidaw. Particularly the proclamation of India's new "Act East Policy" signals a major shift from its former "Look East" approach, towards a more proactive stance. According to critical voices in India, such a reorientation is much needed since India's rather passive and self-sufficient foreign policy towards Myanmar has been marred by ineffectiveness, especially in the economic realm. Former Indian ambassador to Myanmar Gopalapuram Parthasarathy writes, "We would be less than honest if we did not admit that in project and investment cooperation, our record has been tardy" (Parthasarathy 2014). Oftentimes, however, it is not the basic intention but the protracted and incomplete realisation of arduously agreed-upon plans and projects that is widely criticised, as the following excerpt from an interview with Khriezo Yhome, Myanmar expert and research fellow at the Observer Research Foundation Delhi, shows:

> It wouldn't be wrong to say that India has the best of plans, policies and mechanisms in place to promote and protect its interests in Myanmar. [...] The problem is in implementing these plans and projects. New Delhi need not reinvent new policies; if the existing policies and plans are implemented effectively half of the battle is won. [...] There is no doubt that the Burmese want close ties with India [...]. If we, however, ask if the Burmese are happy with India's role in Myanmar, there is a sense of frustration at the pace at which India has been moving. [...] The lack of proper and effective implementation of policies and projects has been a major source of damage to India's image. (Yhome, interviewed by author 4 October 2014)

Hence, there is not only much room for improvement but severe need for action if India does not want to squander the opportunities for better and mutually beneficial relations between India and Myanmar that might be opening up.

3. Issues and policy areas of the India–Myanmar relationship

When asked about the single most important issue for India with regard to Myanmar, the diplomats, experts, researchers and policy advisors interviewed for this study variously named several different topics as the top priority. Security in India's Northeast and bilateral trade relations were named most often. Related to trade and economic issues, the question of connectivity – meaning the improvement of the exchange mechanism between the two nations and a better connection from India to Southeast Asia through Myanmar as a transit country – was also seen as crucial to India. Other subjects mentioned include energy, illegal migration and democracy. Interestingly, one topic which usually receives much attention in the Western world was not mentioned at all: the supposed great power competition between India and China in a "new Great Game" of influence in Asia, in which Myanmar is usually seen as crucial to both sides, was not named as a top priority for India. Apparently, there is a much different assessment of the "China factor" within the foreign policy community in India than some Western observers assume.

Probably the most remarkable point about the answers to the question "What would you regard as the single most important issue for India?", however, is the diversity of the issues named. There does not seem to be much consensus among the relevant policy institutes and think tanks with regard to the order of India's interests in its bilateral relations towards Myanmar. Of course, this reflects the generally incoherent and in some cases erratic foreign policy India has conducted towards its eastern neighbour in the past. After 70 years, there is still no tangible foreign policy statement, let alone a grand strategy regarding Myanmar from the Indian side. Considering the generally feeble nature of the Indian foreign policy service (Chatterjee Miller 2013), this is part of an overarching problem and hardly surprising. It may, nevertheless, cast serious doubts on one of the basic assumptions of international relations analyses – namely, that actors are aware of their own interests and are able to convert these interests into a list of ranked preferences. As long as a concerted official Indian foreign policy strategy is missing, it is an important task for researchers and advisors to organise the different policy areas and point out interdependencies among them.

3.1. Democratisation and stability

The promotion of democracy abroad has never been one of the main pillars of India's foreign policy and plays a rather marginal role. Instead, the principle of non-interference has dominated foreign policy debates and choices in India since the 1950s (Wagner 2009: 9–11). The advancement of democratic ideals

is usually weighed against national interests and only occasionally supersedes economy or security concerns. With bilateral relations already at a low point and not much leverage to lose, India did openly side with the Burmese democracy movement in 1988, welcoming political refugees and exiles from the country (Egreteau 2003: 121–124; Haacke 2006: 34). Apart from granting asylum and supporting exile radio broadcasts, however, tangible activities on the part of India to foster democratic developments in Myanmar have remained scarce. In the early 1990s, India's assessment of the situation changed. With Myanmar's military rulers firmly established and issues such as the question of energy security or the violent rebellions in India's Northeast becoming more pressing, New Delhi began its policy of "constructive engagement" and largely refrained from explicit calls for a transition towards democracy (Wagner 2009: 17–19; Egreteau 2011: 468–470). This "triumph of pragmatism" (Routray 2011) in India's foreign policy brought a modest improvement in bilateral relations, but disappointed the Burmese democracy movement and many observers. Alana,[4] an activist from the Burma Centre Delhi, notes:

> Although India allowed Burmese refugees to take shelter in India especially during [the] 1988 nationwide uprising,[5] India didn't do much or influence much in the process of democratisation in Burma. It's not a matter of being underestimated or overemphasised, but having worked for democracy and human rights in Burma along with Burmese democratic forces in India [over] the past many years, I don't really see India influencing that country for democracy. (Alana, interviewed by author 7 October 2014)

This sentiment of disappointment was also reflected when, during her visit to India in 2012, then-opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi voiced sadness about the lack of support for democratic change in Myanmar and openly criticised New Delhi for straying from the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru (Miglani 2012; The Hindu 2012). Despite its underwhelming efforts so far and going well beyond a mere return to Nehruvian idealism, India has practical incentives for greater engagement on behalf of a sustained democratisation in Myanmar. While in the past the question of stability has often been linked to supporting or at least tolerating military rule in Myanmar, this reasoning has partially been reversed. Now, only a thorough democratisation is seen as a safeguard for lasting stability. Democracy would also offer an opportunity for Indian foreign policy to engage with several different actors in Myanmar rather than continuing to depend on the mood swings of one single decision maker:

> Stability and strengthening reform processes in Myanmar […] have a direct bearing [on] India's strategic interests in the region. Instability provides room for other major powers to play a role in its periphery and as Myanmar's reform progresses, it not only addresses [the concern over external influences] but also opens up more domestic ac-

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4   For reasons of privacy, only Alana's first name is used.
5   Many student activists and political leaders fled Burma and took shelter in India.

> tors in a democratic setup, thereby presenting multiple domestic actors [that] India can engage with, thus keeping a check on the possibility of a single-actor dominance whose domestic and foreign policy orientations could adversely affect India's interests there – the junta in the past is a case in point. (Yhome, interviewed by author 4 October 2014)

Of course, whether the nascent democratisation in Myanmar will have short-term positive effects on Indian foreign policy remains to be seen. There are reasons to be sceptical about the ability of the NLD government to remove some of the obstacles to better bilateral relations and brighter prospects for future cooperation, particularly regarding security concerns in the Northeast (Lee 2014: 311). In any case, having a reliable and predictable partner in Naypyidaw has to be considered as one of India's essential interests.

3.2. Security in India's Northeast and illegal migration

India and Myanmar share a land border 1,643 kilometres long, of which only 10 kilometres are in the process of being fenced (Lee 2014: 299–300). Unsurprisingly, this porous border has been exploited by guerrilla organisations on both sides. The Northeast region of India's "seven sisters" (the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura) have represented "a policy headache for New Delhi" and have been ravaged by violence for decades (Myint-U 2012: 235–236, 272–293). Outside of Assam, three states directly bordering on Myanmar have been hit hardest by guerrilla warfare: Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. Particularly during the 1980s and the 1990s, armed groups from India such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) used the inaccessible and hardly controllable border region as a safe haven. With the open and covert support of the Burmese military junta, they set up bases and supply structures on Burmese territory (Hazarika 2014). Likewise, the Indian government has been accused of lending financial and technical assistance to rebel organisations from Myanmar such as the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the Karen National Union (KNU) since 1988 (Ganesan 2010: 11). The gradual improvement of bilateral relations between India and Myanmar has led to progress on both sides of the border and has resulted in more coordinated efforts to contain insurgencies (Pardesi 2012: 122–123).

An additional problem has been and continues to be the increasing undocumented migration from Myanmar. Again and again, thousands of Muslim Rohingya have fled the spreading ethnic violence in Myanmar and come to India illegally (Mishra 2014). According to Aparupa Bhattacherjee of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies in New Delhi, the Indian government underestimated the issue for a long time and did not tackle the problem seriously (Bhat-

tacherjee, interviewed by author 30 October 2014). But even if pursued more rigorously from the Indian side, there will be no solution without close cooperation between the border security forces of India and Myanmar. Here, New Delhi faces the problem that the government in Naypyidaw has conflicting priorities and engages rather reluctantly in the relevant border areas. Rahul K. Bhonsle, Director of Security Risks Asia, who served for a decade as an army officer in India's Northeast region, points out:

> For the Myanmar government, priority of borders is dictated by the security challenges that are faced by it on multiple fronts. Thus it is more concerned about the borders inhabited by Kachin, Karen and Wa and the Rakhine State with Bangladesh, while [the] Indian border is seen as more of a concern for Delhi. (Bhonsle, interviewed by author 4 October 2014)

Still under the government of Manmohan Singh, India and Myanmar signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Border Cooperation on 8 May 2014. This agreement is set to provide a framework for an extended collaboration on security issues, for information and intelligence exchange, and for jointly coordinated border patrols. The goal of the memorandum is the further weakening of transnationally operating guerrilla groups and the more effective prevention of other illegal activities such as contraband trade or human trafficking (Hazarika 2014).

3.3. Trade and infrastructure

Bilateral trade between Indian and Myanmar accounted for well over 2 billion USD in the fiscal year 2016–2017,[6] a noteworthy increase compared to former years. In 2001–2002, the trade volume was just a little over 300 million USD, and in 2007–2008 the number was still below 1 billion USD (Ganesan 2010: 12). Despite the progress, however, trade with Myanmar still accounts for only 0.33 per cent of India's overall trade (see Table 1). The gains in absolute money volume have not led to a significant increase of the relative share of bilateral trade relations compared to other partner countries. Trade with Myanmar largely remains an afterthought for much of the Indian economy.

There is much room for a further extension in bilateral trade on both sides. India ranks only fifth in the list of Myanmar's most important trading partners, trailing Myanmar's other economically important neighbour countries China and Thailand by substantial margins (see Table 2). As stated by former government official C. S. Kuppuswamy of the South Asia Analysis Group, it was an important immediate target for New Delhi to raise the volume of bilateral trade to 3 billion USD by the end of the fiscal year 2015–2016 (Kuppuswamy, interviewed by author 6 October 2014).

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6   The Indian fiscal year runs from 1 April to 31 March.

Table 1: India's bilateral trade with Myanmar

Fiscal year	India's exports to Myanmar		India's imports from Myanmar		Total bilateral trade	
	Amount in million USD	Overall share in %	Amount in million USD	Overall share in %	Amount in million USD	Overall share in %
2008–2009	221.64	0.12	928.97	0.31	1,150.60	0.24
2009–2010	207.97	0.12	1,289.80	0.45	1,497.77	0.32
2010–2011	320.62	0.13	1,017.67	0.28	1,338.29	0.22
2011–2012	545.38	0.18	1,381.15	0.28	1,926.52	0.24
2012–2013	544.66	0.18	1,412.69	0.29	1,957.35	0.25
2013–2014	787.01	0.25	1,395.67	0.31	2,182.68	0.29
2014–2015	773.24	0.25	1,231.54	0.27	2,004.78	0.26
2015–2016	1,070.65	0.41	984.27	0.26	2,054.92	0.32
2016–2017	1,107.89	0.40	1,067.25	0.28	2,175.14	0.33

Source: Government of India 2018a (Department of Commerce)

This goal has not been achieved, as bilateral trade stagnated at roughly 2 billion USD both in 2014–2015 and in 2015–2016 after reaching a high point at almost 2.2 billion USD in the fiscal year of 2013–2014 (and coming close to this mark again in 2016–2017). Overall, "bilateral trade still remains below potential" (Kuppuswamy, interviewed by author 1 July 2016).

Table 2: Myanmar's top trading partners 2016

	Total trade in million EUR	Share in %	Imports in million EUR	Share in %	Exports in million EUR	Share in %
China	4,323	22.3	2,434	25.9	1,890	18.9
Thailand	3,240	16.7	856	9.1	2,384	23.9
Singapore	2,245	11.6	2,007	21.4	238	2.4
Hong Kong	1,913	9.9	26	0.2	1,897	19.0

	Total trade in million EUR	Share in %	Imports in million EUR	Share in %	Exports in million EUR	Share in %
India	1,465	7.6	626	6.7	839	8.4
Japan	1,241	6.4	774	8.2	468	4.7
World	19,371	100.0	9,393	100.0	9,978	100.0

Source: European Commission 2017

Not only does India want to increase bilateral trade with Myanmar, it also strives to enhance the exchange of goods with other countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). For a long time, Southeast Asia played a rather marginal role in India's foreign trade even after the ASEAN–India Free Trade Area (AIFTA) came into effect in 2010. According to statistics from the Indian Department of Commerce, there were only three countries from the ASEAN region among India's 25 most important trading partners in 2013–2014: Indonesia ranked 8th, Singapore came in 10th and Malaysia was 21st. Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar were, at that point, well outside the group of India's top trading partners. Three years later, the picture has changed. For the fiscal year of 2016–2017, both Vietnam and Thailand have entered the list of India's most important trading partners at positions 19 and 24, respectively, in addition to Indonesia (8), Singapore (10), and Malaysia (11). Myanmar, however, is still not found on that list.

In order to further extend Indian trade with Southeast Asia, interregional connectivity needs to be improved. After taking power, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi immediately declared the issue of connectivity a priority of its foreign policy (Jacob 2014). Of course, Myanmar as a hub and transit country plays a crucial role in this endeavour. The improvement of transportation facilities in Myanmar has been a major focus of Indian bilateral development cooperation for years. Since 2008, the Indian government has spent 20 million USD on the construction of a trilateral highway linking the Indian state of Manipur with Thailand through Myanmar. The road is co-financed by Thailand and the Asian Development Bank (Yhome 2015: 1230). After continuous delays, it is scheduled to be opened in 2020 (Ramya 2018). Such projects, if completed in time, can also be seen as small steps within the larger framework of establishing a new "Southern Silk Road". An important part of these considerations is the initiative to create a Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar (BCIM) corridor (Aneja 2014). All these processes form preconditions for the intended establishment of the world's largest free trade area, ASEAN+6. The negotiations about the creation of a Regional Comprehensive Economic

Partnership (RCEP) consisting of the ASEAN member states plus six partner countries (India, China, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand) started in November 2012 and could hugely benefit from an enhancement of transportation facilities and trade routes between India and Southeast Asia (Hoepfner 2013). For India, the short-term costs of the infrastructure investments in Myanmar and elsewhere are likely to be outweighed by the long-term benefits from the RCEP (Pande 2018: 3).

Another ambitious infrastructure project in Myanmar combines economic aspects with security politics for India. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project is designed to create a direct trade connection from Kolkata to Mizoram over the Bay of Bengal into the port of Sittwe and through the states of Rakhine and Chin in Myanmar. Here, the water transportation routes on the Kaladan River will be improved while many roads will be modernised or newly constructed. The long-term goal for New Delhi is a significantly improved linkage of its Northeast region to the Indian heartland (Hackmann 2014: 14–15). Since 2007, India has invested 50 million USD in this project. Enhanced trade could bring not only a spark to the economy but also a noticeable improvement of the living conditions in Mizoram and the other states in the Northeast that have suffered from violent rebellions for decades. It is hoped that the intended socio-economic development will weaken secessionist movements and reduce the activities of guerrilla groups, thereby easing security problems. Also, the establishment of an alternative connection between the Indian centre and the Northeast would at least partially compensate for the strategic disadvantage of the narrow Siliguri Corridor (Mullen et al. 2014: 17–18). In the long run, building closer connections between India's Northeast and Myanmar could be beneficial to both sides, mutually reinforcing socio-economic development, particularly considering that the Northeast region is completely insignificant in the overall India–Myanmar trade volume (Panda 2017: 43–44):

> Northeast India and Burma combined make up a market of over 100 million people, poor now, but not necessarily forever. It has not helped Northeast India to have an internationally isolated, economically mismanaged, military dictatorship next door. But neither has it helped Burma to be adjacent to one of the most conflict-ridden and neglected parts of India. […] In a way, Northeast India and Burma have long reinforced one another's problems. As borders begin to open, the question is whether they can now support each other's progress instead. (Myint-U 2012: 307)

3.4. Energy

Myanmar's vast oil and gas resources are intriguing to many countries. Competition for exploration and exploitation rights began long ago. In fact, it was Myanmar's potential role as a supplier of natural gas that was crucial for im-

proving bilateral relations with ever energy-hungry India in the 1990s and early 2000s through a new "pipeline diplomacy" (Lall 2006: 425–430, 2009: 34–35). New Delhi, however, has damaged its prospects for years because of protracted decision-making and uncoordinated policies. Government-owned companies from India were not well prepared to succeed in the competitive environment of international bidding in Myanmar (Narayan 2009: 25). Additionally, New Delhi manoeuvred itself into a difficult situation regarding a tripartite gas pipeline project from Myanmar to India through Bangladesh in 2005. When India–Bangladesh relations worsened and the prospects for the pipeline became uncertain, India did not have a strategy for an alternative transportation route (Islam 2009: 140–142). Former Indian ambassador to Myanmar Gopalapuram Parthasarathy recounts the consequences of this disappointing endeavour and another telling example of Indian failure:

> After having secured exploration rights for gas in the Bay of Bengal, we conducted our project-planning and diplomacy so clumsily that we did not have a strategy ready for taking the gas to India through a pipeline across Myanmar and our Northeast, or for transporting it as LNG. China deftly stepped in and took away all this gas by expeditiously building a pipeline to Yunnan Province. In the mid-1990s, Myanmar offered us hydroelectric projects with a potential of over 1,000 MW across rivers near our borders. We took years to scrutinise these projects […]. After nearly two decades, we backed off. (Parthasarathy 2014)

India's more or less self-inflicted defeats have given China a much better position in the Myanmar gas market (Lall 2014: 213). What is more, virtually all current and future hydropower joint ventures in Myanmar are being conducted with the help of Chinese firms (Eleven 2014). India's reputation in the energy sector and beyond has been severely damaged (Jha 2013: 233). There is a widespread feeling in Myanmar that the "Indian government promises much but delivers little" (Bhonsle, interviewed by author 4 October 2014). Many auspicious projects have never been implemented: "Things didn't materialise much except […] [on paper]" (Alana, interviewed by author 7 October 2014). There is an urgent need for a different approach from the Indian side. The new government in New Delhi seems to have realised the problem and has started to tackle it with fresh rhetoric. Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj, as well as Prime Minister Modi, have announced the transformation of the more than twenty-year-old "Look East Policy" into an "Act East Policy", thereby raising hopes that India is going to speed up its decision-making and conduct future projects with much stronger commitment (Jacob 2014; PTI 2014a).

3.5. Development cooperation

Despite the fact that an overall foreign policy strategy regarding the bilateral relationship between India and Myanmar is still lacking, the country has been a major recipient of Indian foreign aid, mainly through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and similar schemes. Additionally, Myanmar is one of just three countries for which New Delhi has laid out a comprehensively planned aid and development assistance programme (Bhonsle, interviewed by author 4 October 2014). The other two nations with such a special status are Bhutan and Afghanistan. The prominent standing of these three countries is also reflected in the volume of Indian loans and grants over the last decade (see Tables 3 and 4). From 2000 to 2014, Bhutan alone received almost half (48.85 per cent) of India's total loans and grants to all partner countries, while Afghanistan accounted for 8.38 per cent. With a share of 3.49 per cent, Myanmar came in sixth overall, behind Nepal (5.86 per cent), Sri Lanka (5.35 per cent) and Bangladesh (3.83 per cent) (Mullen et al. 2014: 3).

There is still much room for an expansion of financial development assistance from India to Myanmar, especially considering the fact that India's annual contributions fall well short of the amount that the United Kingdom, the European Union and leading donor country Japan give per year.

Table 3: Major recipients of Indian loans and grants (in million INR)

	2001–2004	2004–2007	2007–2010	2010–2013
Bhutan	7,265	12,130	28,021	72,450
Afghanistan	NA	NA	8,959	11,675
Nepal	1,203	3,422	3,611	6,290
Sri Lanka	2,033	2,389	2,001	5,627
Maldives	118	224	5,271	3,488
Bangladesh	904	1,003	737	3,079
Myanmar	823	1,922	1,008	2,664
All African countries	873	1,878	2,708	4,487
All other countries	9,869	18,797	9,335	11,228

Source: Mullen 2013: 14

Table 4: Indian foreign aid to Myanmar (in million INR)

Fiscal year	Budget	Revised	Actual
2011–2012	1,900.0	1,118.2	674.0
2012–2013	3,022.1	1,350.0	1,218.7
2013–2014	4,500.0	2,550.0	1,648.6
2014–2015	3,300.0	1,300.0	1,043.4
2015–2016	2,700.0	1,540.0	1,170.7
2016–2017	4,000.0	1,200.0	1,236.2
2017–2018	2,250.0	2,250.0	NA
2018–2019	2,800.0	NA	NA

Source: Government of India 2017 and 2018b (Ministry of Finance)

The United Kingdom doubled its bilateral aid to Myanmar to 95 million USD in 2014. Since 2015, the European Union has quadrupled its annual development assistance to Myanmar to 123 million USD. In 2013, Japan announced it would deliver an aid and investment package to Myanmar to the tune of 394 million USD (Patteran 2014). Compared to these numbers, India's financial commitments appear meagre and underwhelming. In the current "feeding frenzy" (Patteran 2014), New Delhi runs the risk of being left behind and once again frittering away future opportunities. Additionally, willing donors such as Japan or Germany provide alternatives for the Myanmar government to counter the Chinese presence in the country without having to rely on India. Thus, they may give New Delhi tough competition in Myanmar (Ramya 2018).

Most of India's loans and grants in bilateral development cooperation are being used for infrastructure projects. Another focus is the modernisation of Myanmar's agricultural sector, which is being advanced by hundreds of millions in INR and further supported by knowledge transfer. Apart from that, India funds numerous education and training facilities in Myanmar. The establishment of the Myanmar Institute of Information Technology (MIIT) was financed by New Delhi with the sum of 326.8 million INR. Almost 50 million INR went into the founding and subsequent expansion of the India–Myanmar Centre for Enhancement of Information Technology Skills (IMCEITS) in Yangon, which so far has produced approximately 1,500 IT specialists. India and Myanmar also cooperate in the area of effective and efficient governance. Through the ITEC programme, India is training 525 government officials from Myanmar. Additionally, public servants are being educated in all forms of digi-

tal services and e-governance (Mullen et al. 2014: 17–18). In the entire field of IT-related training, India has been remarkably successful and even enjoys a distinct advantage over China in Myanmar (Ramya 2018).

3.6. China

Naturally, China plays an important role in all of New Delhi's foreign policy considerations. Hence, the relations between India and Myanmar cannot escape the shadow of the giant neighbour to the North. With the Beijing-financed construction of a new harbour in Kyaukpyu, Myanmar has become part of the so-called "String of Pearls" of Chinese deep-water ports around the Indian Ocean. This alleged encirclement with harbour facilities in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar is viewed with much scrutiny and suspicion in India. It is feared that these ports might someday be used not only economically but also for military purposes (Vasan 2012: 415–416). Also, the huge Chinese influence in everyday life in many parts of Northern and Northeast Myanmar is cause for concern among some Indian observers (Myint-U 2012: 30–31, 266–268). In particular, the growing interdependence of the economies of China and Myanmar in the border region and the close trade relations between Myanmar and Yunnan Province serve as a painful reminder of India's own shortcomings in this respect (Lall 2014: 211; Parthasarathy 2014).

In general, India and China compete for influence in Myanmar in every policy area. Among parts of the Indian foreign policy establishment, there is "a shared sense of the two countries as rivals", particularly regarding the "crossroads" nation Myanmar (Myint-U 2012: 238). This also includes the vital question of energy security. For a time, "China and India both regarded competition in the energy sector as a purely zero-sum game" (Li 2009: 154). Some observers, however, question whether New Delhi really has to follow the rules of such an "anachronistic" game. As, for instance, Obja Borah Hazarika, a political scientist from Dibrugarh University in Assam, points out:

> In the twenty-first century, treating a country like a pawn in a country's strategic calculation is anachronistic. India can, at most, make itself seem like a more feasible partner in security, economic and cultural issues to Myanmar, and let the latter take its pick between China and India. (Hazarika, interviewed by author 25 October 2014)

There is a chorus of very critical voices regarding the apparent obsession of Indian foreign policy with China in general, which has allegedly been evident for decades, particularly as it relates to Myanmar. A truly independent Indian foreign policy should not simply react to Chinese decisions and initiatives, especially considering the different strategic positions and resource capabilities of New Delhi and Beijing. According to proponents of this view, the coexistence of India and China in Myanmar is definitely possible as long as New

Delhi is able to avoid direct competition and a power struggle with Beijing that it almost certainly cannot win (Wagner / Cafiero 2014: 2). India has to realise that China's lead is probably too large to be overcome in a short period of time. Right now, "India is not there to compete with China" (Kuppuswamy, interviewed by author 6 October 2014). However, the constellation might change more rapidly than anticipated, since China's influence in Myanmar seems to be declining. Increasingly, Naypyidaw appears to regard its dependency on China as a strategic problem and as a loss of sovereignty it is no longer willing to concede (Lee 2014: 294–295). Strengthening national sovereignty thus requires a diversification of Myanmar's foreign policy. The visit of General Than Shwe to New Delhi in 2010 has been interpreted as an early demonstration that Myanmar "would seek to balance China with India" (Myint-U 2012: 221). New Delhi could profit from this situation if it overcomes its own fixation on China. The Modi government has taken steps in this direction, as Wasbir Hussain, executive director of the Centre for Development and Peace Studies in Guwahati and a former member of India's National Security Advisory Board, notes:

> India's policy towards Myanmar [so far] has basically been nothing but a response to what China was doing there. India has now realised that it has to look beyond China and is, therefore, fine-tuning a proactive policy towards Myanmar. (Hussain, interviewed by author 21 October 2014)

Part of this new strategy is an emphasis on the cultural and religious heritage that India and Myanmar share. There is a "natural" familiarity China cannot offer, particularly regarding a common Buddhist tradition (Myint-U 2012: 31). Therefore, it is not surprising that Minister Swaraj, during her visit to Myanmar in August 2014, pointed to Buddhism as an important link between the countries that may foster people-to-people contacts and serve as a foundation for generally improved relations. Accordingly, Swaraj suggested the establishment of direct flights between Yangon and the Buddhist pilgrimage site Bodhgaya in India (Roy 2014).

3.7. Summary: India's view of Myanmar

India-Myanmar bilateral relations seem to be at a crossroads. The political changes in Myanmar, coupled with an apparent desire to diversify its foreign policy, might open up new opportunities for New Delhi to pursue its interests and avoid the risks and pitfalls that have plagued its policy towards Myanmar for many years. Before assessing recent developments under the current governments, this article will briefly summarise India's general view of Myanmar with respect to different policy issues.

As far as democratisation in Myanmar is concerned, India's main interest remains having a stable and reliable partner across its eastern border. While continued or increased support for democratisation could bring long-term stability and secure friendship with future governments, there is also the risk of a backlash under a renewed military regime, possibly resulting in a new diplomatic ice age.

The interconnected issues of security in India's Northeast and illegal migration bear significant interests for New Delhi. Above all, India needs sustained peace in the Northeast, which seems impossible if there is a haven for guerrilla groups in Myanmar. Thus, effective border control is mandatory, also to prevent contraband trade and illegal migration. A functional border control regime could weaken secessionist movements in the Northeast if there is a committed partner in Myanmar.

In the policy areas of trade and infrastructure, India is looking for an expansion of bilateral trade and a reduction of its trade deficit. Further interests include increasing trade with Southeast Asia via Myanmar and improving the connection and economic development of the Northeast. New Delhi sees an opportunity for economic recovery in the area, not least through new trading partners in Southeast Asia. This has the potential to weaken secessionist movements in the Northeast as well. There is, however, a substantial risk of economic stagnation. India's trade deficit could remain the same or even increase. Also, the infrastructure projects financed by New Delhi could be used by other actors without benefiting India.

In the energy sector, India has a strong interest in diversifying its energy imports. Better bilateral relations with Myanmar include the prospect of a reliable energy supply at reasonable prices. However, there is a risk of new dependencies for India. On the other hand, a complete loss of access to Myanmar's energy resources is also thinkable.

New Delhi has shown a willingness to use development cooperation to foster its own interests. In doing so, India attempts to create win-win situations. If successful, development cooperation could enhance trade infrastructure and thereby benefit India. Additionally, it might produce a grateful Myanmar government. Conversely, falling too far behind other donors could damage India's standing. Another risk is that India may not benefit from its investments.

Finally, China is a factor that cannot be ignored. India's paramount concern is to keep from losing Myanmar to China. However, there can be no zero-sum game mentality and no competition with China. It must be New Delhi's interest to facilitate cooperation with China in Myanmar and to increase its influence in Myanmar without negative implications for the India–China relationship. Yet, there is a risk that a possible zero-sum logic in Chinese foreign policy may eventually lead to a complete expulsion of India from Myanmar.

4. New directions after a change of governments?

4.1. Narendra Modi: "Act East"?

After being elected in a landslide victory in 2014, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a pragmatic and undogmatic foreign policy doctrine based on "enlightened national interest" (Haidar 2014). Modi's doctrine has put its focus clearly on India's immediate neighbourhood, including Myanmar. However, the Modi government did not have the best of starts with regard to its Eastern neighbour. India's political influence in Myanmar can be improved only if New Delhi shows substantial public appreciation of the importance of the bilateral relationship. In this respect, some observers were heavily critical of the fact that Myanmar's then-President Thein Sein was not invited to the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi on 26 May 2014, especially in light of the fact that the heads of state of all other neighbouring countries were invited (Sailo 2014: 3). Myanmar, critics argue, obviously was and maybe still is not seen as a real neighbour of India:

> Although Myanmar shares a long, sensitive border with India, many in New Delhi don't seem to regard it as a neighbour, a fact reflected in the failure to invite President Thein Sein to Modi's swearing-in event. Distant Mauritius was invited to the event but not Myanmar. (Chellaney 2014)

It should have been particularly alarming to everyone aspiring to better relations between New Delhi and Naypyidaw that the non-invitation was not widely seen as a mistake or an affront but was, in fact, generally interpreted as fitting, given the nature of India–Myanmar relations:

> In all likelihood, the lack of an invite for Myanmar's President Thein Sein was not a mistake or a deliberate omission, but simply something that was on nobody's mind. Politicians and the media in both countries did not seem to expect that Myanmar would even be invited, as evidenced by the fact that the media in neither country made an issue out of Myanmar's non-invite. (Pillalamarri 2014)

Under these circumstances, Modi's visit to Myanmar in November 2014 was a welcome step in a new direction. Although Modi's primary reason for coming to Myanmar was to attend the ASEAN meeting and the East Asia Summit (EAS), there were also bilateral talks with then-President Thein Sein. Arguably even more important were the signs of respect shown through one of Modi's preferred channels of communication, Twitter. On 6 November 2014, Modi tweeted: "I will have bilateral meetings with leaders of Myanmar, a valued friend. Having stronger relations with Myanmar is a priority area for us." Particularly the description of Myanmar as "a valued friend" carries a significance not to be underestimated. India signalled rhetorically that it was serious about a new definition of its relations towards its smaller neighbours that

have been neglected in the past, particularly Myanmar, but also Bhutan and Nepal.

However, this promising start has not led to substantial improvement in the bilateral relationship. One interviewee even noted: "In the Modi phase, India seems to have downgraded her relations with Myanmar" (Hazarika, interviewed by author 15 July 2016). Initially, high-level visits from the Indian side remained rather scarce. After Modi's 2014 stay, it took almost three years before he travelled to Myanmar again in September 2017. Given the political changes in Naypyidaw in 2015, a high-level visit from India came rather late, especially considering that China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi wasted no time and came to Myanmar as the very first overseas dignitary in early April 2016, shortly after the new NLD government took over (Maini 2016). In a very unfortunate circumstance for India, Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj had to postpone a planned visit that same month, for reasons of health. Swaraj's Myanmar visit finally took place in August 2016. However, the fact that there had been no immediate efforts to make up for the lost opportunity in April further reinforced the view voiced rather mildly by retired senior government official Bashkar Roy, who said in an interview that "the engagement from India's side has been less then optimum" (Roy, interviewed by author 25 June 2016). Former Indian ambassador to Myanmar Preet Malik stated:

> [T]he present Indian leadership has not shown the kind of involvement with Myanmar on the direct bilateral level that the facts on the ground merit. Prime Minister Modi has visited all of India's neighbouring countries but has only made a visit to Myanmar to meet his regional multilateral commitments. This contrasts unfavourably with the panache that he has shown in the area of foreign policy. (Malik, interviewed by author 19 July 2016)

On the other hand, some observers note that it may have actually been wise not to push the bilateral relationship too strongly from India's side and to give Aung San Suu Kyi some room to manoeuvre, particularly with regard to Myanmar's delicate relations with China. From this point of view, rushing in and putting too much pressure on Suu Kyi to show a strong commitment towards India would have been counterproductive. It might as well be argued, however, that India's "failure to deal with [Suu Kyi] […] after a reasonable time had lapsed does not bode well for the evolving of a closer relationship with Myanmar" (Malik, interviewed by author 19 July 2016).

On the other hand, there has also been little effort for immediate high-level visits from Myanmar to India. Although Prime Minister Modi invited Aung San Suu Kyi to India immediately after the election victory of her NLD in November 2015, it took almost one year before the visit actually took place in October 2016. What is more, Suu Kyi made her first major state visit in her position as State Counsellor of Myanmar and Minister of Foreign Affairs to China well before coming to India. While there was some mild disappoint-

ment in India, there is certainly an understanding of the delicate balancing act Suu Kyi has to perform to keep both New Delhi and Beijing happy (Bhatia 2016a; Firstpost 2016). On a positive note, Myanmar's then-new President Htin Kyaw made India his choice for his very first bilateral state visit in August 2016 (PTI 2016). The last high-ranking diplomat to come to India before that had been then-Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, who came to New Delhi in July 2015 in order to take part in the first meeting of the India–Myanmar Joint Consultative Commission (JCC). The establishment of the JCC has been one pillar of Modi's "Act East Policy" with regard to Myanmar. It is designed to provide a forum to discuss a wide range of bilateral issues and also to function as a form of regulatory body. Periodic JCC meetings should help overcome the implementation problems that have plagued India's foreign policy towards Myanmar for decades. This pertains particularly to two of the most important connectivity projects that have run behind schedule for years. The first is a trilateral highway linking India, Myanmar and Thailand, now to be opened in 2020. The second is the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Facility – connecting Kolkata and the Indian heartland, via the Bay of Bengal and the Kaladan River in Myanmar, to the northeastern state of Mizoram – which is finally making progress after years of delay and is planned to be completed by 2019 (Feng 2017; Borah 2018). Better connectivity is of course vital for enhancing bilateral trade, where there is much room for further expansion on both sides.

Recent years have seen mixed signals regarding Indian development assistance towards Myanmar. Myanmar has long been an important target country for Indian loans and grants, though nowhere near the extent of the major recipient, Bhutan. However, Indian foreign aid allocations to Myanmar decreased substantially in both 2014–2015 and 2015–2016. While the national budget for 2016–2017 initially increased the amount distributed to 4,000 million INR, the revised estimates were much lower, at only 1,200 million INR. The budget for 2017–2018 once again reduced the allocations, to 2,250 million INR, thereby making Myanmar only number five on the list of major foreign aid beneficiaries in that financial year – trailing not only Bhutan, Nepal and Afghanistan but also the Maldives. On a positive note, the revised estimates for Myanmar were the same as the initial numbers, which was not the case for Bhutan and the Maldives. The 2018–2019 budget slightly raised the foreign aid target for Myanmar to 2,800 million INR (see Table 5). However, India could certainly do more.

Table 5: Budget allocations of Indian foreign aid (in million INR)

Recipient	2014 −2015	2015 −2016	2016 −2017	2017 −2018	2018 −2019
Bhutan	60,074	61,602	54,900	37,141	26,500
Nepal	4,500	4,200	3,000	3,750	6,500
Afghanistan	6,760	6,760	5,200	3,500	3,250
Myanmar	3,300	2,700	4,000	2,250	2,800
Bangladesh	3,500	2,500	1,500	1,250	1,750
Sri Lanka	5,000	5,000	2,300	1,250	1,500
Maldives	1,830	1,830	400	2,450	1,250

Source: Government of India 2017 and 2018b (Ministry of Finance)

One policy area where India has acted swiftly concerns the fight against guerrilla organisations in the Northeast. In June 2015, Indian security forces unilaterally entered Myanmar territory to fight against the NSCN (Khaplang) insurgency group, which is active on both sides of the border. Although not officially confirmed, it is believed that this cross-border raid triggered developments in bilateral security relations. There has been a series of consultations among high-level security officials, which has led to improved coordination between India and Myanmar (Bhonsle, interviewed by author 25 June 2016). However, one area where there has been no progress is in the conclusion of an India–Myanmar extradition treaty. Analyst Obja Borah Hazarika of Dibrugarh University in Assam is not very optimistic:

> If Myanmar–India relations are prioritised by both countries, the extradition treaty will soon see light of day; however, given the present pace of their interaction, it does not seem to be in the cards. (Hazarika, interviewed by author 15 July 2016)

Overall, the record of India's foreign policy towards Myanmar under Modi is mixed. While there have been areas of progress such as development cooperation and security coordination, there have been disappointments regarding a strong political commitment from New Delhi and concerning the enhancement of bilateral trade. Also, many promising initiatives such as the establishment of the Joint Consultative Commission or the unveiling of a new 1 billion USD fund to improve connectivity between India and ASEAN (Yhome, interviewed by author 22 July 2016) have yet to prove their true value to the bilateral relationship. With regard to Myanmar, Modi's "Act East Policy" still seems to require an upgrade.

4.2. Aung San Suu Kyi: "India's friend"?

Aung San Suu Kyi has strong biographical ties to India. She spent part of her youth in the country accompanying her mother Khin Kyi, who had been appointed as Burma's ambassador to India in 1960. Suu Kyi graduated from Lady Sri Ram College in New Delhi and has many personal friends in India (Parthasarathy 2016). Famously, she has referred to India as her "second home" (PTI 2014b). Without a doubt, Suu Kyi has "a natural propensity towards closer relations with India" (Malik, interviewed by author 19 July 2016). Former ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia described her as "India's friend", which should be a benefit for India, as analyst Khriezo Yhome of the Observer Research Foundation notes:

> Suu Kyi has strong ties with India and knows India and its peoples. This is surely an advantage for both countries. […] As foreign minister, India will be dealing with a person who understands India, but when it comes to bilateral ties between the two neighbours, she will work for her country's national interests and Delhi would understand. (Yhome, interviewed by author 22 July 2016)

While the preconditions for a closer bilateral relationship are very good, the NLD government will probably have to deal first with problems at home, such as ethnic, religious and economic issues, before turning to major foreign policy initiatives (Hazarika, interviewed by author 15 July 2016). Regarding India–Myanmar relations, continuity can be expected. Former ambassador Gopalaswami Parthasarathy said in an interview:

> There is no reason for us to believe that there will be any change in Myanmar's foreign policy of not doing anything that could have an adverse bearing on India's national security interests. (Parthasarathy, interviewed by author 30 June 2016)

This and Suu Kyi's personal bond with India, however, do not mean that Myanmar's foreign policy will automatically favour New Delhi or that the relationship cannot be damaged, as Parthasarathy notes:

> Like her father, Suu Kyi is first and foremost a Burmese nationalist […]. She will deal with India as a friendly neighbour and base the relationship on what it does to fulfil the aspirations of Myanmar's people. Like most of her fellow citizens, she was unhappy at the crude chest-thumping that accompanied the cross-border raid India carried out last year [2015] on Myanmar's soil. We would do well to remember this while dealing with Myanmar […]. (Parthasarathy 2016)

While the assumption that Aung San Suu Kyi is "India's friend" is certainly true, New Delhi has to be aware that she will be guided by pragmatism (Bhonsle, interviewed by author 25 June 2016) and will never let emotions influence her politics (Roy, interviewed by author 25 June 2016).

4.3. Myanmar as a balancing factor in the India–Myanmar–China triangle?

The potential prospect of Myanmar playing a role in improving the relationship between India and China has intrigued many observers, particularly after Aung San Suu Kyi herself articulated that idea in an interview with an Indian TV journalist. Certainly, one could envision Myanmar as a field of collaboration between New Delhi and Beijing, for example in the areas of development cooperation or energy. However, this would not only require a complete abandonment of any remnants of a zero-sum logic but above all mutual interest from both sides. Since there are important areas of conflicting views, for instance regarding transnationally operating insurgency groups or virtually all matters pertaining to the Myanmar armed forces, it is difficult to envision such a wide-ranging Indian–Chinese rapprochement in Myanmar. In an interview, former Indian ambassador to Myanmar Rajiv Bhatia called the idea "an impractical suggestion" for which "there are no takers […] in India" (Bhatia, interviewed by author 12 July 2016). From today's point of view, it has to be regarded as a mere fantasy.

4.4. India–Myanmar–Bangladesh trilateralism?

The economic and strategic importance of the Bay of Bengal has led to repeated calls for closer cooperation among bordering countries. In particular, the prospect of trilateral approaches among India, Myanmar and Bangladesh has been raising interest. The basic idea is to transform already existing bilateral dialogues between India and Myanmar and between India and Bangladesh into trilateral talks, thereby fostering closer economic cooperation and, ultimately, closer political bonds among the three countries. Such a trilateralism could help address issues such as maritime security, illegal migration, development of borderlands, cross-border connectivity and transnational energy supplies (Yhome 2014: 9-12). However, the divide between Dhaka and Naypyidaw could be too much to overcome in the near future. According to Khriezo Yhome, there are emotive issues, such as the Rohingya question, that are exceedingly difficult to resolve and that are going to hinder any closer cooperation between the two countries, be it bilaterally or trilaterally. Consequently, there "is no sign of any movement towards [a] trilateral approach in the capitals as of today" (Yhome, interviewed by author 22 July 2016). Given the current situation, the idea of India–Myanmar–Bangladesh trilateralism has to be seen as unrealistic.

4.5. Myanmar as a future SAARC member?

A final interesting point to examine is the prospect of Myanmar's possibly joining the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Thus far, Naypyidaw only has observer status within the organisation. A full SAARC membership for Myanmar would represent a historic precedent, since Myanmar would be the only permanent member of both SAARC and ASEAN, thereby bridging the border between the regions of South and Southeast Asia. This "overlapping regionalism" could bring interesting new perspectives not only for issues of connectivity and trade but also and maybe even more importantly for the establishment of a comprehensive regional security environment. The idea of Myanmar joining SAARC was first voiced by India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the 1980s (Malik 2016: 75–76; Haacke 2006: 33–34). Having rejected Rajiv Gandhi's earlier invitation, Myanmar officially applied for SAARC membership in March 2008 (Yhome 2008). The bid was supported by India, yet failed nevertheless (Saez 2011: 40). According to some analysts, India should encourage Myanmar to apply once again for membership and support such a bid even more emphatically, just as it had successfully done when Afghanistan became a full SAARC member in 2007 (Rahman 2009; Singh 2012: 33).

Is a SAARC membership for Myanmar really a conceivable option? According to Rahul K. Bhonsle, there are only limited prospects for this to occur. The first SAARC membership bid in 2008 was probably never meant to succeed but was intended to put pressure on ASEAN not to suspend Myanmar under the military junta (Bhonsle, interviewed by author 25 June 2016). As early as 2003 there had been warnings that an expulsion of Myanmar from ASEAN could become a viable option (Dosch 2016: 54). With Myanmar again firmly established in ASEAN today, there are fewer incentives to reach out to SAARC. ASEAN is widely seen as the "logical regional arrangement" for Myanmar (Malik 2016: xvi). Additionally, Myanmar's ASEAN membership has had and continues to have China's support, which is of no small significance to any government in Naypyidaw (Malik, interviewed by author 19 July 2016). Furthermore, China would probably also play an important role in SAARC expansion. It has shown interest in joining the organisation, and countries such as Pakistan and Nepal might push hard for Chinese membership if Myanmar were to be invited (Yhome, interviewed by author 22 July 2016).

Hence, joining SAARC is for Myanmar at best "a hypothetical question" at present (Roy, interviewed by author 25 June 2016). Former ambassador Bhatia stated accordingly: "I do not foresee Myanmar as a member in SAARC" (Bhatia, interviewed by author 12 July 2016). What is more, recent developments point to a new approach by New Delhi towards its neighbourhood, which would further abandon SAARC and instead strengthen BIMSTEC, in

which Myanmar is already an important member state (Bhatia 2016a). Notwithstanding possible significant improvements in bilateral relations between Myanmar and India, Myanmar as a future SAARC member remains a highly improbable outcome.

5. Conclusion

Although dramatic shifts in the broader diplomatic and security dimension of India–Myanmar relations are rather unlikely, there are certain steps New Delhi could and should take to show its willingness to do more for Myanmar. Rupajyoti Borah of the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore has suggested five measures India should consider (Borah 2017: 5). First, there should be a generous extension of development aid and additional lines of credit to Myanmar. As the findings of this paper have shown, there is much room for improvement in this regard. Second, India could expand its successful bilateral development assistance in the IT sector by providing more technical support and manpower. Third, New Delhi should think about relaxing visa rules for Myanmar nationals in order to foster people-to-people contacts. Additionally, specific exchange and scholarship programmes for students from Myanmar could be helpful. Fourth, unilateral concessions in the field of trade would give India, as the bigger partner, substantial credibility in the relationship. In a new form of "Good Neighbour Policy", India could allow certain products from Myanmar to be imported with few or no tariffs attached. Fifth and finally, a stronger involvement of the Indian private sector in the infrastructure segment and beyond might help alleviate problems of implementation. As argued in this paper, India's difficulties in meeting scheduled dates for the completion of key bilateral projects have severely damaged New Delhi's reputation in Myanmar. Any assistance in order to avoid such complications in the future should be seriously considered.

There is a long way to go in order to make a truly fresh start in India–Myanmar relations. While the window of opportunity is certainly wide open, New Delhi has to avoid the failures of the past, particularly by ensuring the successful execution of foreign policy initiatives under the "Act East" paradigm. There should be no more "gaps between promise and implementation" (Malik, interviewed by author 19 July 2016). All too often, India has damaged its own interests with erroneous decisions, thus becoming a "would-be" instead of a real great power (Chatterjee Miller 2013; Wagner 2005). India has been regarded as an "anti-Machiavelli", committing virtually all the mistakes that an actor striving for power should avoid (Rösel / Gottschlich 2008: 139). Considering India's foreign policy towards Myanmar, one might conclude

that New Delhi has "never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity", to quote Israeli diplomat Abba Eban's famous assessment. For India, it is time to change this perception through a different policy approach and closer collaboration with Myanmar's NLD government.

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Legacies of Military Rule in Myanmar

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Abstract

For more than half a century, Myanmar was ruled by the military. Even now, with a civilian government in power, the military exerts considerable political influence and sees its involvement in national politics as a fundamental task alongside defending the sovereignty and integrity of the country. This factual situation logically derives from the origins and development of the armed forces. A key factor seems to have been the period from 1958 to 1962: not only did the military elite experience governing success during the "Caretaker Government", but also, following the return of authority to civilian political forces, these proved incapable of ensuring the stability and development of the country. The reluctance of the military leadership to fully hand over power to the NLD after the latter won the elections in 2015 seems to reflect the lessons they learned from this experience. This article examines, against the background of history, how the present diarchy evolved and may be seen as a logical feature of transition in the Myanmar Way.

Keywords: Myanmar, military, history, politics, civil-military relations

"Put simply, Burma is an enigma, and the scholars who study this country and its traditions face great challenges," noted Ronald Morse and Helen Loerke in the introduction to their overview *Burma Studies Worldwide* in 1988. This statement is still true, as is the expression "The Burmese Way", denoting the country's uniqueness. Morse and Loerke defined this as "a blend of Burman ethno-centrism, Buddhist metaphysics, an independent (non-aligned) political path, and a socialist model" (ibid.). This latter characteristic no longer applies and could be replaced with "a Myanma style parliamentary democracy", which is a unique feature indeed: there is currently no other country in the world where the constitution defines a leading role for the military in the country's politics as substantiated by a fixed quota of seats in the legislative assemblies at all levels and a number of strategic portfolios. This constellation is widely considered an anomaly, and many comments on current developments in Myanmar attribute to it the setbacks faced by the transition.

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It is not unusual in the world that armed forces seize power with the justifica-tion of rescuing the country from ruin and with the promise "to return to the barracks" as soon as law and order are restored (Finer 1988). This was the promise of the Myanmar military elites, as well. What is special about them, however, is their prolonged rule and the fact that even after eventually step-ping back they are not content with watching developments from the rear but insist on continuing their active participation in political leadership alongside the elected bodies.

In order to take a closer look at the background of this situation, this text will outline a general survey on how political commitment emerged among the armed forces and how they developed into a political, economic and social force, with special attention being given to the late 1950s. It is an attempt to view current events in Myanmar through the lens of the past, relying on estab-lished facts from publications and news media, rather than on own field re-search or archival sources. It will thus not comment on ongoing armed clashes. In talking about *the* military the author is aware that it is not a homogeneous body but consists of groups with different or even diverging interests and ideas. There is something, however, that holds them together: patriotism or, perhaps more precisely, a "praetorian ethos".

An independence army

The national army was first born as the Burma Independence Army (BIA) at the end of December 1941 in Bangkok. Its founders and core were the famous Thirty Comrades, a group of young nationalists led by Aung San, whom the Japanese had trained for their own purposes. The BIA grew quickly in num-bers while they took part in the Burma Campaign of the Japanese Army. Giv-en the circumstances at the time, the masses of volunteers who rushed into the army could be neither scrutinised nor properly trained. Therefore, in the very beginning it was rather an "unwieldy, disorganized, decentralized collection of thousands of thugs, patriots, peasants, and politicians" (Callahan 2003: 58). At the fringes even criminal elements could enter the army for their own obscure purposes.

Two phenomena from the period are noteworthy because of their long-term effects to this day. One is the army's consisting of mostly Bama[1] fighters. This situation arose from the fact that the anti-colonial movement was dis-

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1   The Bamas, also called Burmans, are the most populous of the 135 official ethnic groups in the country; the concrete proportions are controversial, and the ethnicity-related results of the 2014 census have not yet been published. The Bamas make up almost 90 per cent of the population of the lowlands, which was under the direct rule of the British, and was referred to as Ministerial Burma or Burma Proper. The territories of most of the other ethnic groups, often hill tribes, were the surrounding mountainous regions, which were administered indirectly under the continuation of traditional ruling structures.

tinctly concentrated in so-called Ministerial Burma or Burma Proper, i.e. the low-land areas where the vast majority of the population were ethnic Bamas. Their direct exposure to foreign rule gave impetus to the independence movement. By contrast, the traditional elites in the indirectly ruled mountainous areas hardly had reason to turn against the British. On the contrary, most of them were on the British side during the war and the Japanese occupation. Moreover, the Burma Campaign took place chiefly in Lower Myanmar and barely touched areas of other ethnic groups except the Karen, who for historical reasons did not enrol or were not recruited. Thus about three quarters of the new fighters were ethnic Bamas (ibid.: 53). This composition has been fundamental to the exclusive nationalism among the Bamas in general and within the *tatmadaw*[2] in particular – which prevails even today.

The second phenomenon is that already in the first half-year following the Japanese conquest of Burma, the BIA assumed political and administrative responsibilities in addition to its own military tasks. For restoring and maintaining law and order in the countryside the army established local administrative committees and staffed them with pre-war *thakins*[3] and other young nationalists (Callahan 2003: 51). Retrospectively, the military considers this the very beginning of their political leadership in national affairs (Min Maung Maung 1993: 16). When the Japanese replaced the nationalists with former bureaucrats the BIA often became the nationalists' last refuge, and its political clout increased further. Although the Japanese tried to avert the threat by disbanding this army of between 10,000 and 50,000[4] men and re-creating it as the Burma Defence Army of only 3,000 men[5] in July 1942, the nationalist fervour grew. A feeling of brotherhood developed in the Burma National Army (BNA), or Burma Army as it renamed itself after nominal independence in August 1943 (Callahan 2003: 57).

When the Japanese broke their promise to grant immediate independence and instead installed a new colonial regime, the leaders of the Burma National Army became deeply disappointed and started preparations for anti-Japanese resistance. For this purpose they utilised institutions and organisations established by the Japanese administration, such as the Officers' Training School in Mingaladon and the War Office. Their political clout increased when in August 1944 they joined with the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) in order to form the Antifascist People's Free-

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2   The term *tatmadaw* ("Royal Army") and a number of articles about its glory in precolonial times, published in the newspapers during the last period of military rule, may suggest borrowing from the royal past, but these references mainly served propaganda purposes. In actuality, the military leadership takes pride in having emerged from liberation struggles.

3   *Thakins* are members of the nationalist organisation Do-Bama Asi-Ayone, which took charge of the anti-colonial movement in the 1930s.

4   The estimates of the size differ considerably, see Callahan 2003: 235.

5   See Min Maung Maung 1993: 17.

dom League (AFPFL) (Min Maung Maung 1993: 25). When at the end of March 1945 the BNA spearheaded the anti-Japanese uprising they again changed their name, to People's Army, but willingly accepted the new name, Patriotic Burmese Forces (PBF), given by the British in July 1945 (ibid.: 30). During the subsequent struggle for independence from Britain, General Aung San virtually embodied the combination of military and political leadership: in October 1945 he decided to be a politician and left the army but has been revered until now in both capacities – both were integrated components of his personality and reflect the self-concept of the military.

The first decade of independence

Whilst in the pre-war Burma army the Bama were underrepresented, at about 12 per cent, the Kandy Agreement between General Aung San and Admiral Lord Mountbatten of 6 September 1945 stipulated that one wing of the re-established (British) Burma Army of 12,000 men should consist mainly of members of the PBF (3rd, 4th, 5th Burma Rifles plus one Burmese battalion with non-PBF recruits) and the other one mainly of non-Baman units (Kachin, Karen and Chin, two battalions each) (Callahan 2003: 97–98). In effect, two armies came into existence: one resulting from the British-trained professional army without political commitment under the command of British-trained officers, often Karen, and the other one resulting from liberation struggles under the command of Japanese trained ex-PBF officers imbued with patriotism and a missionary zeal – members of the Thirty Comrades.

Each wing was suspicious of the other. In particular the ex-PBF officers regarded those who had served in the British Burma Army as mercenaries, but thought of themselves as fighters who served their own people out of patriotism (Maung Aung Myoe 2009: 48). Moreover they were impaired by internal fissures along party lines, which became evident during the civil war, which commenced in April 1948.

Both government troops and rebels were affected by heavy losses, when most Bama and Kayin units and one Kachin unit joined the insurrection. When the army was reinforced after it had reached its deepest point in February 1949 the majority of new units under the Supreme Commander General Ne Win, who replaced Lt. Gen. Smith Dun on 1 February 1949, were made up of hill people – Kachin, Chin, Shan, even Kayah units (Taylor 2015a: 122). It might have been the origin of a federal army, as is currently being demanded by ethnic armed groups[6] in the ongoing peace talks which were initiated by the Thein Sein government in 2011. But when by January 1949 nearly all Karen units of

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6   See e.g. Saw Yan Naing 2014.

the army and police revolted against the government, the top-ranking Karen officers, including Supreme Commander Smith Dun, were replaced by ex-PBF or other officers whose loyalty was beyond doubt. The fear that foreign powers might exert a dominating influence on Myanmar had lingered since British and Japanese colonial times and influenced decisions – the non-Baman groups remained under the cloud of plotting with those foreign powers. With the members of the War Office and all commanders being mostly Bama ex-officers of the liberation armies, their dominance became near to absolute. Moreover, irregular home guards like the *sitwundan* (mostly Bama) were incorporated, increasing the share of the latter, but also raising the risk of harassment of the local population, as with the *sitwundan* certain "undesirable elements" also crept into the regular armed forces (Callahan 2003: 127).

The success with which the armed forces mastered the challenges during the first years of independence – the insurrections and the invasion of the Guomindang troops in the Shan state – assured the officer corps of their guardian role. In fact, it was the loyalty of the army's leadership to the civilian government and to the norms of the constitution that helped the government to remain in office (Taylor 2009: 239). Even, when they were busy with military tasks they remained involved in politics, more or less directly. More directly when, for example, on 1 April 1949 U Nu assigned Lt. Gen. Ne Win to three offices in his government – deputy prime minister, minister of home and minister of defence affairs – which he held until September 1950 (Taylor 2015a: 126, 144). Less directly when they watched governmental activities with growing disgust and developed their own plans.

Emerging as a political force

The more the civilian government apparently lost sight of the original aim of the liberation movement – to create an independent nation of socialist character – the more it became preoccupied by internal power struggles. Because of this, it was thus less able to exert its authority over the numerous and influential local power centres, often linked with politicians of the Socialist Party, with the result that leading circles of the *tatmadaw* increasingly turned to issues beyond their actual purview.

This can be illustrated by the Annual Commanding Officers' (CO) conferences, which were platforms for the field officers and also venues where major tensions surfaced. Most of the field officers considered themselves as the sustainers of the revolutionary legacy, while regarding the civilians or civilians-turned-politicians, as well as some staff members in the cities, as opportunists and careerists (Callahan 2003: 151).

While the first three CO conferences were mainly "complaint sessions", with the field commanders airing their grievances, the 1952 conference broke this mould. Along with the question of improving the *tatmadaw*'s efficiency, a wide array of society-related issues was brought into discussion: land ownership, economic development, education, local administration and health (Callahan 2003: 153). This was not spurred by any crisis, as prospects seemed fine at that time: stability had been re-established in most of Burma proper, so that general elections could be held in 1951 (which provided the AFPFL with a safe majority to continue its rule), and the Pyidawtha Plan[7] was in preparation for the overall development of the country. Rather it indicated a new approach of the military to counter-insurgency: not only did the decentralised, guerrilla-style state of the army need to be overcome (Callahan 2003: 154), but the appeal of communist propaganda to the rural poor had to be countered (Maung Aung Myoe 2009: 59).

The CO conferences of 1953 and 1954 were marked by a closer cooperation with civilian leaders, in that the prime minister and other members of the cabinet gave informative speeches to the approximately 200 gathered officers in order to rally support for their causes (Callahan 2003: 180). From 1955 onwards, however, this relationship grew increasingly hostile. For example, according to Mary Callahan the vice chief of staff Aung Gyi attacked the Minister for Industry U Kyaw Nyein, saying that "unless the AFPFL could make a better showing of running Burma's affairs, the army would have to intervene" (ibid.). These tensions coincided with the increasing inefficiency of the ruling party due to infighting, even as the *tatmadaw* leaders strengthened their corporate identity. For instance, at their national and regional level conferences they shared the knowledge and experiences they had obtained while on study tours to various countries and when combatting diverse insurgencies. Seeing themselves as fighters for a just cause, they increasingly despised their former comrades-in-arms who had transformed from fighters into party politicians (ibid.: 181).

During the CO Conference in 1954 General Ne Win stressed the need for a distinct ideology for the armed forces. This demand was largely inspired by fear of the communists: "The soldiers [...] know that once the Communists come into power, they will be the first victims, and the Army will go to pieces" (Sein Win 1959: 67). Because this fear "was more of physical necessity than of ideology", as Guardian Sein Win concluded, the distinct anti-communist stance did not prevent the leading *tatmadaw* officers from continuing to embrace socialist ideas. Rather, they considered them as a crucial factor in winning over the people and creating a mass basis for their political ends. Thus,

7   Literally "comfortable land"; a programme of economic and social welfare designed by the Knappen Tippetts Abbett McCarthy Company, New York, and launched in 1953. Based on false assumptions it had to be revised several times and could not be fully implemented.

the first ideological statement that was submitted to the 1956 CO conference synthesised socialist principles and nationalist ideas within the context of a Buddhist society (Callahan 2003: 184).

Three more papers document the evolution of the armed forces as an independent institution with hegemonic ambitions. All of them were produced under the newly created Directorate of Psychological Warfare (Psywar Directorate) against the background of the worsening crises of the AFPFL government.

The CO conference in Meiktila on 20–21 October 1958 discussed not only the report on a new military doctrine and strategy for counter-insurgency but also the statement "State Policy and Our Determination". In this statement the *tatmadaw* pledged to uphold the belief that administrative and economic systems founded on the universal laws of justice, freedom and equality[8] were essential to build up an affluent human society free from all woes (Min Maung Maung 1993: 118). It was also called "the first phase of ideological development". The second phase followed at the CO conference in February 1960, namely the statement "The National Ideology and the Role of the Defence Services", which was on the agenda together with military topics such as the advantages and disadvantages of counter-insurgency operations. Formulating major socio-economic objectives, this document highlighted the *tatmadaw* as an important political institution. Thus, for the first time the *tatmadaw* had an ideological orientation to legitimise its political role (Maung Aung Myoe 2009: 60) and reached a level of ideological coherence not previously achieved (Taylor 2015a: 219). The document stated that democracy would only flourish when the people "respect the law and submit to the rule of law" (ibid.). Its concluding mottos were: 1) peace and rule of law, 2) democracy, 3) socialist economy.

Moreover, it made a clear distinction between the "national politics" pursued by the *tatmadaw* and the "party politics" of scheming politicians who "would sell the country to serve their purposes", as Guardian Sein Win put it (Taylor 2015a: 219). In essence, the principles formulated in this document are still upheld by the military leadership today.

Caretakers (1958–1960)

The political developments in Myanmar seemed to prove the authors of the documents right. In 1958 the long-lasting power struggle and personal rivalries within the ruling AFPFL culminated in a split into two factions: the "Clean AFPFL" led by U Nu and Thakin Tin and the "Stable AFPFL" led by U Ba Swe

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8   Interestingly, Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing used nearly the same phrase at a meeting of the Peace Process Steering Team in June 2016 (Global New Light 2016b).

and U Kyaw Nyein. The continued infighting badly affected the administrative machine, with lack of security, rampant crime, economic disorder and spiralling prices becoming the order of the day. When the central authority was on the brink of collapsing, the army was called in to stabilise the situation. There are various accounts of the events which brought this about, among them the risk of an imminent coup by discontented field commanders (Callahan 2003: 184–186). What can be regarded as fact is that on 26 September 1958 Prime Minister U Nu sent the Commander-in-Chief General Ne Win an invitation to form a caretaker government, that the latter accepted it promising to hold fair elections, and that on 28 October the parliament confirmed him as prime minister. This event is often called a "constitutional coup". Indeed during this first spell in power Ne Win meticulously observed the provisions of the constitution and insisted that the army remain politically neutral (Taylor 2015a: 211). In his first speech as Prime Minister on 31 October 1958 he said:

> I have accepted this responsibility in large measure to prevent any assault on the constitution, which all of us revere and respect. I have taken this responsibility solely in my capacity as an individual, a citizen, and as a soldier. […] I wish to state here, most emphatically, that my Government will not work in the interest of any particular political party (Maung Maung 1969: 250).

He himself had terminated any involvement in the affairs of the Socialist Party in 1955 and repeatedly emphasised the impartiality of the *tatmadaw*. Having reduced the number of ministers from 30 to 13 he formed a functional cabinet that was civilian in appearance and technocratic in character. Ten positions were filled with civilians who were respected for their probity and competence and not affiliated to any party. Only three ministers, including himself, were senior military officers (Taylor 2015a: 217). The parliament and other civilian bodies continued to function (Maung Maung 1969: 260). The initiative, however, was with the military: the civilian ministers were assisted by officers from the armed forces, and the civil service was buttressed by military men, increasing its efficiency considerably (Taylor 2015a: 217). In order to keep peace and run administration in the field, Security Councils were established – joint army-civilian teams, which were coordinated and directed by the Central Security Council chaired by Home Minister U Khin Maung Pyu (Maung Maung 1969: 253).

The performance of the Caretaker Government achieved notable results. Before long it restored security and rule of law, reduced insurgency, curbed the power of the local centres and their pocket armies, brought down commodity prices, combatted criminality and violence, made the Shan and Kayah *sawbwas* (hereditary rulers) relinquish their administrative and judicial powers, and, last but not least, held general elections in February 1960 (Min Maung Maung 1993: 123). Although the public was pleased with the improvements, there was much dislike of the harsh methods which brought them about, such

as the insistence on enforcing rules and regulations, drastic measures against all types of lawbreakers, the persecution of leftists and other critics, and unpopular actions like resettling squatters from the city into the outskirts of Yangon. Therefore, in the elections in February 1960 the majority of voters preferred the Clean AFPFL, chaired by U Nu, whom the masses revered as a pious Buddhist and even a future Buddha, and whose governance promised the return to more liberal conditions and the elevation of Buddhism as state religion.

The question arises as to why Ne Win held the elections although the result was foreseeable, and why he handed over the government to U Nu in spite of his prejudice against politicians in general and U Nu's performance in particular, as well as against the will of a number of commanders (Taylor 2015a: 235). Some scholars attribute it to his respect for the constitution, as Ne Win put it in an address at a CO conference in 1958:

> We ourselves shall serve the people and uphold the constitution. We would work under any constitutionally established government. We would also, on our part, request the leaders of the Government to respect the constitution and call on us to render only those services which are in keeping with this (Maung Maung 1969: 242–243).

From this point of view returning governmental power to the victorious party was an affair of honour. Moreover, Ne Win was internationally lauded for the "giant step to democracy" and awarded the Magsaysay Award for "his conscientious custodianship of constitutional government and democratic principles in Burma through a period of national peril", as a statement by the Magsaysay Awards Foundation board reads (Callahan 2003: 197).[9]

Another paper, circulated by the Psywar Directorate at the Commanding Officers' conference in October 1958 suggests other attitudes, however. Entitled "Some Reflections on Our Constitution" the paper ascribes the political crisis of 1958 mainly to inappropriate provisions in the constitution such as freedom of speech and freedom of association, because the Burmese people were not yet mature enough to make proper use of them and easily fell prey to false propaganda. It suggests "that unscrupulous politicians [...] and their allies may take advantage of the flaws, [...] contradictions and inadequacies of the constitution and bring about in the country gangster political movements, syndicalism, anarchism and a totalitarian regime" (Callahan 2003: 189). This criticism of the Myanmar people tallies with the description Ba Maw gives in his analysis of the 1960 elections, and as this picture might still prevail a part of it is quoted:

> The Burmese have believed for a thousand years or more that a government exists only to promote their religion especially by building pagodas and other rich and costly edi-

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9   Ramon Magsaysay was president of the Philippines from 1953–57. The foundation annually honours individuals who "perpetuate his example of integrity in government and pragmatic idealism within a democratic society" (see also http://www.rmaf.org.ph). Ne Win refused to accept the award, officially, because he was merely carrying out his duty, but more probably the close connection of Magsaysay with the CIA prevented him from doing so (Taylor 2015a: 235).

fices, to collect taxes which it may use as it likes, and to punish the law-breaker and for nothing else; everything else is quickly suspected to be tyranny. They just want to be left alone by the government. Progress means change and all sorts of rules and regulations they cannot understand, and so it is an interference with their lives, or fascism as it is called in Burma nowadays. The people have heard a lot about their democratic rights, but hardly ever of their democratic obligations (Maung Maung 1969: 81).

It seems that the architects of the 2008 constitution took advice from those statements. As Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day in 2016:

> The two main obstructions in our country's progress toward democracy are weakness in obeying rules, regulations and laws, and having armed insurgents. This could lead to disorderly, chaotic democracy. Only if we can fix these two [things], the country's path to democracy will be smooth (San Yamin Aung 2016).

Behind the withdrawal of the armed forces from active politics in 1960 were probably internal problems. On the one hand, the leadership was aware of the armed forces' growing unpopularity, and on the other hand they knew of fissures within the *tatmadaw*, which weakened its coherence and clout. A radical restructuring followed, transforming it into a standing, centralised institution that was efficient throughout the entire country (Callahan 2003: 204). Moreover, at that time the situation was stable, meaning that there was no apparent need for a praetorian guard.

The Caretaker period was instrumental in the transition of the *tatmadaw* from state custodians to state builders for three main reasons: 1) They could test the feasibility of the ideas the officer corps had developed during the 1950s. 2) They could test their own ability and detect weaknesses that had to be overcome before seizing power on their own. 3) The period was favourable for promoting the economic power of the *tatmadaw*. Freed from civilian control, the Defence Services Institute, founded in 1951 under Aung Gyi, could expand even more quickly than before and become "the largest and most powerful business concern in the country" (Steinberg 2005: 56). Securing their own income was essential for the armed forces to maintain their independence, and allowed them to acquire management skills as well. The high degree of self-confidence they derived from their success might have fuelled their firm conviction that they could run complex enterprises and even the whole economy of the country most efficiently (ibid.). The DSI can thus be considered a forerunner of the economic conglomerates which came into existence after 1988.[10]

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10 For example the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd. (UMEHL), and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC). See also Maung Aung Myoe 2009: 176–191, Steinberg 2005: 68.

Backslide (1960–1962)

During the next two years the country fell back on chaotic conditions. As these resulted from the divisions in the Pyidaungsu, or Union Party – as the Clean AFPFL had been renamed – and from the erratic politics of Prime Minister U Nu, the military elite saw their view of political parties confirmed. Moreover their praetorian mindset was overstrained by the campaigning of some Shan *sawbwas* for secession, which then led to other Shan *sawbwas* and ethnic leaders calling for a "genuine federation" – which the military construed as breaking up the Union. In February 1961 the Shan State Steering Committee had agreed upon the decision that the Union Constitution should be revised in accordance with the principles of true federalism.[11] This demand was unanimously adopted by the leaders of the Union States at their convention in Taunggyi in June 1961 and forwarded to the Union Government, which in several discussions showed a willingness to consider the demands and agreed to discuss them at a federal seminar at the end of February 1962 (Taylor 2015a: 245). If implemented they would have entailed a high degree of local autonomy and a substantial reduction of central power. These prospects added to the critique widely shared within the army of parliamentary democracy as practised in Myanmar (Taylor 2015b: 294), reason enough to end it and to seize power on 2 March 1962 in order to put the military leadership's own projects into effect – encouraged by the praise they had earned for their performance as caretakers.

Running the country: Direct Military Rule (1962–1988)

While during the Caretaker Government period the military leadership acted within the frame established by the system of parliamentary democracy, they now upset this system, dissolved the parliament, dismantled all institutions of the 1947 constitution, established themselves as a Revolutionary Council of 17 members and formed an administrative cabinet of seven senior officers – members of the Revolutionary Council – plus one civilian[12] (Mya Han 1991: 4, 197). Both bodies were chaired by General Ne Win, who assumed all legislative, executive and judicial authority.

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11 Basic requirements stated in the document: 1) Establishment of a Burmese State; 2) Assignment of equal power to both chambers of the Union Parliament; 3) Each State to be represented by an equal number of representatives in the Chamber of Nationalities; 4) All powers, rights and entitlements except the following departments shall be transferred to the States: a) Foreign Affairs, b) Union Defence, c) Union Finance, d) Coinage and Currency, e) Posts and Telegraphs, f) Railways, Airways and Waterways, g) Union Judiciary, h) Sea Customs Duty; 5) Union revenue to be distributed equitably (Shan Federal Proposal 1961).

12 U Thi Han; as director of procurement in the War Office and member of the Caretaker Government from February 1959 onwards, he was close to the military leadership.

The new rulers immediately started to implement the ideas that had been developed in the CO conferences of the 1950s. On this basis, within one month the programmatic declaration "The Burmese Way to Socialism" was finalised at the 1962 CO conference, endorsed after some discussion and published on 30 April 1962. Like the earlier documents it was an amalgam combining socialist ideas, in particular borrowed from political economy and historical materialism, with Buddhist concepts. As its aim it projected a society where "exploitation of man by man is brought to an end and a socialist economy based on justice is established" (Revolutionary Council 1962: 1) to be built by the country's own efforts, excluding external influences.

For the effective implementation of the programme, the *tatmadaw* secured absolute leadership in all areas of society including the economy. Because of their basic distrust of civilians, in all essential offices they preferred the employment of military personnel disciplined by the chain of command. Thus, more than expert knowledge, the military virtues of loyalty and obedience became crucial in filling positions. Moreover, arbitrary policies and isolationism caused a catastrophic deterioration of the economy.[13] The introduction of a parliamentary system based on the 1974 constitution and the increased application of economic criteria in the 1970s could not prevent economic failure. At the core the system remained the same: primacy of politics over economics and decision-making by central authorities, the majority of which were former or even active military officers.

Utilising the advantages of having access to all resources, the *tatmadaw*, including family members, evolved into a privileged social entity or class with all the prerequisites – better schooling, better health system, etc. – to produce further generations of elites in all sectors of society. The military came to control all avenues of social mobility (Steinberg 2015: 51).

This added to the growing contempt of the population for the once so highly-esteemed *tatmadaw*, whose leaders were now blamed for the dramatic deterioration in living conditions caused by the economic disaster. The latter entailed the humiliation of having to apply for the status of a Least Developed Country and getting it, being grouped together with the poorest states.[14] This failure did not make the military elites lose confidence in their historic mission. Rather they attributed the public disapproval, which became evident in the protest movement of 1988 and the elections of 1990, to having bet on the wrong

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13 It made the warning of Sir J. S. Furnival seem prophetic: "Yet Burmans cannot lead a healthy national life in isolation from the outside world. It is a law of political as of natural evolution that organisms which keep themselves to themselves survive if at all only as freaks, museum pieces, until, on exposure to the stress and pressure of the outside world, they break down and disintegrate" (Furnivall 1957: g).

14 Asia: Cambodia, Laos, East-Timor, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Yemen; in Africa 34 states, nearly all in the sub-Saharan region.

horse, namely socialism, and to similar factors as cited in the above-mentioned paper of 1958: the deficient character of the masses.

New strategies (1988–2017)

In order to remedy the flaws in the Burmese way of socialism, the military government, after openly seizing power again on 18 September 1988, made the market economy and an open-door policy crucial to their politics. Moreover, it responded to the democratic aspirations of the masses by holding multiparty elections in May 1990 and allowing a great number of political parties. The masses, however, delivered a landslide victory to their great hope, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and a devastating defeat to the military, thus – in the eyes of the latter – once again demonstrating their inclination to follow a false prophet. As a logical consequence of its opinion about civilian political parties and perhaps also having learned a lesson from the instability which followed the transfer of power in 1960, the military did not follow the usual procedures of parliamentary democracy. Instead of handing over power to the victorious party, the military declared a new constitution to be necessary and gave the elected parliament the task of drafting one. After the NLD, which took 80 per cent of the parliamentary seats, refused to do so, the military had the principles of a constitution drafted by the National Convention between January 1993 and September 2007, with a break of eight years (1996–2004). Eventually the State Constitution Drafting Commission transformed these principles into a constitution, which was confirmed in a nationwide referendum in May 2008 and entered into force in January 2011. Thus, in adaptation to the changed international conditions following the collapse of the socialist world, the military rulers created a political framework that complies with the norms of a parliamentary democracy – which in reality they are suspicious of – while at the same time institutionalising the military's guardian role.

The main move was the involvement of military personnel in the legislatures and central government, to be appointed solely by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, over which civilian institutions had no control. This was designed to maintain stability in the event of disagreements among civilian political forces. Thereby the military made a virtue out of necessity and utilised the status of the constitution to protect its core interests, including clauses that prevent any change of the provisions guaranteeing the military's autonomy and leading role in national politics. This has been the critical precondition for their willingness to accommodate the transition to a civilian-governed society.

Moreover, the transfer of state power to elected civilians was designed as a gradual process.

As the first step of transition, in November 2010, they organised general elections on the basis of the 2008 constitution in such a way that their proxy party – the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) – could win the vast majority of votes in the parliaments.[15] It might not have worked that way if the popular opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD) had not responded to the restrictive laws and regulations by boycotting the elections. In possession of the absolute majority in the Union Parliament the USDP could form a government consisting mainly of people with a military background: out of the 46 ministers at the national level 32 were former senior officers and 5 even on active duty, and of the 14 chief ministers of the regions and states all but one were retired military officers (Selth 2015: 15). The position of President was taken by former general U Thein Sein, who had been a member of the State Peace and Development Council and the last Prime Minister under the military regime. This government and parliament initiated a number of political and economic reforms that astounded the world. The world was even more surprised when they held free elections at the end of their reign, on 8 November 2015, and handed over state power systematically and smoothly after their rival party NLD had won a landslide victory. The defeat was bitter because the electorate had not rewarded their claimed commitment to the national good. But they had achieved what they wanted: an orderly and respected retreat from the front line, without giving up supervision.

Since it is the constitution that guarantees this withdrawal, prioritising changes to the constitution – which was a major pledge of Aung San Suu Kyi and other oppositional forces prior to the election of 2015 – would have proved counterproductive. Soon after her takeover, Suu Kyi explicitly made the peace process and national reconciliation the first priority of her government, relativising the demand for amending the constitution by stating that in "our effort to amend the constitution, we will choose ways and means that would not adversely affect the people. We won't resort to means which will affect national peace" (Global New Light 2016a).

At a press conference in June 2016 the Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House of Parliament), U Win Myint, a close compatriot of Suu Kyi's, explained: "Amending the constitution will not be successful if we attempt to implement changes without first securing national reconciliation" (Ei Ei Toe Lwin / Swan Ye Htut 2016). This could open a door with the *tatmadaw's* Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who repeatedly men-

15 These are: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) consisting of the chambers Pyithu Hluttaw (lit. People's Chamber; House of Representatives, also called Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Nationalities' Chamber, also called Upper House); 7 Region Hluttaws and 7 State Hluttaws. One quarter of the representatives are non-elected military personnel; three ministries of strategic importance – Defence, Border Affairs, Interior – are run independently by senior military officers.

tioned lasting peace as a paramount task. But political activists – both Bama and other ethnic groups – raised vehement protests against this statement. Their main argument has been that the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO) will never agree to a peace deal without constitutional change. Still, as an outgoing MP from the Shan National Development Party remarked, without first building trust with the military any attempts are doomed to fail (ibid.). The fate of the attempt of the constitutional amendment committee set up by the then-Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw, Thura U Shwe Mann, in June 2015 to amend some controversial articles was proof of this: the military representatives blocked the bills. But unnoticed by the media and public, a constitution amendment law was passed by the parliament in July 2015, complementing the legislative and tax competences of the regional parliaments as listed in Schedule 2 and 5 of the constitution.[16] This suggests that constitutional amendments may be achieved if they do not impinge upon what the military regards as their fundamental interests (Steinberg 2015: 53). Moreover, the case of the State Counsellor Law shows that it is possible to implement articles of the constitution beyond the limits set by its creators.[17]

The *tatmadaw*'s White Paper of 2015, which was released to a limited audience in February 2016, may be a sign of the *tatmadaw*'s growing openness: for the first time this type of strategic document was released to outsiders. The 99-page document provides a basic outline of the defence policy and the objectives and structures of the armed forces. These aim to emerge as a strong, competent and modern patriotic force that safeguards the Union against all internal and external dangers. One of the four defence missions defined in the paper pledges to abide by the provisions of the constitution. Another one refers to the army's political commitment, in that – in addition to military aspects – also political, economic and administrative aspects are included in training in order to achieve the "three capabilities" – military, administrative and organisational – which are essential for participation in national political leadership in the state (Maung Aung Myoe 2016).

In his address at the passing out parade of the 59th Intake of the Defence Service Academy in Pyin Oo Lwin in 2017, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing defined the role of the armed forces as follows:

> [The] tatmadaw is responsible for safeguarding the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, composed of over 100 national races. […] [The] tatmadaw is taking part as a national institution in a multiparty democracy platform which is chosen by [the] people. Our tatmadaw must be free from the shadow of politics. [The] tatmadaw must safeguard national interests and identities. [The] tat-

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16 See Law 45/2015 of the Union Parliament from 22 July 2015 (www.pyithuhluttaw.gov.mm; in Burmese).

17 Making use of Article 217 of the Constitution, which allows the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to confer "functions and powers upon any authoritative body or person" it was possible to create for Aung San Suu Kyi, who was prevented from becoming president in accordance with Article 59f, a position – State Counsellor – which makes her the de facto head of state and thus puts her over the president, as announced prior to the elections.

madaw venerates Our Three Main National Causes and is trying to achieve a Union based on the federal system and democracy in accordance with a policy based on the pathway of the multiparty democracy system (Weekly Eleven 2017).

Therefore, stepping into the background and being content with the role of a veto power instead of ruling directly does not mean that the armed forces are consenting to civilian control or are resigning from politics. Rather they maintain their institutional independence and implement their participation in national politics by acting in parallel with the elected government, at best in tune with it – sort of a diarchy. In so doing they might find it comforting that they need to deal with one authority only – Daw Aung San Suu Kyi – instead of with a plethora of political parties, each with its own ambitious leader(s) and agenda.

In the aftermath of the 2015 elections there are toe-holds for rapprochement. The loser was the USDP, not the *tatmadaw*, which was, instead, a winner. The new situation offers the armed forces an opportunity to distance themselves from the NLD's rival party, which they had been identified with – "the military-backed party" – and which they perhaps suspect of assuming evil traits like the power struggles typical of political parties (see the purge of Thura U Shwe Mann in August 2015).[18] Thus they can present themselves as a national institution free from party entanglements.

The ongoing peace-building process to which both government and *tatmadaw* have pledged their first priority offers common ground for cooperation as well as an opportunity to take the other side at their word. Launched by the quasi-civilian government of president U Thein Sein in 2011 it achieved its first results in the form of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which was, however, signed by only eight Ethnic Armed Groups (EAO) on 15 October 2015. The process was continued in the form of the 21st Century Panglong Conference, the third session of which is planned for May 2018. All stakeholders declare a "genuine democratic federal nation" the eventual goal, but the ideas for its design are mutually exclusive. The concept of the military is centripetal in that the peripheral units should integrate with the centre. It is embedded in the "Our Three Main National Causes",[19] which have been the credo of the military since the 1990s, and which are invoked time and again. The concepts of the leaders of the nationalities, on the other hand, are rather centrifugal, i.e. as independent from the centre as possible, as envisaged in the federal proposal of 1961, for example. Thus far, no specific position of the NLD on this issue is known, and some EAOs have come to perceive the NLD

18 On 13 August 2015 the then Joint Chairperson of the USDP, Thura U Shwe Mann, together with some aids who were members of the Central Executive Committee, were demoted to ordinary party members. While the official explanation referred to his high workload due to his dual function as acting party chair and parliamentary speaker, it has been widely believed that his closeness to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the attempt to amend the constitution were the real reasons for the purge (see Sai Wansai 2015).

19 Non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of the national solidarity, consolidation of national sovereignty.

and the military as a single Bama-defined block. The main problem remains the mutual lack of trust that has emerged throughout history. In order to over-come this obstacle both the *tatmadaw* and the NLD need to prove that their mindsets are free of the Bama- or Buddhist-centred nationalism that the ethnic minorities accuse them of.

Future perspectives

Asked by BBC reporters in March 2015 when the *tatmadaw* will withdraw from politics, President U Thein Sein answered: "In fact the military is the one who is assisting the flourishing of democracy in our country. As the political parties mature in their political norms and practice, the role of the military gradually changes" (Weekly Eleven 2015). Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing expressed it more bluntly when during his speech at the Armed Forces Day parade in 2016 he told the attendees that the armed forces would not allow the country to "totter backwards" into "a situation which could harm the stability, perpetuation of sovereignty and non-disintegration of the Union" (San Yamin Aung 2016).

That the military elites expand the basic function of the armed forces "to en-hance the safety of the nation's social, economic and political institutions" (Hun-tington 1957: 1) for a responsible role in Myanmar's decision and policy-making structures "is the logical result of decades of nationalist, anticolonial and failed state and nation building struggles" (Egreteau / Jagan 2013: 45). Therefore, un-der the prevailing conditions the attempt to curtail the military's influence by maximising civilian power and subjecting them to civilian leadership – i.e. es-tablishing subjective control[20]– as some observers continue to demand will most likely fail.

The conflict in North Rakhine, which has led to the flight of more than 600,000 Muslim residents since August 2017, has led to two opposing views on the *tatmadaw*. International media condemn them as the culprit, guilty of mur-der, rape, expulsion and even genocide. To the public in Myanmar, however, they appear in their basic function as protectors, thus improving their reputa-tion, which has been badly damaged during decades of serving as rulers.

How will this state of affairs affect the future place of the *tatmadaw* in My-anmar society? Will it strengthen its political role or promote its evolution into a professional army which is politically neutral?[21] Perhaps there are chances for

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20 See Huntington 1957: 80.

21 Compare Huntington 1957: 71: Politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participa-tion of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism, curtailing their professional compe-tence, dividing the profession against itself and substituting extraneous values for professional values. The military officer must remain neutral politically.

the latter: Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has repeatedly emphasised that the *tatmadaw* must be free of political influences and has vowed to form a "standard" army in terms of equipment and skills (Nyein Nyein 2017), avoiding the term "professional" as this is equated with mercenaries. On the part of the government, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi already in her campaign speech on 21 September 2015 signalled support for such a development. She said that although there are disagreements between the military and the NLD over amending the constitution, both yearn for a "bright and stable democratic federal union", and that the NLD wants the *tatmadaw* to be a highly qualified modern institution according democratic standards that will defend the freedom, security and peace of the country and is respected in the world because the people love it (Aung San Suu Kyi 2015). Such an approach may help to integrate the military into society, utilising their skills for the good of the country while ensuring that "the management of violence", Huntington's definition of the profession of soldiers, does not cross the line of oppression (Huntington 1957: 11). In other words, it could contribute to maximising the professionalism of the armed forces, which is the essential condition for objective civilian control, described by Huntington as its most effective manifestation (ibid.: 83).

A senior officer in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital city, had an apt comment regarding perspectives: "The antipathy to civilians and politicians, so long a dogma of the *tatmadaw*, would gradually be erased as they worked together in the legislature. Therefore, this civilian-military duality might be a good interim measure for future relations" (Steinberg 2015: 53).

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Wetland Sanctuary Co-management and Conflict: An Exploratory Study of the Impacts of the Baikka Beel Project in Bangladesh

Nahreen I. Khan, Kawser Ahmed

Abstract

In 2003, the Government of Bangladesh declared Baikka Beel, a 100-hectare wetland in the north-eastern part of the country, as a permanent wetland sanctuary conservation project intended to preserve its fish breeding and bio-diversity. Within the framework of the Borogangina Resource Management Organisation, a co-managed project was launched with the support of the USAID. Through a community husbandry initiative several NGOs and one multi-national company also took part in the project. Field research was conducted in 2012 to explore the socio-economic and environmental impacts of the co-managed project. The research revealed that the primary dependent group (i. e. the fishermen) who live in the surrounding vicinity were excluded from the co-management process and that the project impacted their economic, social, political and cultural lives considerably. The top-down approach apparently failed to persuade relevant stakeholders to buy in, resulting in a conflict among three relevant project stakeholder groups as they perceived and pursued their interests on a piecemeal basis.

Keywords: Co-management, conflict escalation, natural resource management, Bangladesh

Introduction

Bangladesh is a country of deltaic floodplains, making it one of the world's most important wetlands, upon which a vast population remains highly dependent. Therefore it can almost be claimed that "Bangladeshis are sculptured by the rivers, lands, and wetlands rather than the land being shaped by the people" (Rahman / Davis 2005: 11). A survey shows that approximately 80 per cent of the rural households are either subsistent or commercial fishermen (Islam / Braden 2006) and about 60 per cent of animal protein is attained from fish consumption (Belton et al. 2011).

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Depending on various local (resource depletion) and global (donor funding) factors, the state often intervenes to protect its bio-diversity. Such intervention is often essential because, on the one hand, the state does not want its citizens to remain overly dependent on a natural resource, thereby causing its depletion, while on the other hand, intervention helps to maintain the delicate ecological balance of the country. Baikka Beel (the first and only permanent wetland sanctuary in Bangladesh) is one such case where the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) intervened, because an excessive dependency on and misuse of the wetland had been causing large-scale bio-diversity extinctions since the 1990s (Mukul 2007).

This paper explores the case of a wetland and its stakeholders working within a joint wetland management system, the Baikka Beel Project. This conservation project evolved from the Bangladesh Ministry of Land's (MoL) realisation that a multi-party conservation approach in small areas has the potential to sustain the ecology and bio-diversity while at the same time protecting the livelihood of hundreds of people living in the vicinity. While the reports of the MoL, as well as of participating project partners, describe only positive aspects of the project,[1] our research shows that this project might have brought some unintended consequences for the local inhabitants in general and for the fishermen in particular.

One might even go so far as to say that our study shows that the co-managed project did more harm than good, especially to the local inhabitants: it impacted negatively on livelihood and led to nutrition loss and geographical dislocation for the most vulnerable group (i. e. fishermen), who were highly dependent on the wetland's natural resources, and eventually escalated into inter-group conflict. Co-management sometimes disrupts an already existing social power hierarchy as it attempts to realign the power relationship among social groups, which in turn triggers inter-group rivalry. Resistance in this case came in passive (non-cooperation) and active forms (protests and demonstration), as observed during the study period. Moreover, an analysis of historical data points to the fact that the conflict in question can be termed a "conservation conflict" related to the preservation of the wetland sanctuary, since visible manifestation of conflict was not discernible before 2003.

Natural resource co-management approaches and conflict

Co-management concepts have been developed in many countries around the world where a state has felt the necessity to co-opt locals and interested external third party agencies to operate certain conservation projects. This occurs

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1   See reports by Winrock International 2013 and of the Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS 2012).

mainly for two reasons: to rely upon the technical, financial and knowledge expertise of external agencies and to reduce the government footprint in active resource management. However, scholars define co-management as a condition that "refers to joint decision making by the state and communities (or other interest groups) about one or more aspects of natural resource access or use" (Castro / Nielsen 2001: 230). Certain salient aspects occur in such collaborative environments: for example, "two or more social actors negotiate, define, and guarantee amongst themselves an equitable sharing of the management functions, entitlements, and responsibilities for a given territory or set of natural resources" (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2000: 1). Additionally, co-management also involves "state agencies sharing resource allocation or management responsibilities with communities. […] Although these stakeholders may hold different interests, the fundamental assumption is that sharing authority and decision making will enhance the process of resource management" (McCay / Jentoft 1998: 26).

Le Billon posits that natural resource-related conflict is often expressed in binary terms (i.e. abundance or scarcity), although conflict can result from mere "vulnerability resulting from resource dependence"; he therefore linked violence generated from conflict to "the conflictuality of natural resource political economies" (Le Billon 2001: 561). In a similar vein, the primary stakeholders who live in two villages within the study area, the core constituents of the conservation project, are those most likely to engage in activities to protect their livelihoods, which is why it is beneficial to understand that the "growing human production of nature, and the political forces behind such production" drive conservation-related conflicts (Bryant / Bailey 1997: 191). However, inasmuch as the conflict is a "situation that occurs when two or more parties with strongly held opinions clash over conservation objectives and when one party is perceived to assert its interests at the expense of another", it is also about people organised into different camps while disagreeing about fundamental conservation and development goals (Redpath et al. 2013: 100).

Escobar suggests a holistic understanding of environmental conflicts, taking into consideration three inter-related elements: "economic, ecological, and cultural" (Escobar 2006: 6). He also contends that in order to lay out a political ecology framework to understand the dynamics of conservation-related conflicts, one should also focus on understanding the stakeholders' relationships based on "access" to resources and the prevailing "cultural" diversity of different stakeholders (ibid.). Scholars argue that political economy only takes into account the economic distribution resulting from social groups' proximity to political power; whereas political ecology, in contrast, takes into account the "ecological and cultural dimensions of distribution and equality" that are pertinent to our research (ibid.). Similarly, another scholar has commented

that a better way to analyse conservation-related conflict is to use an "ecological distribution conflict" lens (Martinez-Alier 2003).

Conflict Escalation (CE) is one of the useful theories in understanding natural resource-related conflicts and their constructive management. However, CE theory is dependent on the resource in question and the actors or stakeholders in terms of their interest in and influence on the matter (Yasmi et al. 2011). Conflicts related to forests, aquatic resources and cultivatable and/or arable land are ubiquitous and may involve violence, such as physical attacks or even assault.[2] In this article we have used Friedrich Glasl's CE model to analyse the conflict. This model has nine stages based on the level of conflict intensity, which increases as the number rises: 1) hardening; 2) debate, polemic; 3) actions not words; 4) image and coalition; 5) loss of face; 6) strategies of threat; 7) limited destructive blows; 8) fragmentation of enemy; 9) together into the abyss (Glasl 1999). The important aspect of the model is that conflict intensifies not only due to the existing differences (both perceived and real) of the stakeholders but also because of the perception of "impairment" that one party feels due to the behaviour of another actor because of these differences. For this reason conflict management strategies should be devised based on conflict intensity level. Consequently, Glasl suggests that conflict intervention should be implemented when the conflict is at its least intense phase.

The case of Baikka Beel – past and present

Baikka Beel is an extended part of Hail Haor, one of the three major haors[3] in Bangladesh under community management initiative. It is a 100-hectare wetland sanctuary located in Kalapur Union, in Sreemangal Upazila,[4] located 200km northeast of Dhaka. During the dry winter season, the haors tend to dry up significantly, but Baikka Beel retains water throughout the entire year. Therefore, it is an important breeding ground for numerous aquatic and fish species, of which many are categorised as rare and endangered. It is also a premier birding destination in Bangladesh. The aquatic species that mostly shelter and breed at Baikka Beel also disperse to Hail Hoar to re-populate the region during the rainy season, thus safeguarding the availability and sustainability of natural resources.[5] Approximately 172,000 people living in 60 villages surround Hail Hoar and the majority of these households are fishermen

2   For some examples see Peluso / Watts 2001; Ayling / Kelly 1997; Alston et al. 2000.

3   A *haor* is the local term for a large wetland. It consists of bowl or saucer-shaped shallow depressions that are inundated or flooded seasonally.

4   An *upazila* is a sub-district. Sreemangal Upazila is a sub-district of Moulvibazar under the Greater Sylhet district, Bangladesh.

5   For further reading refer to John Valbo-Jørgensen / Paul M. Thompson (2007): *Culture-based Fisheries in Bangladesh: A Socio-Economic Perspective*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

by profession (CNRS 2012). The living standard of the majority of people in haor areas, Baikka Beel included, is one of the lowest in Bangladesh and the population density is high. With one of the poorest road communication networks in terms of connectivity with the mainland, eleven haor upazilas are not connected with the roads network.

Figure 1: Location of Baikka Beel
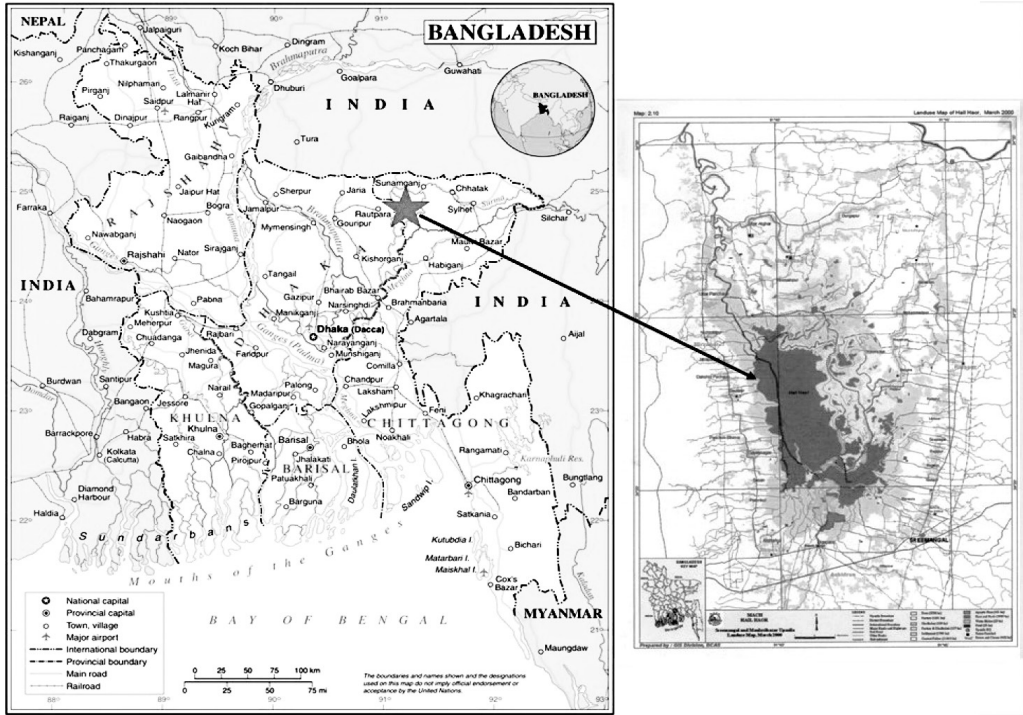
Source: Monwar et al. 2014

Since 2003, when the Baikka Beel area was declared a sanctuary zone, it has been considered a safe haven for birds, reptiles, mammals and fish and from 2004 onwards all fishing, hunting and aquatic plant collection was banned (although limited fishing rights were given to selected people, who were awarded lease by the local government). Consequently, it was observed that the wetland sanctuary declaration resulted in increased fish size and abundance (Dev 2011: 67). The GoB's approach to the management of Baikka Beel is based on a multi-party participatory model in which USAID, the US-based funding agency, is the principal project donor; it supports the project through its Management of Aquatic Resources through Community Husbandry

(MACH)[6] programme. MACH began in 1998 and is implemented jointly by Winrock International, the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, Caritas Bangladesh and the Center for Natural Resource Studies. The major purpose of MACH is to demonstrate to communities, local government and policy makers the viability of community approaches to sustainable natural resource conservation and management in aquatic ecosystems, with the ultimate goal of ensuring food security to those dependent on wetland aquatic resources. During the fieldwork period, the project supported training and micro-credits for alternative occupations and income sources for fishing households, among other activities (MACH 2017). Besides MACH, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Borogangina Resource Management Organization (BRMO), Ministry of Land (MoL), Social Welfare Development, Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS, a Bangladeshi NGO), Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC), Chevron Bangladesh (a multinational company) and other resource management organisations (RMOs) are the stakeholders in this project. Principal aspects and stakeholders of the co-managed programme are illustrated below (see Table 1).

The institutional approach of all these organisations that work within the co-managed environment shows the following characteristics (Thompson / Choudhury 2011): 1) The resource management organisations (RMOs) that have been established to protect and sustain wetland resources represent all stakeholders. 2) Separate organisations, the Federations of Resource User Groups (FRUG), have been formed to help the poor diversify and enhance their livelihoods. 3) These community-based organisations have been formally linked with local government (both union parishads – elected local councils and upazilas, or sub-district administration) through Upazila Fisheries Committees. 4) Separate partner NGOs have worked to support each of these bodies and their activities in a collaborative and coordinated way.

Once the project was implemented, a limited number of fishermen were still able to work with selected lessees (selected by BRMO authority) who obtained the right to catch fish. However, this dual system – the total ban on fishing under the conservation regime vs selected fishing rights (who was included, and who was not) – gave rise to questions amongst the primary stakeholders. The exact number of those "fortunate" fishermen could not be ascertained during the study period.

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6   "The key elements of the MACH approach have been establishing community organizations and then embedding within them institutions for sustainable wise use of wetland resources, formally linking these with the existing local government system, and through this making interventions to restore wetland productivity and improve the livelihoods of the poor. The organizations involved comprise: 16 Resource Management Organizations representing all local people with interests in wetlands and fisheries, 13 Federations of Resource User Groups comprising of poor fishers and other poor wetland users, 25 Union Parishads, and the administrations of 5 Upazilas. Co-management is formalized through Upazila Fisheries Committees where representatives of all bodies sit to coordinate and oversee management of the systems" (Thompson / Choudhury 2011).

Table 1: Organizations involved in the co-managed project of Baikka Beel

Internal Stakeholders

Ministry of Land (MoL), Government of Bangladesh	The MoL declared Baikka Beel as a permanent wetland sanctuary on 1 July 2003. It chose a multi-party participatory model to provide sustainable management of Baikka Beel.
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	USAID is a US-based funding agency, the principal project donor, supporting the pilot project MACH financially.
Management of Aquatic Resources through Community Husbandry (MACH) Program	MACH was run from 1998–2008, implemented jointly by Winrock International, the Bangladesh Center for Advanced Studies, Caritas Bangladesh, and the Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS, a Bangladeshi NGO founded in 1993).
Borogangina Resource Management Organization (BRMO)	BRMO was developed under USAID and the MACH program. The organisation is registered as an NGO with the Social Welfare Department of the Government of Bangladesh with a general body (consisting of 47 fishermen, farmers, women and local leaders). It is also supported by 1) the local union council; 2) the Department of Fisheries; 3) the upazila committee under the supervision of the local administrative head. BRMO is responsible for the concrete management of the wetland.
Federation of Resource User Group (FRUG	Separate organisations, which have been formed to help the poor diversify and enhance their livelihoods.

External Stakeholders

Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC)	IPAC was set up by Nishorgo Network, another NGO in Bangladesh, which funded the MACH project from 2008.
Chevron Bangladesh	Chevron Bangladesh is a multinational company, and a financial partner for promoting tourism in the Baikka Beel region.

Source: compiled by authors

Of the 16 RMOs, Borogangina RMO (BRMO) is the one situated within the study area. It used the concept of a Community Conserved Area,[7] which included 45 surrounding villages (fishermen, farmers, women and local leaders were included) to manage the conservation as well as to liaise with villagers, with multiple goals in mind. An important stakeholder representing the

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7   This includes realistic activity packages for the stakeholders, which cover household-level livelihood planning and intervention, training needs assessment, awareness and institution building, habitat rehabilitation, afforestation, wise use of fish and other wetland resources, establishment sanctuaries, community development and local level institution building, and social and biological monitoring.

MACH programme in Baikka Beel is the Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS), a Bangladeshi NGO. Additionally, the Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) programme of Nishorgo Network, another NGO in Bangladesh, funded the project from 2008. For conservation purposes, a variety of wetland management functions were divided among different stakeholders: the management part of the wetland to BRMO; policy monitoring to USAID; financial partner for promoting tourism to Chevron Bangladesh; and wetland policy implementation to the CNRS.

BRMO is registered with the Bangladesh Social Welfare Department and its local stakeholders are local fishermen, farmers, women and local leaders randomly chosen by BRMO officials. Additionally, the local union council, the Department of Fisheries and the upazila committee support it. Under the BRMO, a Federation of Resource User Group (FRUG) was also formed and some fishermen signed up to become participants of the MACH programme[8] while others did not. MACH-participating fishermen received significant training on knowledge sharing, financial and technical services, marketing, organisational information, alternative income and social and cultural activities (Dev 2011).[9]

In Bangladesh, several laws and acts are in place governing distribution and access to lands by the population.[10] One study showed that at least 60 per cent of rural families are land-poor or even landless (Ali 2010). Local fishermen, in particular, are not dependent on arable lands per se but rather on wetland areas, and they have enjoyed their traditional "usufruct rights" to resources since the colonial period (Khan 2011). Through the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, the colonial administration included Sylhet District (including Mou-

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8   The Management of Aquatic Ecosystems through Community Husbandry (MACH) project is a USAID-supported pilot project that started in 1998 and is implemented jointly by Winrock International, the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, Caritas Bangladesh and the Center for Natural Resource Studies. The major purpose of the MACH project is to demonstrate to communities, local government and policy makers the viability of community approaches to sustainable natural resource conservation and management in aquatic ecosystems, with the ultimate goal of ensuring food security to those dependent on wetland aquatic resources. The MACH approach has been to consider all factors that affect the community and the aquatic resources at the ecosystem level. This has involved a multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral and participatory process of planning, implementation and monitoring. For example, recognising that the reduction of fishing pressure to a sustainable level is a critical part of fisheries management, and that this would cause hardship for some fishers, the project supported training and micro-credit for alternative occupations and income sources for fishing households (MACH 2017: 10).

9   The study by Bishwajit Kumar Dev (2011) compared the statuses and livelihood patterns of fishermen participating in the MACH project with those who did not participate (for details see p. 70). It is assumed that membership in such a programme was on a voluntary basis. The fundamental expectation was to educate the dependent fishermen about fish resources and train them for alternate professions in order to reduce dependency on fishing. In line with this study, we also observed that the fishermen who participated in the MACH programme benefited from it.

10   For example, the National Land Use Policy of 2001, the 1972 Constitution (last amended in 2011), the 1950 State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, the 1984 Land Reforms Ordinance, the Transfer of Property Act of 1882 and the Registration Act of 1908. *Khas* lands are owned by the Ministry of Land, which may allow their use by the otherwise landless or by those who pay money to lease it. *Waqf* or trustee lands are under control of another ministry or department but managed by a committee. *Khas* bodies of water are owned by the Ministry of Land, and forest lands are completely owned and managed by the Ministry of Forest and Environment (Khan 2011).

luvibazar sub-division, which contains a large part of the wetland that in-
cludes Baikka Beel) in the revenue collection system (Hunter 1881: 495). This
1793 historical record actually gave birth to a perceived right in people's
minds to enjoy the natural resources "located in common properties" (often
described as public land or *khas* property in Bangladesh: common-law free-
hold government land) for those who live near wetlands, without being en-
gaged in a renter-owner relationship. However, things have changed since the
mid-1990s, when many of the wetlands were leased out to interested lessees
(who participated in the bidding process in order to use the wetland for the
purpose of fish extraction) for revenue generation by the MoL, leading inevi-
tably to great difficulties for subsistence fishermen in accessing the resources.

   Beginning in the 1970s the Department of Fisheries actively pursued a prop-
er management of wetland resources based on sustainable fishery management
principles; however, it did not see much success until the New Fisheries Man-
agement Policy came into effect in 1986 (Ahmed et al. 1997: 3). This new pol-
icy actually attempted to address some of the inequitable wetland management
processes and also outlined ways to empower local fishermen by "free[ing] the
fishers from exploitation by middle agents, leaseholders and financiers in shar-
ing resources" (ibid.). Nevertheless, inter-departmental rivalry arose between
the MoL and the Department of Fisheries, as described by one scholar: "stem-
ming from the reluctance of MoL to give up ownership of jalmohals [local
name of the fishing estates] to the DoF [Department of Fisheries], conflict arose
between MoL and the DoF as regards to implementation of the 1986 NFMP
[New Fisheries Management Policy]. There are two main reasons why MoL
wants to hold absolute authority on beels/jalmohals management: i) to ensure
easy income from beels/jalmohals leasing for the government exchequer by
which MoL can claim to be a profitable government institution compared to
others; and ii) the process of leasing of jalmohals allows various types of mal-
practice and manipulation" (Khan et al. 1989: 149).

   In essence, the "usufruct rights" of the fishermen of Baikka Beel to freely
access the wetland for resource extraction came to an end (with some excep-
tions, of course) when the conservation project was launched. Although previ-
ously some parts of the beel were leased out to local and external clients (i. e.
businesspeople who obtained leases, supported by local elites), local fishermen
still enjoyed some rights to fish and remained gainfully employed, since they
constituted the main workforce who were hired by the lessees. Under the new
circumstances following the New Fisheries Management Policy, however, not
only was their free access to resources curbed significantly, but they also saw
that local and external businesspeople continued to enjoy fish extraction as per
new lease conditions. For example, whereas previously the fishermen could
catch fish anywhere in the beel, now, as the new conditions came into force,

they were required either to fish in a restricted area within the beel during a given period or to be employed by the lessees in order to catch fish.

Methods

This research uses a mixed methodological approach (Johnson / Onwuegbuzie 2004), combining qualitative and quantitative data. The main reason to adopt such an approach is to gain deep insights about the nature of the conflict from the stakeholders and to see how the co-managed project impacted their lives. During the data collection stage we primarily aimed to collect quantitative data, but collected qualitative data in interviews and from ground observations as well. Further, we included secondary data from various studies conducted thus far on Baikka Beel to support our findings. In the analysis, we carefully compared both forms of data with regard to the overall research question as to the impact of the co-managed project on the primary stakeholders and on the conflict, which has escalated over the years.

Purposive sampling was used to reach out and access different stakeholders situated in three tiers within the co-managed framework (direct stakeholders such as the village communities of Baruna and Hazipur; external stakeholders such as USAID, NGOs and Chevron; and GoB officials). Initially, pre-test questionnaire surveys of ten households and later 100 households were conducted in Hazipur and Baruna – two village communities where most of the dependent groups of Baikka Beel live. Two practical aspects influenced our concentration on these villages: logistical ease (i.e. transportation, accommodation, concentration of participants and project activities) and accessibility to a maximum number of participants. Research participants were carefully chosen, keeping in mind the overall aim of the research to study the three tiers of the co-managed project environment. However, in the BRMO, only two local businesspeople participated in the study although we reached out to more than ten. This could be related to a prevailing perception that businesspeople are the "bad guys" who exploit the fishermen, leaving them unwilling to participate in the study.

Research fieldwork was carried out in the summer of 2012 by a research team composed of Nahreen I. Khan and four graduate students from Jahangirnagar University. Six Focus Group Discussions consisting of about 12–15 participants each (with different stakeholders – project members, local leaders, fishermen) were held. In addition, 22 open-ended key informant interview sessions lasting 90–120 minutes each were conducted with the fishermen, with six external stakeholders from Chevron, CNRS and the GoB, with ten local community members and with six BRMO stakeholders. The details of the

study participants are highlighted in Table 2 below. Study participants were reached through letters and word of mouth. It is worth noting here that when interviewing the direct stakeholders, we often noted that they felt uncomfortable in the presence of local elites and BRMO members. These latter groups sometimes accompanied our research team to the places where interviews were conducted. They often did so uninvited, claiming that they were only curious onlookers. In the Bangladeshi rural context, such a situation is rather typical, as local elites perceive the presence of any outsiders in their area as an intrusion in their sphere of dominance. However, it took some trust-building efforts from the research team (such as dialoguing in local dialect and explaining the aims and benefit of the study), but eventually the team was able to successfully access the direct stakeholders in private. Although we tried to include as many female participants as possible, the gender distribution clearly shows a dominance of male participants in this research, which is due to two reasons: females are not usually involved in the catching of fish with their male counterparts and they are reluctant to speak to strangers.

Table 2: Details of the study participants (N=135; number of household surveys / study participants)

Direct stakeholders		BRMO project stakeholders		External stakeholders	
village community of Baruna	59	local leaders	3	USAID (MACH project)	6
village community of Hazipur	41	BRMO members	14	NGOs (CNRS)	6
				Chevron	2
				GoB	4
Total	**100**		**17**		**18**
Gender distribution					
Male	97		14		18
Female	3		3		0

Source: compiled by authors

Impacts of the Baikka Beel project on the local fishermen

Since the commissioning of the BRMO, which was developed under MACH and CNRS in 2004, a number of social, economic and cultural conditions have changed, impacting the lives of the people living at Baikka Beel. Thus, 88 per cent (N=119) of the respondents reported that they experienced significant changes in the environment, sometimes including the death of fish, and 12 per cent (N=16) reported changes in the social (negative), economic (mixed) and cultural (negative) conditions. For example, a demographic shift occurred, triggered by the influx of external labourers, trades changed among local inhabitants, and increased poverty, as well as a change of values, could be seen.[11] While alluding to environmental change, they observed that "the impacts are subtle yet the environmental quality of the area has deteriorated in the years following the declaration as a sanctuary", in the form of fish stock degradation and noise pollution caused by works for the tourism project. A small number (12 per cent) of participants (all of them local fishermen) reported drastic environmental changes such as incidences of flash floods, which had a negative impact on the fish and prevented these participants from working as fishermen throughout the years. However, opinions regarding the socio-economic-environmental changes varied widely according to which stakeholder group the respondents belonged to and how freely they felt they could speak. According to the majority of the respondents from the group of direct stakeholders, the conservation project benefited only the local elites, only exacerbating poverty and complicating life for the fishermen, as one of them explained:

> This development is nothing but an eye-wash. We live here, but we feel like outsiders. We are not allowed [?] to walk beside the sanctuary, anytime police can come and arrest us with false allegation. We feel that this is not our land. We are living in no man's land (male fisherman in his early 40s, 24 July 2012, Srimangal).

Some of the small-scale commercial and subsistence fishermen in the area observed that despite an increase in the quantity of fish in the beel (due to the conservation regulation), they were not able to catch fish freely because they couldn't gain fishing rights under the regulation. On the other hand, the BRMO allowed businesspeople coming from outside the area to lease a portion of the sanctuary and harvest fish in a regulated way. Such a dual practice fuelled animosity among the direct stakeholders, although BRMO stakeholders tried to negotiate between businesspeople and fishermen. Still, the direct

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11 We observed that in the study area there was a signpost every few meters reminding women to keep their modesty by speaking softly and covering their heads. This shows that the area is fairly conservative, and this was a reaction to the clear impact of deviant cultural and social values that arrived with the newcomers who came for project-related works. Further, the participants mentioned that there was an increase in prostitution, which is considered a grave sin.

stakeholders witnessed their livelihoods and tradition in jeopardy while they saw businesspeople – some of them belonging to local elites – profiting from the project. Although some skills training was imparted to selected fishermen who joined the MACH programme, no organised efforts were made to provide alternative employment for them.

External stakeholders (i. e. project workers from MACH, CNRS and Chevron) shared their optimism and positive experiences about the project outcome. In line with these, BRMO stakeholders (especially the local elites) echoed similar impressions. For example, one of the respondents of the local elites remarked that he personally had benefited from the project and that the reported conflict was a rumour to derail the project:

> This project is for the wellbeing of the community, we have benefited from it and we have no complaint. We are better now in every aspect. The news regarding conflict is just a rumour (male member of local elite in late 50s, 3 July 2012, Srimangal).

When confronted with this feedback on the project's impact, the fishermen didn't share this opinion. Since the direct stakeholders could not extract natural resources as they used to do previously, they felt deprived and stripped of their natural rights of access to fishing and therefore saw no positive outcome to the project. Instead, they felt disempowered, since they perceived that the locus of power, especially concerning the decision-making ability regarding sharing local resources, had shifted from them to the external stakeholders. The majority of the external stakeholders were seen as outsiders who did not have any natural ties to the land – only the GoB had a few local employees, whereas all the others, such as MACH, CNRS and Chevron, hired workers from different parts of Bangladesh for the project. We also observed a notion of an "us" vs "them" condition when the respondents shared their hopelessness with us. The sense of alienation was rooted into their perception that the government had adopted an approach of parachuting in an external organisation, which determined "what was good for them" (i. e. how to increase fish size and number, improve air quality and concentration of migratory birds and increase the touristic value of the area) without any participatory process. Such an approach might have deprived the direct stakeholders of their sense of involvement in the project.

Respondents alluded to environmental degradation yet could not substantiate these allegations with any examples of possible degradation. Nevertheless, a Department of Fisheries study succinctly corroborates our respondents' claims with the following observation:

> The income of marginal fishers has decreased over the years due to reduced availability of carp and other fish in the haor. Moreover, every year more people from neighbouring communities are getting involved in fishing as a seasonal or part-time occupation. As a result, fishing pressure is continuously increasing. In addition, environmental degrada-

tion caused by late rains, heavy river siltation, agricultural and industrial pollution, and other environment factors further intensify the problem (Dev 2011: 78).

In 2013 several construction activities took place at Baikka Beel, such as tourist toilet facilities, footbridges, a tourist centre and bird-watching towers. Such eco-tourism initiatives did not employ a significant number of fishermen seeking alternate jobs because of their lack of skills and education. Chevron Bangladesh sponsored these constructions as a part of their Corporate Social Responsibility to further develop local tourism. For the construction activities, external labourers (according to a member of the local elite, approximately 270 of them) stayed overnight in the area, dumped construction materials in the water and used various loud machines, which distracted the birds. Further, since there were no proper waste disposal facilities in the area, the labourers often disposed biological, non-biological and even hazardous wastes in haor water, posing substantial risks to the ecology and biodiversity of the wetland.

The Baikka Beel project had a clear impact on migration patterns of surrounding communities of the project area. A substantial degree of out- and in-migration could be witnessed, causing a demographic shift. Three reasons stood out: 1) many fishermen lost their traditional jobs and left the villages to seek employment in urban areas; 2) for project management purposes external stakeholders and the local elites who were allowed to fish brought cheap labourers from outside; and 3) many construction workers came in from outside to build project infrastructure. For example, 79 per cent (N=107) of the respondents observed a definite trend of out-migration from their communities; 69 per cent (N=93) reported that they knew at least 8–10 families who migrated to other, mostly urban areas, of the country and took up seasonal or transitory jobs within the past year. Moreover, a distinct out-migratory trend was noticed among the young people within the communities (23 fishing families revealed that from each family at least one young man had left to seek a job in urban areas and eleven families reported that all of their able-bodied males had left the villages to earn a livelihood).

Out-migration also impacted the traditional local way of life in tight-knit families, in which males were the principal breadwinners, maintaining control of the family. Now that a significant number of males had left their families to find work in nearby urban centres, family cohesion and participation in community affairs by male family members were adversely affected. Although cellular phones help people keep in touch and the absent males visit their families once or twice a month to share their wages, the traditional way of life for families has changed for many. Furthermore, the absence of male family members has also pushed the females to take on menial labour to support their families, further straining the very fibre of traditional (patriarchal) village

lives. The following statement by a research participant corroborates this finding:

> I work as a housemaid in two houses in the village. I never worked like this before, yet I had to take up these jobs to help my family to survive. Earlier, I used to help my husband in preparing the fishing net and now we no longer have to do it. I carry my young child with me while I work and it makes me sad because most of the day we remain outside of our home (wife of a fisherman, in her early 30s, 30 June 2012, Srimangal).

According to 75 per cent (N=75) of the direct stakeholder respondents, there was a direct link between migration and ongoing cultural changes.[12] Under the project mandate, some non-local and local businesspeople (who gained fishing rights) teamed up and hired cheap labourers from other parts of the country, some of whom eventually settled in the area. The interplay of out- and in-migration had a ripple effect on the traditional cultural landscape of the study area, which was also related to the ongoing economic changes, especially the increased poverty. One study participant summarised the new situation as follows:

> We were peaceful in the past, now we are not. Earlier, people used to know each other, people used to help each other, and intermingling was a normal situation. Since the strangers arrived, we hardly get together. The project impacted on small families very much, as so many fishermen left the village to cities and it created problems in their previous *sukhi* [happy] families (54-year-old male fisherman, 29 June 2012, Srimangal).

We were particularly interested in likewise obtaining some insights into what sorts of cultural impacts the project had on the primary stakeholders and asked them to reflect on their lifestyles before and after the project was implemented. As the project was launched in 2003 and we studied the case in 2011–12, the primary stakeholders had already lived through a significant amount of time under the project environment. Consequently, viewed from macro and micro perspectives, we deduce two aspects here: 1) From the macro perspective, their reflections about changes might have been rooted in the ongoing broader socio-economic-cultural changes in Bangladesh that adversely affect collective living and give rise to a nuclear family system, as well as lessening intra-group interactions based on mutual trust and fellowship. 2) From the micro perspective, the fishermen at Baikka Beel live in a certain "niche" where they experience the impact of the Baikka Beel project on an ongoing basis, as it changes existing social hierarchies and brings about new social rules that continuously affect their social relationships.

The respondents mentioned a couple of significant changes that they noticed: one of the most important was the change in local dialects as outsiders arrived

12 This information was revealed during Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) and from the local community leaders. The interview question was: "What kind of changes have you experienced in your cultural life since the conservation project was launched?" Here, "culture" was used in a broad sense to mean the way traditional fishermen used to interact with other people in the area as well as amongst themselves.

for project work. Also mentioned were an increase in instances of inter-marriage, the engagement in informal trades, the use of recreational facilities (such as going to the cinema and attending *jatra*, local theatre) and a rise in anti-social behaviour.[13] The change in language can be attributed to an unfolding phenomenon, what we term here as the effect of "domestic globalisation".[14] This signifies a growing realisation amongst the primary stakeholders that people's "long standing cultural practices [are] being transformed [both positively as well as negatively]" due to unavoidable encounters with outside cultures and individuals that the project ushered in (Escobar 2006: 7). It is merely a comparative assessment of social conditions that the respondents thought important to mention when they alluded to phrases like *shanti noshto hoye geche* ("there is no peace anymore"). In this regard, we observed that the socio-economic differences between those people who came to work in the study area vis-à-vis the local population had increased to such an extent that it affected inter-group social harmony and reinforced class differences based on inequality. For example, one might say that social inequality had always existed (at the lowest level the fishermen; at the top local elites, businessmen and politicians), whether or not the project actually accelerated the process. What we gained from the participants' responses was that the sense of inequality felt by the fishermen was rooted both in perception as well as in actual effects of the project. In other words as the project unfolded, the first thing that the fishermen experienced was the loss of their natural rights (i.e. the right to fish anywhere in the beel). In addition, the project also realigned the social class system by producing new beneficiaries (such as middlemen and workers), a development viewed unfavourably by the fishermen. Whatever the case, a complex interweaving of perception and reality with regards to inequality precipitated a conflict.

The "inequality" that the project precipitated can be linked to the idea of a struggle where several factors – physical power, familial reputation, religious or political authority, wealth, capital and technical knowledge – are in play with an aim to control a "dominant good" (although at times it can be more perceptual than real) (Waltzer 1983). Inequality does not always reside within the "material social sphere" (i.e. economic) related to "unequal distribution of goods and services, yet economic inequality also encompasses the intersectionality of culture, gender, environment, education, race and the social esteem of people living in a society" (Giesen / Nobre 2010: 339). In the context

13 "Anti-social behaviour" is defined here as the increase in petty crime in the area, the availability of casual sex workers and inter-group violent conflicts. A number of demonstrations had taken place in the area in the past and these were also referred to as anti-social behaviour.

14 We use this generic term to denote the nature of changes the respondents alluded to. The key components of globalisation (such as inter-connectivity, transfer of ideas, free trade and outsourcing) were also present in the study area. We viewed in a smaller framework the very presence of these components in the area and assert that a correlation exists between the advent of the project and the observed changes.

of the Baikka Beel project, this is contextualised in the following way: as the outsiders who landed in the area were mostly employed or tied to some sorts of economic activities, they were viewed as privileged against the locals whose quality of life had experienced a continual downward trend since the project's inception. Some of the fishermen were chosen in the MACH programme or allowed to fish only because they were known to the local elites. Consequently, this "closed circle" played a dominant role in granting access to the project.

The project included all the villagers of Baruna and Hajipur and triggered a necessity for occupational change for the majority of the villagers. Traditionally, two thirds (according to local information provided by local government officials) of the population of these villages were fishermen, and among them, 23 per cent of the study participants said that they had to change their occupation in the post sanctuary declaration due to limited or no access to catching fish. The list of new occupations that some of the fishermen adopted includes: rickshaw-puller, grocery seller, vendor and day labourer; however, the majority of fishermen still remained unemployed. Moreover, under the changed conditions, they had to resort to taking a number of different jobs without much preparation or education; at the same time, they faced steep competition in the alternate job market. Although one study documents that MACH-affiliated fishermen received some training for alternative employment (Dev 2011), we did not receive enough responses to confirm such a claim. According to the questionnaire surveys, limited self-employment opportunities prevailed in the area. Furthermore, the respondents also said that most of the people had to take up two jobs in order to support their family, which was not the case in the past.

Some of the fishermen told us that they had to learn new skills as taxi drivers, and in varied circumstances many resorted to selling their land or borrowing money from local lenders, micro-credit firms and/or banks to buy a taxi. Some 29 per cent of the direct stakeholders had to put up their houses as collateral, giving rise to anxiety and insecurity about the future. These are new experiences for the fishermen. In rural Bangladesh fishermen seldom like to take out bank loans due to the fact that they cannot provide any collateral; although micro-credit has gained popularity in the country, taking out a loan remains culturally perceived as a bad thing. In the same vein, 54 per cent of the direct stakeholders stated that they had lower job satisfaction in their current occupation, as they were no longer able to practice their traditional fishing skills.

Conflict Analysis

As the project began (2002–2003), tension built among the direct stakeholders when the news first broke hinting that the government was considering a conservation project to protect the biodiversity of the Baikka Beel wetland. In the absence of any direct consultation process with the villagers, the rumour spread rapidly in the community regarding the likely loss of their livelihood. Using Friedrich Glasl's model for Conflict Escalation (see above) this can be termed the "(1) hardening stage" and took place around 2004–2007. Consequently, the villagers got the impression that BRMO stakeholders were "sell-outs" and that they were acting merely as a tool of the local elites and government agencies. Although a semblance of dialogue between the direct and BRMO stakeholders existed, with the occasional presence of the external stakeholders (representing the stage of "(2) debate and polemic" according to Glasl), the villagers quickly perceived that subsequent dialogues were not a sincere effort. They felt, rather, that these were aimed at buying out the villagers so that they would not resist the project's implementation. Moreover, the promises of the BRMO to generate alternate employment opportunities for the villagers were not fulfilled after the first round of dialogue. Once the dialogues failed, the conflict moved to the next, third stage: "(3) actions, not words".

The principal reason why the dialogues failed was due to the lack of trust between the primary stakeholders (i. e. fishermen) and the external stakeholders, as the former were not very convinced about the project's benefit. Consequently, the external stakeholders failed to bring the fishermen into the overall project management process. The villagers informed us that as soon as they realised that dialogues wouldn't solve the problem they gradually avoided any consultation sessions. It is worthwhile noting here that mutual mistrust deepened between the direct and BRMO stakeholders, as manifested in a number of quarrels and local protests, leading even to "damaging infrastructure installed by BRMO such as an area map billboard, or a foot bridge connecting watch-towers" (Khan / Falk 2013: 14). As a result, BRMO stakeholders stopped communicating with the villagers, although some of the union members tried to keep the dialogue channel open. Positions hardened, as can be seen in the statement of one BRMO member and a villager:

> This is the time to handle the situation boldly; if anyone does not like to protect our beel, he may stay somewhere else. We are repeatedly convincing them [the villagers], but unfortunately they have no idea about environmental awareness (47 years old, male BRMO member, 20 June 2012, Srimangal).

> This is the land of our ancestors, we cannot allow any outsider to rule us or control us. Our indigenous knowledge is enough to protect our beel (male villager, in early 40s, 21 June 2012, Srimangal).

It might be worth noting that the visible presence of the external stakeholders was minimal in the conflict area; instead, their interests were represented by their local representatives (i.e. the local elites). Three external representatives, especially from MACH and Chevron, described frequently feeling insecure in the project area, leading them to avoid communicating with the villagers about the project directly. Some of them even left the project sites and started living in nearby urban areas. Subsequently, as both the primary and BRMO stakeholders started to blame each other for not delivering the promises of the project and started rallying their groups behind a cause, the conflict moved on to stage 4, "concern for images and coalition", between 2012–2013.

Within a span of years after we completed our project, there was a report of a massive attempt to catch a large amount of fish at once in Baikka Beel (Prothom Alo 2013). According to a news report, the water levels at Baikka Beel were low due to insufficient rainfall in the monsoon season, further causing a detrimental impact on the fisheries. Nevertheless, villagers believed that an artificial environment had been created that caused the fish to die and that it had been orchestrated by sanctuary guards and some BRMO members. The BRMO authority, however, dismissed the allegation of their members' involvement and instead accused the locals of violating project regulations. In addition, it was reported that illegal fishing continued unabated, impacting the project's future (Dhaka Tribune 2014).

Although at the time of the fieldwork in this study, the conflict seemed to be moving from stage 3 to stage 4 according to Glasl's CE model, only a few months later the conflict rapidly intensified and resulted in open protests and rallies between the villagers and BRMO stakeholders. Some local inhabitants now raised similar concerns about resource exploitation:

> The authorities always ignored it when the beel was being grabbed and polluted and the eviction drives often stopped midway due to "unknown reasons". Aroj Ali, another resident of the area, said protecting the beel from grabbers and pollution is a must to save the life and living of the local people (Daily Star 2015).

This rapid deterioration of the conflict situation between the stakeholders confirms that conflicts often do not proceed in a linear way. Conflict progression depends upon three factors: the presence of some or all of the conflict escalating factors (for example, propaganda, threat, intimidation, lack of access to authentic information and coercion), negative social relationships (among the stakeholders) and the perception of continuing deprivation among the marginalised. Eventually, the period between conflict stages contracts and a conflict could escalate at a faster pace, resulting in violence from any side at any time.

Co-management of the Baikka Beel Project

The co-management model that the GoB came up with underpins a host of lofty goals, as evident from one of the project partner's strategies:

> To reduce natural resource dependency and increase their adaptation capacity, CREL [Climate Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods] livelihood beneficiaries are required to provide sustainable market-based solutions. Using a value chain approach is one of the key strategic points that has been identified as a catalyst to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on the livelihoods of the beneficiaries. Other interventions include adequate and substantial skills and knowledge transfer, improved practice and technology based on market demand, and a response to climate resiliency (Winrock International 2013: 7).

Our findings indicate that although the above-mentioned strategy looked good on paper, it actually not only failed to bring all stakeholders to a common platform through implementing a community-based resource management system but also failed to deliver a "market-based" solution (ibid.: 9). Additionally, researchers had already identified unique sets of challenges that came with the concept of the Community Conserved Area and what could be done to overcome these conflicts. Yet, in the Baikka Beel case, we observed that many challenges remained unaddressed (Islam et al. 2006). Similar studies carried out in Botswana also noticed limitations of co-managed projects as the "local people find it difficult to voice their concerns […] given the power relations involved in this participatory process. […] [And] implicit in the policy implementation process are mechanisms which constrain empowerment and dictate the forms of participatory conservation" (Twyman 2000: 323).

Under the co-management model, other GoB-initiated projects (such as forestation) were also unable to succeed, pointing towards a lack of stakeholder cooperation within the system (Dhaka Tribune 2015).[15] One scholar noted that it is not the declaration's aspect or government's good will to "protect and preserve" but rather how the preservation is being managed that is crucial, through a "cooperation between residents of different economic status and local leaders, councillors and officials" (Dev 2011: 67). Additionally, communication, education, and public awareness activities that various parties initially performed might have failed to deliver the expected outcome.

As indicated above, the co-management model had upset the pre-2003 hierarchical power scenario and a previously familiar living arrangement within a familiar power dynamic (i.e. a small number of elites and local government

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15 Climate Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL), an NGO working at Baikka Beel, reported that the forest department took the initiative to plant various trees during the 2012-2013 fiscal year under the climate trust fund. In this regard, Md. Shamsuddin, treasurer of Borogangina Wealth Management Association, an organisation involved in managing Baikka Beel, confirmed that the Murta plants planted by the forest department no longer existed: "After the forest department planted the trees, they did not contact any of the private organisations associated with managing Baikka Beel. Hence there was no one to take care of them. Most of the Murta plants died within one to two years of planting" (Dhaka Tribune 2015).

officials at the top followed by poor fishermen at the bottom). The GoB's intervention to preserve and protect Baikka Beel reshaped the power relation landscape, since the project brought in external experts, new NGOs, created new elites (such as businessmen), introduced new laws, and last but not least launched new ideas (such as eco-tourism). Consequently, the poor fishermen had to go through a familiarisation process to understand new power brokers under the new arrangement as the GoB's power became manifested through a meso-level organisation (i.e. BRMO) composed of local elites, officials and selected fishermen. External stakeholders who set the agenda for preservation and protection support this organisation. On the surface, it might appear that the direct stakeholders are reasonably represented within the BRMO; nevertheless, from the "power" consolidation and decision-making perspectives we observed that the external stakeholders and GoB were in an advantageous position to influence BRMO objectives. Moreover, in the process of project implementation, not all the local fishermen subscribed to a certain resource group (FRUG, MACH- and non-MACH and other NGOs) for two primary reasons: fishermen were free to choose to join the resource groups based on their employment and training needs, while some of them were preferentially able to join a particular resourceful group based on their access to local elites and local government officials. This resulted primarily from the lack of a harmonised approach by external and BRMO stakeholders to "buy in" the local fishermen.

Conclusion

The case of Baikka Beel shows that an expected correlation among "increased environmental scarcity", "decreased economic activity" and "migration" for conflict generation does not always exist (Peluso / Watts 2001: 5). Rather, the investigated conflict originated locally (i.e. was site specific), was rooted in local histories and was manifested in social relations, although "[it is] connected to larger processes of material transformation and power relations" (ibid.). An examination of the conflict suggests that it is definitely rooted within the study area (6 similar projects have been launched in Bangladesh thus far and encountered similar issues in terms of implementation) and thereby "site specific" with its unique characteristics (Islam et al. 2006: 13).

The external stakeholders involved in this conflict came with varied agendas; for example, Chevron aimed to improve tourism conditions while CNRS tried to improve socio-economic circumstances. Synchronisation of all these agendas became a daunting task for the government – one that the co-managed approach in Baikka Beel project management failed to achieve.

The project generated an inter-group conflict and clearly changed social patterns in the traditional village society. The seeds of the conflict were sown when it became clear that the project parameters (such as addressing alternate livelihoods and the social impact of the project on the villagers) could not be properly determined in consultation with all the stakeholders. From that point, project implementation suffered and other factors (such as misuse of power by local and external elites) compounded the issue. The primary stakeholders and a group of several organisations (i. e. BRMO, MACH, Caritas and Chevron) are the two distinct conflict parties, as the conflict essentially gave birth to new "winners" and new "losers". On the one hand, the Baikka Beel preservation project empowered local elites to retain control over the project management that systematically disempowered the poor and dependent groups. Thus the fishermen who were dependent on Baikka Beel felt vulnerable; this is a classic manifestation of conflict originating from the "vulnerability resulting from resource dependence", as identified by Philipp Le Billon (2001). The Baikka Beel conflict altered the social class system in the area as the project ushered in new business opportunities for outside traders, which created new elites and their beneficiaries. In addition, the traditional roles in village life were questioned, with some respondents mentioning that the project presented a psychological challenge, especially to the village elders, by systematically diminishing their role and their informal authority in mediating conflict between and among various parties.

The conflict eventually polarised the villages and pitted different social groups against each other (i. e. the BRMO members and local elites against the fishermen). In this complex situation, although it appears that the local elites, middlemen, project workers and external stakeholders gain from the project (i. e. winners), conflict analysis shows that the prevailing antagonistic atmosphere rooted in widespread frustration among the fishermen might escalate into hostility in the future, whereby the apparent winners might eventually lose their businesses and interests.[16] In the long-term perspective, this could be termed a "lose-lose" situation that might destroy the socio-ecological-cultural balance of Baikka Beel.

In our recommendation, to avoid a protracted conflict that might lead to violence, the GoB should review the project's mandate and allow the stakeholders to engage in a fresh round of dialogue, not only by taking stock of previous output but also by mapping out the ways to move forward. Care should be taken to empower the direct stakeholders by taking a number of steps, including but not limited to eliminating local divisions, by restoring mutual trust and by including the direct stakeholders in the decision-making process for project implementation.

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16 In the aftermath of the study, several local protests were reported in the newspapers.

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Islam, Politics, and Cyber Tribalism in Indonesia
A Case Study on the Front Pembela Islam

Timo Duile

Abstract

At the end of 2016, Islamist organisations proved able to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people for political purposes in Indonesia. In order to explain their success, the role of social media should not be underestimated, as Islamic movements rely heavily on agitation in online media. This article sheds light on the example of the Front Pembela Islam, using one of the organisation's Facebook pages as a case study. Within the algorithmic enclave of a cyber tribe, narratives and symbols are applied in memes. The research examines how narratives and symbols evoke emotions in online memes and offline banners, what narratives are addressed, and how the memes make claims regarding commonly acknowledged signifiers such as the NKRI, Islam and Pluralism. The guiding thesis is that these memes express not simply anti-pluralist or anti-NKRI notions, as opponents of these groups frequently assert, but rather combinations of robust nationalism and their alternative version of pluralism with conservative Islamic approaches. Nonetheless, threats and enemies are inevitably present as a constitutive outside and suggest a highly exclusive version of Indonesianness. Thus similar narratives and symbols applied in online media also emerge within public spaces, blurring the distinction between the online and offline realms.

Keywords: Islam, Nationalism, Indonesia, Cyber Tribalism, Jakarta Election, Front Pembela Islam

Introduction

On 4 November and 2 December 2016 the largest demonstrations since the *reformasi* movement took place in Indonesia. Some even claimed that they were the biggest demonstrations in Indonesian history (Lim 2017: 412). But unlike the *reformasi* movement, the protestors did not seek democracy and liberty, instead demanding the imprisonment of the Christian governor of Jakarta, Basukri Tjahaja Purnama, commonly referred to as "Ahok", whom they accused of blasphemy. The Islamic organisations that organised the protest claimed that 7.5 million people joined the largest rally on 2 December,

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whereas rather liberal newspapers considered a number between 400,000 and 500,000 to be more realistic (Batubara 2016). Still, the size of the demonstrations surprised both the government and liberals in Indonesia. While this mobilisation of the masses for a religious purpose was without precedent in Indonesia, it did not happen out of the blue. Concerning these new developments, political scientist Marcus Mietzner pointed out in an interview for Carnegie Council that

> […] since around September/October [2016], we have seen an additional development, and that was the reintroduction of popular mobilization as an instrument of power play in Indonesia. That is something we really have not seen since 1998, when longtime dictator Suharto fell. Since then, the focus of Indonesian political analysis has been on the state institutions – who is controlling the parliament; who is controlling the parties; who is winning elections; who is controlling the oligarchy. All of that was important so far, and we have neglected in that analysis what is happening in terms of popular mobilization (Mietzner 2016).

Analyses of mass mobilisation in the rising Islamic movement in Indonesia are a desideratum for research that encompasses several aspects. Whereas mass mobilisation from both left- and right-wing parties and organisations was a crucial feature of the political culture before the New Order[1] (Robinson 2018: 9), the Suharto government conceptualised the population as a "floating mass" (*massa menggambang*) for the sake of depoliticisation (Eklöf 2004: 54). This legacy of depoliticisation seemed to live on in post-Suharto Indonesia until Islamic organisations managed to mobilise masses for political purposes. Issues such as formal politics in state institutions are crucial here since Islamic organisations and their mobilisation operate within the frame of the power struggles of the political elite. However, that is just one side of the coin. In order to develop a more profound comprehension of Islamic mass mobilisation, not only must political and social circumstances be taken into account, but it is also necessary to analyse discursive strategies and the narratives of the Islamic groups. Without the mobilisation of emotions through symbols and discourses, the mobilisation of people would not be possible. It is insufficient to claim that the mobilisation was solely a matter of money politics (that is, politicians paying people to join rallies) since those claims deny the possibility of affective and emotional ties between people and political issues.

On the one hand, emotions are crucial for a functioning democracy. Rational deliberation, as some liberal political philosophers claim (e.g. Habermas 1970, Rawls 1993), is probably a rather insufficient basis for a democracy. Emotions are crucial, since they make people concerned and cause them to engage with political issues. Therefore, post-Marxist approaches, for instance, emphasise the role of "passions" (Mouffe 2000) – which are closely related to

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1   "New Order" (Indonesian: *orde baru*) denotes the authoritarian Suharto era (1967–1998). The Suharto regime referred to the era of the first president Sukarno as "Old Order" (*orde lama*).

emotions. However, emotions can also be used for anti-democratic and anti-pluralist purposes since they can lead to fragmentation within society and can undermine social cohesion, especially in countries with diverse cultural and religious compositions.

Without doubt, in the rallies of 2 November and 4 December 2016 in Jakarta, emotions and passions played a crucial role. For instance, the head of the Front Pembela Islam (FPI, "Front of the Defenders of Islam", a conservative Islamic vigilante organisation) Muhammad Rizieq Shihab – often referred to as "Habib" Rizieq – spoke at both rallies and claimed that the issue of jailing the Governor was a matter of life and death (*harga mati*) for Muslims. Whereas the rally was non-violent overall, this rhetoric reinforced passions and sentiments against the alleged blasphemer.

This article focuses on the FPI as a case study, as the organisation played a prominent role in the mobilisation of the masses. Until recently the scholarly discourse has tended to view the FPI as a rather small organisation, "not taken seriously as a religious movement by most other committed Muslims" (Bruinessen 2013: 38), and for good reason: at least among liberal Indonesians, the FPI had the reputation of being a vigilante organisation and a protection racket. On the other hand, it has to be emphasised that state institutions considered the FPI a serious organisation, for instance when its representatives were invited as experts to give statements in the juridical review of law No. 1-PNPS-1965 on the "Prevention of Religious Abuse and/or Defamation", commonly referred to as the blasphemy law (Yonsta et al. 2014: 128–129). During the hearing, FPI leader Rizieq stated that if the court declared the blasphemy law not to be in line with the constitution, Muslims would take matters into their own hands. As the FPI was also known to be a group that carried out violence, such a statement from the FPI leader contained an obvious threat (Sinn 2014: 233).

However, until the mass demonstrations of 2016, most politicians in Indonesia might have viewed the FPI as a rather small organisation, easy to control and utilise for their own purposes. To explain that success in mobilising the masses, it is important to highlight the connection between state apparatuses such as the police or military and the FPI, since it would be impossible for the FPI to operate if state institutions did not let them carry out vigilante actions. The close ties between politicians and the FPI (Wilson 2014: 6) are also crucial, since politicians provide room for the vigilantes to manoeuvre. As Ian Wilson (2015) argued in his book on protection rackets, the strength of vigilante organisations is the result of economic dependencies and arises in states in which the boundary between state and non-state actors is constantly blurred. This phenomenon is of importance especially with regard to religion. Since Indonesia is a nation based on *Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa* (which can be translated as "monotheism", "one supreme divine being" or "one almighty

God"), the discursive constellation blurs the boundary between the state and religion, leading institutions and politics to refer necessarily to religion (Duile / Bens 2017).

Therefore the discursive and symbolic constellations have to be taken into account in order to understand the success in mobilising the masses. This paper analyses the FPI's mobilisation by shedding light on the narratives and symbols they use when communicating with the *ummah*, the Islamic community. The examination of narratives and symbols is operationalised through memes and banners. Thus, it is shown how emotions are evoked by combining narratives and symbols, particularly those of nationalism and Islam. The units of the analysis are banners and memes while narratives and symbols provide the frame in which memes and banners are embedded. That frame is analysed with regard to the analytical units. Narratives and symbols are analytical units too, insofar as they are constructed and reconceptualised through memes, but they also are a precondition for making sense of memes and banners. Therefore they are conceptualised as contested signifiers, with memes and banners as the methods of claiming those signifiers, of imposing a special meaning on them.

It has been convincingly presumed that social media contributed considerably to the mass mobilisation against Ahok and to the process of forming identities based on hate and religion (Lim 2017). As a case study, this article analyses online memes spread by the FPI and their *laskar cyber* ("cyber army"), since those messages – in the form of a combination of pictures and text – reached a considerable number of people through online media such as Facebook or WhatsApp. In a second step, those memes are compared to banners that appeared in public spaces after the demonstrations. This is done in order to illuminate connections between the online and offline social spheres. I argue that memes in social networks generate a certain kind of sociality through emotions that is also displayed in offline communality. By explaining links between online and offline sociality through emotions, the article seeks to overcome the dichotomy between these spheres (cf. Postill 2008, 2012). The first objects of research are memes from an online community of Rizieq's Facebook page. That community can be termed a "cyber tribe" or "e-tribe". Such tribes are groups which share a common loyalty to persons (a "chief", in this case Rizieq) and concepts, usually evoked and maintained through affects and emotions. Members of cyber tribes often do not know each other in person, but shared affects (and thus emotions such as indignation) create a strong sense of belonging (Janowitz 2009: 5).

However, before dealing with the narratives, symbols and emotions, the paper briefly introduces the FPI as a religious and vigilante organisation, and its aims and history. In a second step, the political circumstances of the Jakarta election campaign are explained, since they constitute the framing in which the symbols and narratives of the FPI were articulated. Since there is not yet

much academic research concerning the recent Islamic mobilisation, the paper mainly relies on reports from media in that section.

Front Pembela Islam: Reactionary Islamism organised

As Carool Kersten (2015) points out, Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia is deeply divided between progressive and reactionary camps. Whereas the first is eager to seek links between Islam on the one hand and liberal, pluralist and secular values on the other, applying a substantivist approach, the latter camp focuses on a rather literal interpretation of Islamic law. Many adherents of reactionary groups aim to introduce Islamic law (sharia) nationwide in Indonesia or reject the nation state in order to replace it with a Caliphate in Southeast Asia. Reactionary groups usually refer to the past and the FPI is no exception here. In their view, the rejection of the so-called Jakarta Charter (*piagam Jakarta*)[2] in 1945 was a betrayal by secular nationalists, but the very idea of sharia law as a legal foundation of the country (in Indonesia usually referred to as *NKRI bersyariah*, the "Unitary State of Indonesia under sharia law") marks the starting point of their concept of a society fully reconciled to Islamic supremacy (Petrů 2015: 60). Thus part of the reactionary camp pursues that agenda by establishing a hegemony of reactionary Islamic discourses through cooperation with Islamic politicians, raids against behaviour and symbolism considered anti-Islamic, as well as through agitation in social media and on the streets.

The FPI's ideology is based on the theological argument that it is every Muslim's duty to call other fellow Muslims to do good deeds (*amar ma'ruf*) and to reject the evil and sinful (*nahi munkar*).[3] In order to carry out that mission, the organisation's internal structure is one of military ranks, with the *laskar* ("fighters") at lower ranks carrying out intimidation and making threats (Beittinger-Lee 2009: 188). Targets of the FPI include, for instance, leftist discussions and events (since the FPI fears the rise of atheism and communism), night clubs, events associated with the LGBT community and feminism, restaurants that sell alcohol or pork, and Islamic communities that are perceived to be deviant (such as Ahmadiya or Shia). Many members of the FPI are culturally affiliated to traditionalist Islam and some are also members of traditionalist organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama or Jami'atul Kahir. Economically, most members belong to the urban lower classes (Mubarak 2008: 228).

2   The Jakarta Charter was a supplement to the first *Sila* (*Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*) of the *Pancasila* ("The five pillars", Indonesia's national ideology) which reads "[…] with the obligation for all Muslims to carry out Islamic law" (*dengan kewajiban menjalangkan shari'at Islam bagi pemeluknya;* Elson 2008: 108).

3   This principle is mentioned in several verses of the Quran and is also termed *Hisbah*. It "requires every individual Muslim to command good and forbid evil conduct by other members of the society, including the state" (Esmaeili et al. 2017: 122).

The FPI was established in 1998 from paramilitary troops, gangsters (*preman*) and pious Muslims (*santri*) in order to protect the Suharto Government and Suharto's successor Habibie who came under pressure from student demonstrations. A paramilitary group, Pam Swakarsa, was joined by pious Muslims from Banten and West Java as well as by gangsters from Jakarta. Eventually they used Islamic symbols and language to counteract the alleged "communist" and "anarchic" ideology ascribed to student demonstrations. The Pam Swakarsa was the embryo of the FPI (Mubarak 2008: 227). Officially, the FPI was founded on 17 August – Indonesian Independence Day – 1998. However, it was a rather small organisation in its first years. In Jakarta, the organisation became famous when it opposed the liberal Utan Kayu community with threats and intimidation in 2005 (Pringle 2010: 170). The Utan Kayu community is an association of artists and writers such as Goenawan Mohamed and Ayu Utami with close ties to the "Network of Liberal Islam" (Jaringan Islam Liberal, JIL). It is named after their cultural centre in Utan Kayu Street, where the members conduct discussions and put on theatre plays and movie screenings concerning cultural topics from a liberal perspective, promoting views often antagonistic to those of conservative Muslim organisations. The JIL is also one of the FPI's foes, since the latter considers liberalism in general to be contradictory to Islamic teaching.

However, the first event in which the FPI appeared as an explicitly violent organisation was the *insiden Monas* ("incident at the National Monument") in 2008 when hundreds of FPI members attacked a multi-religious festival. The FPI stated that the event was *haram* – i.e. forbidden for Muslims – since it called for tolerance of "deviant" Muslims such as the Ahmadiya. Some seventy people were injured (Sinn 2014: 208) and Rizieq was found guilty of inciting the crowd to attack (Tim Viva News 2008). The FPI even garnered international attention when they successfully banned Lady Gaga from holding a concert in Jakarta in 2012. On that occasion, Rizieq stated that Lady Gaga was the "epitome of the devil" (*merupakan jelmaan setan*) and threatened his opponent by stating that if the authorities did not cancel the event, "people will take things into their own hands, including the FPI" (*masyarakat yang bertindak, termasuk FPI*) (Tirta 2012). Recently, the FPI have used public debates in order to strengthen their profile as an organisation concerned with national and religious identity. During debates on communism and LGBT rights – two state-driven discourses about alleged threats to Indonesian security, identity and morals – the FPI continued their attacks on critical discussions of the mass murder of Communists in 1965/66 as well as events organised by LGBTs, and they threatened members of the LGBT community (e.g. Rafiq 2015, Perdana 2016).

The politics of Islamic mobilisation in the Jakarta election

There is a faction within the political elite in Indonesia that is in favour of incorporating reactionary Islam and counterbalancing it with robust nationalism. These politicians cooperate with the FPI, and the organisation also has close ties to the business elite, for instance to the ethnic Chinese billionaire Harry Tanoesoedibjo (Varagur 2016). However, a few years ago Rizieq publicly called Tanoesoedibjo an "infidel" and a "pig" who should be "slaughtered and burnt" (Wilson 2014: 6). Another example of the shifting support of the FPI is the current minister of defence, Wiranto, who was initially a sponsor of the FPI in 1998. But after he publicity supported the idea of hosting the Miss World Contest in Indonesia, which the FPI considered *haram*, the FPI strongly opposed him as a politician (ibid.).

The ongoing support from parts of the elite indicates that at least some of them still consider the FPI to be a suitable organisation to have as a strategic partner. In the 2017 gubernatorial election, the FPI took on a prominent role, managing to establish a regime of indignation to the disadvantage of the incumbent Ahok. The FPI denounced Ahok several times while he was still in office, for instance by portraying the eviction of people without land titles as a devilish plan of the Ahok administration in which ordinary, poor people were characterised as Muslim *pribumi* ("sons of the soil") and the governor as a part of the Chinese elite. Seeing their chance to attack the governor, who was known for his forthright statements, the FPI organised protests both in online media and on the streets after a speech made by Ahok on 27 September became public in early October 2016.

In that speech, Ahok said that people do not need to vote for him if they believe those who use the Quranic verse Al Maidah 51 in order to fool the people. Conservative Muslims interpret the verse as a command not to vote for non-Muslims as political leaders whereas liberal Muslims highlight that the Arabic term *auliya* in the verse does not necessary mean "political leader" but rather "friend" or "ally" and that the verse should be interpreted within the context of war.[4] Thus the question of the meaning of the verse also became an issue in the trial against Ahok (Pratama 2017a).

In October 2016, the FPI and other hard-line-organisations began to organise rallies in order to put pressure on the court. The first large demonstra-

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4   For instance, in the English translation by Hakkı Yılmaz, the term is translated as "protector, supervisor, governor" (Quran translated by Hakkı Yılmaz 2018: 489). In the translation by Muhammad Asad the verse reads "O YOU who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies: they are but allies of one another – and whoever of you allies himself with them becomes, verily, one of them; behold, God does not guide such evildoers". In the comment section of the verse it is explained that the term can be translated as "ally", "friend", "helper" or "protector" (Quran translated by Asad (without year): 225–226). However, in many Indonesian translations the term *auliya* is translated as *pemimpin* which means "leader" (for instance: Quran translated by Adlany / Tamam / Nasution 1995: 209).

tion (*aksi bela Islam II*, "Action for the defence of Islam II") took place on 4 November 2016 and Ahok became a defendant (BBC Indonesia 2016a). To increase pressure on the court and in order to strengthen their moral standing within society, the FPI carried out further rallies against Ahok.

The second huge demonstration was that on 2 December 2016 when hundreds of thousands of people held a mass prayer and a rally in central Jakarta. That rally came to be known as *aksi bela Islam III* ("Action for the defence of Islam III"). The *aksi bela Islam* rallies were organised by the committee called Gerakan Nasional Pengawal Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia (GNPF-MUI, "National Movement of the Guardians of the Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwas"), a movement in which the FPI took a leading role. However, that movement eventually eroded due to internal disputes. In subsequent rallies, *aksi bela Islam IV* and *aksi bela Islam V*, the number of participants declined, but hard-line groups have proven that they are able to mobilise a considerable number of people for political purposes. Despite the fact that the FPI is well known for its threats, the organisation was very eager to highlight that the *aksi bela Islam III* was a peaceful rally (*aksi super damai*). Whereas the President of Indonesia Joko Widodo (Jokowi) did not comply with demands made in a meeting with the protestors at *aksi bela Islam II*, he appeared on the stage and thanked the protestors for their prayers for the nation at *aksi bela Islam III* (Nugroho 2016).

Despite the waves of indignation, Ahok and his running mate Djarot Saiful Hidayat gained 43 per cent of the vote in the February 2017 election, leaving the challenger Anies Baswedan and his running mate Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno in second place with 40 per cent. Since none of the candidates gained more than 50 per cent, a second round was held on 19 April 2017. In that election Ahok lost and the FPI achieved its aim of making a Muslim the new Governor of Jakarta. Anies Baswedan met with the FPI's front man Rizieq during the election campaign, declaring that he was not a liberal but a Sunni Muslim in order to counteract rumours that he was a Shiite (BBC Indonesia 2017). The narrative portraying the Christian Governor as a blasphemer lingered on, but as time passed other narratives begun to counter the indignation evoked by the FPI. The most influential counter-narrative might have been the diversity narrative, which portrayed the FPI and its approach of conservative Sunni superiority as a threat to religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia.

The point of reference for that narrative is Indonesia's national motto of "Unity in Diversity" (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika). It emphasises cultural and religious diversity and the fact that there is no single religion eligible to claim a dominant role among the other acknowledged religions. In April 2017, huge banners reading *Warga Jakarta bosan dengan isu sara* ("Jakarta citizens are tired of ethnic, religious and racist issues") appeared at important junctions (Setyadi 2017). This was clearly a statement against FPI rhetoric. Also, Rizieq

found himself sailing against the wind when lawsuits were filed against him. He was, of all things, accused of blasphemy by a Catholic student organisation, which reported him to the police due to a statement he made while preaching to his adherents (BBC Indonesia 2016b). He was also accused of mocking the national ideology of Pancasila, for which he was reported to the police by one of Sukarno's daughters.

Another suit was filed due to his derogatory remarks on a traditional Sudanese greeting, which Rizieq considered un-Islamic. When the police summoned Rizieq, he did not cooperate but portrayed himself as a victim of a campaign aiming to depict him as a criminal (Lazuardi 2017). However, the greatest controversies arose when the FPI leader was accused of conducting a private chat with pornographic content (Pratama 2017b). Ironically, it was the FPI who had pressured parliament in 2007 to pass an anti-pornography bill. Eventually, Rizieq went on a pilgrimage journey to Mecca, probably in order to avoid prosecution.

Symbols and narratives of reactionary Islamism: Mobilising online and offline

It would hardly have been possible to mobilise around 500,000 people for a rally if those people were not driven by emotions. These emotions, chiefly indignation, are veritable capital for many political movements around the globe and as such are an important cornerstone for democracy. Emotions can, however, also be used to agitate against democracy and pluralism. In the self-perception of groups using emotions for their own purposes, the struggle is usually based less on the claim that their own group is superior to others and more on the perception that their own group is suppressed or threatened by an elite or culturally alien elements within society. Thus these groups develop their own narratives, frequently leading to tribal identities and approaches. Within the political context of Jakarta's gubernatorial election, the FPI's actions produced certain forms of what Lim (2017: 423) has termed a "digital version of tribal nationalism", referring to Hannah Arendt's (1973) "tribal nationalism" concept. This tribal nationalism is (re-)produced and maintained by and within algorithmic enclaves. These enclaves emerge when

> a group of individuals, facilitated by their constant interactions with algorithms, attempt to create a (perceived) shared identity online for defending their beliefs and protecting their resources from both real and perceived threats (Lim 2014: 422).

Within such algorithmic enclaves, a concept of how Indonesia should be is expressed according to acknowledged symbols and narratives. Algorithmic enclaves are highly exclusive, since they inevitably refer to a threat, a consti-

tutive outside that shapes the common identity of the group. This exclusivity generates a strong sense of belonging within the enclave. Emotions constitute affective ties within the enclave and are crucial for tribalism.

In the following, I aim to outline some narratives transmitted through memes in online media. The memes (seventy-two memes in total) were collected from the official Facebook page of "Habib" Rizieq between 8 November and 2 December 2016, that is, during a period between *aksi bela Islam II* and *aksi bela islam III*. People who had joined the group (which was shut down by Facebook Indonesia in August 2017, probably because some memes promoted hatred and violated the Facebook community standards) constitute a cyber tribe, that is, an online community whose members do not know all members in person but are bound together through affective ties (cf. Janowitz 2009: 5). At that time, about 360,000 people had "liked" Rizieq's page. Some memes were shared more than 10,000 times. These memes also spread throughout other social media such as WhatsApp. It can be assumed that the memes played a considerable role in mobilising the masses. Rizieq himself called for a Muslim "cyber army" (*laskar cyber*), that is, for devotees of the FPI eager to spread the leader's message on social media. However, the issue of the FPI's online presence became the subject of debate in Indonesia after Facebook took down most FPI pages. The FPI accused Facebook of taking an anti-Muslim stance and organised rallies in front of Facebook's office in Jakarta. While first calling for a boycott of Facebook and other Western online applications, instead promoting "Indonesian" alternatives (Novia 2017), the FPI finally admitted that they rely on Facebook (Wildansyah 2018).

However, online memes are not the only media this article deals with. The aim is to overcome the dichotomy between network sociality in online media on the one hand and community sociality in public spaces on the other (cf. Postill 2008, 2012). Therefore, banners (*spanduk*) placed by the FPI and FPI sympathisers within the public domain are analysed in a second step. The banners analysed were photographed between 2 and 19 March 2017 in areas around Manggarai station in South Jakarta. That area is in large parts inhabited by people of the lower middle class and is infamous for riots between youth gangs. Numerous gangs operate in the area and the FPI is among the most influential, frequently claiming territory with flags. In total, ten banners were photographed but it has to be stressed that many more similar banners were set up. At the time the photos were taken, however, most banners had already been removed. Nonetheless, the photographed banners provide a good example of the numerous FPI and FPI-related banners displayed all over Jakarta between January and March 2017 as responses to and public comments on political events. Due to visibility considerations, most banners appeared at strategic junctions. Often they were found near mosques, ensuring that worshippers would notice them. For instance, two huge banners were hung at the

intersection of Jalan Matraman Dalam, Jalan Dempo and Jalan Matraman Dalam II. This intersection is located close to a large mosque, as well as near several Muslim institutions, such as the Dewan Syariah Nasional ("National Sharia Board") of the MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Indonesian Council of Muslim Scholars"), an Islamic kindergarten and certain educational institutions run by the two large Muslim organisations Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah.

However, some banners were found near churches, such as one set up at the Tugu Tani roundabout in Cikini. This is not surprising, since displaying banners can be seen as a way of laying claim to public space; religious groups thereby claim that a certain public space is their territory. However, in February/March 2017 the police confiscated some one hundred banners reading "This mosque does not conduct farewell prayers for supporters and defenders of blasphemers" (*Masjid ini tidak mensholatkan jenazah pendukung dan pembela penista agama*), a clear instruction not to vote for Ahok (Muhyiddin 2017). The police did not manage to confiscate all the banners set up on ground owned by mosques, however. Often these banners appeared together with FPI banners.

Online: Memes of Islamic cyber tribalism

In order to reveal the narratives present and generated through memes, I will start by pointing out some prevalent topics and motives. Since the online memes were posted in the run-up to the large rally of 2 December, it is not surprising that many depict Ahok and his statements as blasphemous. Twenty-eight memes (38.9 per cent) highlighted the topic of blasphemy (penistaan agama), mostly referring directly to the Ahok case. In many cases, the memes dealing with the topic of blasphemy also used nationalistic symbols and language such as the Indonesian national flag, placing the contours of Indonesia in the background or directly stating that blasphemers not only threaten the Unitary State of Indonesia (NKRI) but also oppose the national ideology of Pancasila and "Unity in Diversity" (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika). The latter are highly contested signifiers within the debate since all factions refer to them.

For the FPI, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* has to be achieved under the supremacy of Islamic law, but that does not mean that they leave the signifier of "diversity" to their opponents (e.g. Figure 1). Through the connection of blasphemy and nationalism, the FPI managed to mobilise strong emotions. Overall, nationalistic language and symbols were displayed in twenty-six memes (36.1 per cent). The FPI took a clear stance here and tried to stress the role of religion (especially Islam) in national identity. The main narrative of indignation is that if religion is taunted, national identity is threatened. Unity, national stability and peace (*perdamaian*) can only be maintained when blasphemy is prosecuted.

Source: Meme No. 25, Facebook-Page Habib Rizieq, November 2016.

Figure 1   "Mr. Jokowi, do you know that if you just let blasphemers commit blasphemy it means: 1. Harassment of Pancasila, 2. Violating the Constitution of 1945, 3. Destroying unity in diversity, 4. Destroying the Unitary State of Indonesia, ?????????, Let's build peace without blasphemers … !!!"

In order to stress the narrative of a threatened nation and a threatened national identity, some memes refer to well-established narratives on what can be termed the "constitutive outside" of Indonesian identity – for instance, communism. Since the Suharto government had successfully managed to establish discourses portraying the Communist Party as a latent threat to the nation, Rizieq used narratives on communism as a threat in his memes, as well. Six memes (8.3 per cent) referred to communism or the banned PKI (Partai Komunis Indo-nesia, "Communist Party of Indonesia"). Other threats displayed in memes include (neo-)liberalism, Zionism and capitalism as opponents of the genuine "Indonesian" and Islamic foundation for society that the FPI advocates. Some memes portray not only communism as a threat to the Indonesian nation but – referring to the 2005 MUI fatwa – also identify secularism, pluralism and liberalism as equally dangerous threats. In order to evoke emotions, state-ments against secularism, pluralism and liberalism are summed up in the acro-nym *sipilis* (the Indonesian term for "syphilis"), suggesting a relationship be-tween sexually transmitted diseases and "Western", non-Indonesian concepts. However, it is important here to note that the FPI understands "pluralism" differently from the genuine Indonesian concept of *kebhinekaan*: whereas

"pluralism" is portrayed as a foreign concept with the potential to undermine the purity of a religious group, *kebhinekaan*, in contrast, refers rather to plurality in the sense of a plural society in which different religious groups live side by side as clearly distinct entities.

The role of Rizieq himself has to be stressed. He established himself as the mouthpiece of the indignation movement led by the FPI, and that is very clearly shown by the memes: many memes depict Rizieq using a microphone. His facial features often express anger and indignation – that is, the same emotions the readers of the meme should feel. Rizieq's memes evoke indignation through different strategies. One is to use a language of morality. For instance, one meme states that there is an "illicit affair" (*perselighkuhan*) between neoliberalism and communism that threatens Indonesian Muslims and the nation state.

Moral narratives occurred most frequently within the context of blasphemy, since Rizieq accused Ahok of violating the *ummah*'s dignity. This is considered the ultimate moral failure. In some memes, Rizieq points out that other blasphemers were sent to jail immediately, suggesting that Ahok, as a member of the political elite, considers himself above the law. Indignation is evoked here by portraying Ahok as arrogant, but also by pointing to other members of the political elite who are unwilling to comply with the FPI's demand. Some memes refer directly to President Jokowi, calling him "Mr. Jokowi", a form of address usually applied to Western foreigners. This form of address thus implicitly portrays the president as foreign. In twenty memes (27.8 per cent), the government and state institutions are referred to as enemies and as objects of indignation. However, the FPI's aim is not to destroy the government but rather to push it towards the organisation's goals – that is, to arrest the governor and to establish sharia law. Therefore, six memes (8.3 per cent) depict the police as an ally of the *ummah*. Despite anti-elite rhetoric, the memes clearly indicate that the FPI is not hostile to state and state institutions but rather aims to inject its ideology into them.

The issue of government and state institutions is not the only one toward which the FPI takes an equivocal approach, portraying them as objects of anger and indignation on the one hand and as potential partners for cooperation on the other. The issue of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity is also addressed in at least two different ways. Since diversity (*kebhinekaan*) is a constitutive signifier of Indonesian identity, Rizieq has to take a positive stance towards it. In his memes, it is argued that clear and strict action by government institutions to prosecute blasphemers is the best way to maintain harmony among different religious groups. However, cultural diversity must exist under Islamic superiority and be guarded by Islamic law. There are some memes referring to diversity that suggest that arresting a blasphemer is in the interest of all religious and ethnic groups (e.g. Figure 2).

Source: Meme No. 18, Facebook-page Habib Rizieq, November 2016.

Figure 2   "Demonstration to defend Islam. Demonstration encompassing all religious schools and currents. Demonstration encompassing all religions and culture. Religious and nationalist – Asy'ari and Non-Asy'ari. Native Indonesians and Non-Native Indonesians – Muslims and Non-Muslims. All agree: Apply law on the blasphemer. Does Jokowi still not understand that issue … ???!!!"

Source: Meme No. 1, Facebook-page Habib Rizieq, November 2016.

Figure 3   Black Headline: "Netizens Protest because of a Poster of the Police". Poster of the Police reads (left): "Maintain Diversity of the Unitary State of Indonesia and govern legitimately in a constitutional way!"

There are also occasional memes that clearly refer to a dichotomy between indigenous (*pribumi*, literally "sons of the soil") Muslim Indonesians on the one hand and the non-Muslim ethnic Chinese, of which Ahok is a representative, on the other.

An example here is a meme (Figure 3) that expresses indignation about an Indonesian police poster. The poster promotes cultural, religious and ethnic diversity (*kebhinekaan*). The indignation supposedly evoked by "the netizens" (the Internet users) concerns the fact that a Chinese Indonesian is at the very centre of the poster. According to the comments, the man in the traditional Chinese dress is a "foreigner", whereas many native groups are not represented in the picture. Although Ahok is not mentioned in the meme directly, it is a clear rejection of the equal status of Chinese Indonesians. Similarly, other memes refer to the lower economic status of many native Indonesians. These "ordinary people" are addressed by the Javanese term *wong cilik*. In one meme (Figure 4), for instance, Rizieq, with a facial expression showing indignation, is speaking on behalf of the *wong cilik*, asking why non-*pribumi* officials are not jailed whereas their native counterparts are sent to jail for similar offences. This evokes the perception that native Indonesians (mostly Muslims) are not treated equally in their own country. The memes take a clear racist stance here, also displayed on banners during *aksi bela Islam II*, where anti-Chinese sentiments were expressed.

Also relying on the issue of marginalised native Muslims, another meme addresses the issue of evictions: Rizieq states that poor native people (*rakyat pribumi miskin*) are evicted in order to make space for expensive apartments later inhabited by foreigners (*akan dihuni asing dan aseng*). Again, this narrative refers to nationalist sentiments but also evokes indignation by mixing in the issues of economic injustice and nativeness.

Whereas anti-Chinese sentiment is a useful tool for the mobilisation of indignation, there are two memes (2.7 per cent) in which Rizieq states that he and the FPI are not anti-Chinese. One meme (Figure 5) displays photos of Rizieq meeting Chinese Indonesian leaders, saying the FPI is not against Chinese Indonesians but combats corruption, prostitution and other sinful business. These memes are in sharp contrast to the anti-Chinese memes mentioned previously. It can be assumed that the two Chinese-friendly memes serve as "fig leaves" in order to enter *kebhinekaan* discourses and to gain recognition from nationalistic Indonesians, whereas the anti-Chinese memes are a crucial part of the indignation regime as they define the constitutive outside. Thus Chinese Indonesians are not wholly targeted but are incorporated in an alternative concept of diversity in which the supposedly advantageous position of ethnic Chinese is challenged. In order to understand these narratives, it is crucial to highlight the fact that many corporations in Indonesia are in the hands of Chinese-Indonesian businessmen. This rich Chinese businessman (*cukong*)

embodies the very stereotype of the Chinese Indonesian. As the gap between the poor and the rich widens, poor people seek narratives that explain social injustice. The lack of leftist approaches and economic analyses makes it easy for groups like the FPI to establish their narratives based on the assumption that economic injustice is a matter of injustice between Muslims and Chinese Indonesians. Not surprisingly, some memes encourage Muslims to join labour and student demonstrations for social justice and also invite trade unions to join their rallies.

Source: Meme No. 19, Facebook-page Habib Rizieq, November 2016.

Source: Meme No. 45, Facebook-page Habib Rizieq, November 2016.

Figure 4 (left) "Ordinary people ask: Until now ordinary people follow various law processes. When native Muslim officials became suspects, they were immediately jailed. Just see the examples of Luthfi Hasan Ishaq (PKS), Surya Dharma Ali (PPP), Gatot Pujo Nugroho (Governor of North Sumatra), Ratu Atut Chosiyah (Governor of Banten), and others. Now, a non-native and non-Muslim official becomes a suspect, but he is not jailed. Even though that case became internationally known and had far-reaching effects, it even holds the potential to divide the people and the nation. Why … ???!!!"

Figure 5 (right) White Headline: "Habib Rizieq is not against Chinese". Grey box down to the right: "FPI is not against Chinese. FPI is not against Christians. FPI is not against diversity. But FPI is against corruption, gambling, alcoholic beverages, prostitution, tyranny and immorality as well as other evils". Grey box at the bottom: "Do all Chinese public figures meet with the great imam of the FPI for the purpose of asking whether the FPI is anti-Chinese?"

Offline: Displaying indignation, hate and love in public spaces

As previously mentioned, banners reading *Warga Jakarta bosan dengan isu sara* ("Jakarta citizens are tired of ethnic, religious and racist issues") appeared at major junctions in Jakarta in April 2017. That was an effort to counteract numerous banners set up by the FPI and its sympathisers some weeks earlier. These banners (or, in Indonesian, *spanduks*), were often set up in front of mosques known to be conservative. They were meant as a response to police investigations in which Rizieq was a suspect. When summoned, hundreds of FPI adherents accompanied him to the police station, indignant over the fact that a religious dignitary would be interrogated by the police. Some *spanduk*s also responded to the accusations against Rizieq. But as we will see, most banners took up several narratives from the memes.

Source: Banner No. 1, photographed by author, 2 March 2017, Manggarai, Jakarta.

Figure 6   "Ready to defend *habaib* and *ulama*. Stop the criminalisation of *habaib*, *ulama* and public Islamic figures". "Spirit 212. Save *ulama*. Save the Unitary State of Indonesia. Save Pancasila. Refuse to understand communism (PKI)"

A huge banner (Figure 6) of about fifteen square meters near a mosque at Manggarai station, for instance, connected the issue of the accusations against Rizieq to narratives displayed in memes. The banner reads "Ready to defend Islamic dignitaries" (*Siap membela Habaib dan Ulama*) and referred to the "spirit" of the huge demonstration of 2 December (*Spirit 212*). Furthermore, the banner referred to nationalist narratives, reading "Save NKRI", "Save Pancasila", and "Refuse to understand communism" (*Tolak Paham Komunis*). Situated in the same line and in the same writing, the slogan "Save ula-

ma" suggested that the issue of defending Rizieq was also a matter of defining the nation's religious foundation and thus an issue concerning the very identity of the nation. On another banner, the issue of saving the *ulama* was connected (using "&") with the slogan "*NKRI harga mati*" ("NKRI is a matter of life and death"). Thus denouncing Rizieq is, according to these narratives, equivalent with denouncing the nation's very foundations.

The crucial role the nation plays in the FPI's narratives can also be seen in another banner displaying Rizieq and other *ulama* inviting the *ummah* to join a prayer for the nation. The event was the commemoration day of the Supersemar (Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret, "Letter of the Order of 11 March"), the day when Suharto gained power from his predecessor Sukarno in 1967 and established the anti-communist New Order regime. Although the New Order regime provided little room for religion in politics at the beginning, the FPI depicted its anti-communist efforts as the salvation of the Indonesian nation. The banner evokes the anti-communist foundation of Indonesian identity, and the other side of the coin is the religious foundation of the nation, since communism and religion constitute an oppositional pair of signifiers.

In some places, the FPI banners appeared together with the banners and flags of racist movements such as the Gerakan Pribumi Indonesia ("Indonesian Movement of the Sons of the Soil"; Figure 7).

Source: Banner No. 5, photographed by author, 2 March 2017, Manggarai, Jakarta.

Figure 7   Black banner: "We are ready to protect and to guard you. Ya Habibana. Community of the lovers of Habib Rizieq Shihab". White banner: "Movement of Native Indonesians. For Jakarta. Refuse the reclamation [Land reclamation in the Jakarta Bay, TD]"

This refers to narratives of indignation also displayed in the memes: native Indonesians, usually of Muslim faith, have to stick together against the threat of non-Muslim ethnic Chinese such as Ahok. However, relatively few banners displayed that hatred. Some displayed the other side of the coin: love for those who are considered the victims of injustice, for example, Rizieq facing police interrogations. On one banner, the text below his portrait reads in English: "We love you, Habib Rizieq". Other banners also expressed love (*cinta*) of the FPI leader without referring directly to his enemies. But the enemy is implicitly present as the threat to the beloved. The symbols and narratives of love displayed on the banners were similar to those that appeared during the mass rallies in November and December 2016 when phrases expressing love for both Islam and the NKRI were used (Lim 2017: 411).

Conclusion

Historically, the rise of the new reactionary Islamic movements such as the FPI is rooted in the fact that the ordinary people, workers, peasants and the urban *lumpenproletariat* have developed a common identity as a marginalised social group. After the eradication of the left in 1965, it was the collectivist, arch-political approach of the New Order which defined "a traditional, close, organically structured, homogeneous social space that allows for no void in which the political moment or event can emerge"(Žižek 1998: 991). Thus a political narrative incorporated the economically marginalised and veiled the enormous contradiction of social fragmentation that emerged. This narrative of the New Order, however, has weakened, at least since the downfall of the Suharto regime. The rise of reactionary Muslim organisations has served to replace the narratives of the New Order and its successor. Islamist organisations and leaders find language, symbols and narratives to give recognition to ordinary people, recognition that is provided less and less by the official narratives on nationalism and unity: what counts is the pride of the majority, that is, the Islamic *pribumi*, at the expense of minorities. Economic contradictions are translated into narratives of religious belonging. As in many places in the world, these reactionary narratives trump those of liberals or the left.

The latest mass movements are successful because they link religious emotions to the signifier of the Indonesian nation and the state and even to the issue of diversity. I have argued that the conservative Islamic movement is only anti-state insofar as the current state institution (president and police apparatus, for instance) are concerned, but they are by no means entirely anti-state in the sense that they want to get rid of the state and state institutions. In order to apply nationalist ideas, Islamist actors such as the FPI rely

on the state-driven discourses of the Suharto Regime (for instance when fighting the threat of communism) and on the very frame of the Indonesian nation as a religious nation based on *Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*.[5] Thus crucial signifiers such as Pancasila and even *kebhinekaan* ("diversity") are incorporated into the aims and narratives of the FPI.

Online communication through memes is an effective tool for strengthening a sense of belonging within cyber tribes. These tribes not only provide an alternative version of what Indonesia is and should be and of what diversity should mean: they also constitute their tribal identity through these narratives of Indonesianness and *kebhinekaan*. Therefore, it is insufficient to counteract these movements simply by stating that they are anti-Pancasila or anti-diversity, as supporters of Ahok did during the election campaign (Lim 2017: 412). Rather, narratives in memes and banners demonstrate how reactionary groups seek to claim signifiers such as "NKRI", "*kebhinekaan*" or "Pancasila" since they are open to Islamic interpretations. However, the final aim of the FPI, the "Unitary State of Indonesia under *sharia* law" (*NKRI bersyariah*), would mark a major shift within Indonesian history and would end the formal status of equal rights among Indonesians of different faiths. The political aims of the FPI as depicted in the memes can be termed as aims under the umbrella of what Assyaukanie (2009: 57–96) terms the "Islamic Democratic State", a democracy in which certain issues are considered final under *sharia* law.

Such final issues include, for instance, restrictions on freedom of expression and the prevention of non-Muslims from holding strategic political positions (Assyaukanie 2009: 14–15). The strategy of reaching that goal, as applied in the memes and in banners, portrays the majority (*pribumi* Muslims) as victims and thus as a majority that has lost control culturally, economically and politically in its very own land. Cyber tribalism and claims over public spaces using banners are both strategies to promote alternative versions of what Indonesia should be and adherents of the cyber tribe promote those narratives in their consciousness of being members of a marginalised group that is unjustly treated. The question is whether democratic state institutions are able and willing to counteract tribal nationalism by giving recognition to these people, recognition that relies not on religious forms of belonging but on citizenship and economic justice.

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5   Some translate the term *Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa* as "the belief in the One and Only God" (cf. Kersten 2015: 164) or even as "divine sovereignty/ruling" (Sinn 2014: 134-135). *Ketuhanan* is the abstract noun of the Indonesian term for God (*tuhan*) while *yang Maha Esa* means "the One and Only" or "the Supreme". The *sila* of *Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa* holds a strong notion of monotheism and thus all acknowledged religions in Indonesia are conceptualised as monotheistic religions.

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Mapping the Presence of the Korean Wave in North Korea

Research Note

Bianca Milanowitsch

Abstract

This research note scrutinises the degree to which the Korean Wave – South Korean cultural exports, for example of pop music and television shows – has impacted North Korea. Hallyu, as the Korean Wave is also called, has reached the North through illegal trade, despite restrictions put in place by the regime, and has triggered a growing demand for South Korean productions. The South Korean government creates a presence in its northern neighbour by using Hallyu as a soft power tool that has become part of its foreign policy arsenal. The North has reacted to the influence of the Korean Wave with crackdowns and arrests, for example of government officials. Yet Hallyu may also serve the North Korean government's aim of prolonging its authoritarian rule, by using the South Korean cultural presence as a justification for feeling threatened by foreign intervention.

Keywords: North Korea, South Korea, soft power, Korean Wave, Hallyu, K-drama, K-pop

1. Introduction

The Winter Olympics held last February in Pyeongchang, in which a total of 92 countries participated, propelled South Korea into the focus of international media and sport fans alike. Although South Korea was the host country, North Korean participation in the event attracted as much attention as on previous occasions, for example when "[t]he two Koreas marched together under one flag at both the 2000 and 2004 Summer Games, as well as the 2006 Winter Games" (Calamur 2018).

The Winter Olympics, although a sporting event, showcased a cautious rapprochement between the two countries. The announcement that a Korean unified women's hockey team would compete in the Olympic tournament became the symbol of a possible future unification (Watson et al. 2018). In line

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with that development, North Korea's political elite was also represented at the event, for example through the presence of Kim Jong-un's sister, Kim Yo-jong (Lim / Kim 2018).

Given the complicated relationship between the two countries, which includes on the one hand a continuous series of threats and such actions as South Korean propaganda music being broadcast towards the border between the countries (Berlinger / Soo 2018),[1] and on the other hand repeated efforts to broker a peace deal, with Kim Jong-un even recently visiting Seoul for a historic bilateral summit (Haas / Mccurry 2018), it is worth asking why the two sides would try to use such a public event to showcase a rapprochement. Several questions come to mind. Might the North Korean government's charm offensive towards its neighbour be the result of South Korea's appeasement efforts? Could these astonishing developments be seen as evidence that soft power has the potential to help overcome one of the longest-running conflicts in the world?

The present article focuses on the issue of South Korean soft power inroads into the North. The following sections map the intrusion of South Korean cultural soft power into North Korea, predominantly through the Korean Wave, and analyse the degree to which this foreign policy tool has been able to impact North Korean society.

2. Soft and hard power

The concept of hard power, an approach fitting the realist theory of international relations, describes the importance of a country's use of the military, of weapons and in general of aggressive politics to achieve its goals (Jackson / Sørensen 2007: 103). Coercion is its main component (Nye 2004: 2). Past examples of its use, in the context of international conflicts, were the military involvement of the US in Vietnam or the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

The opposite concept, known as soft power, means "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideology and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced" (Nye 2004: x). While coercion defines hard power, co-optation defines soft power. Soft power's aim is to make others, in this case states, change their behaviour, so that goals can be reached without the need for weapons or other types of pressure. "Ultimately, nations with the greatest soft power find that citizens of other countries aspire to share their values and institutions,

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1   Such broadcasts have recently been discontinued, due to the detente between the two countries (Berlinger / Soo 2018).

and leaders of foreign countries view their policies as legitimate and want to follow their leads" (Kurlantzick 2005: 420).

One example of soft power is Hollywood's ability to influence local populations all over the world into seeing the US – its culture, its way of life – in a positive light. That type of projection has helped the US sustain an image such as the "American dream". Another type of soft power is the one China has achieved in regions such as Latin America (Milanowitsch 2018). Because its economic policies differ from the traditional neoliberal ones, for instance through trade deals signed with "no strings attached", China has already become the main commercial partner for several countries on the Latin American subcontinent (cf. Milanowitsch 2018: 52–55)

Soft power consists of different elements, which include but are not limited to ideology, political systems and culture (Nye 2004: 11). As will be seen through this article, and as is the reality when foreign policy is implemented, there exists a complex web of various aspects and elements that could be considered part of soft power and that were not included in Nye's initial definition of the concept. Culture, for instance, can also refer to education, language, clothing, music and media, depending on the country that is being analysed. This broader understanding of that concept is applied here. While theory clearly defines how to differentiate between soft and hard power, in research practice both concepts can be applied to the same type of action, depending on the perception by the receiving actor.

Broadening the definition of that concept to include that extended conceptualisation has only been explored by some authors and has not yet become part of mainstream theory. Among the exceptions is Geun Lee (2009a), who analyses the role of soft power in South Korea by applying Nye's theory to a case study. Lee "extended Nye's theory in terms of definition and categorization, by attaching the nature of power to its sources as a solution to the problem of distinguishing hard and soft powers" (Vasilevskytė 2013: 146). Sheng Ding (2010) combines the concept(s) of soft power with rising power, choosing China as a case study. The two concepts are seldom fused, because soft power is scarcely considered an element that promotes a country's rise (Milanowitsch 2018: 113). Pinar Bilgin and Berivan Eliş widen the definitions of both soft and hard power which, according to them, have remained too closely attached to Nye's initial definition and to the perspective of realism (Bilgin / Eliş 2008: 6). Massimo Di Ricco discusses migration as a soft power, showing how Colombia, a country that has many descendants from Arab countries, makes use of this circumstance in its foreign policy towards the Middle East (Di Ricco 2015: 32).

Soft and hard power are a reflection and a consequence of how North and South Korea have positioned themselves on the regional and world stage. North Korea's position within its own region is not easily defined by interna-

tional theory standards. It can best be considered a case sui generis (Tan 2015; Branigan 2011), especially since the presence of nuclear weapons, the country's relative isolation and other aspects further complicate its classification.

South Korea, in contrast, is a classical "middle power" – a term that can also be applied to its geographical position as a country surrounded by the stronger actors Japan and China (Kim / Jaffe 2010: 64). The country has been focusing on creating influence via means such as niche diplomacy. That type of diplomacy is how middle powers are able "to increase their global influence and acceptance through the employment of their specific capabilities" (Flemes 2007: 11). As an example of the implementation of niche diplomacy, the country has hosted G20 meetings and other international events, such as the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. Being a middle power also means it has limited leeway within its own region, which is why soft power has become part of this middle power's tool arsenal, and the Korean Wave one of its main representatives (Milanowitsch 2018: 36; Wong 2016).

3. The Korean Wave

The Korean Wave has existed for more than two decades. The term, also known as Hallyu, was first used in China in the 1990s (Kim / Jaffe 2010: 152) when Korean television shows started reaching the local population. Soon afterwards, the Korean Wave became a regional success when it spread to neighbouring countries. During its next phase, the movement grew into an international trend (Kim / Marinescu 2015), when Korean cultural exports reached Central Europe, the Middle East, the US, Latin America and other regions. Hallyu is connected to several other elements of South Korea's export strategy and nation-branding, including business endeavours of conglomerates such as Samsung and LG. The Korean Wave should thus not be understood as an exclusively cultural phenomenon. The most important elements of Hallyu have been K-dramas (Korean TV dramas) and K-pop (Korean pop).

While South Korea had long produced television series and shows, mainly for domestic consumption, it was only in the late 1990s that they started to attract international attention. One particularly path-breaking drama was Korean Broadcast System's (KBS) *Winter Sonata*[2] (2002) (Russell 2008: 118–119), which swept across East Asia and opened the door for further productions to be acknowledged internationally. Other series followed, such as *Boys*

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2   This love story portrays the relationship between two people, called Joon-sang and Yoo-jin. Soon after they fall in love, Joon-sang is involved in a car crash, which leaves him an amnesiac. He and his family then move to the US, where he gets a fresh start, while his friends in Korea believe he has died. One decade later, he returns to South Korea, where fate reunites him with Yoo-Jin. They fight for their love, against all odds, with plot twists including illness and Yoo-Jin's engagement to another man (Russell 2008: 118; Han / Lee 2008: 120–122).

over Flowers (2009, KBS), *Secret Garden* (2010/2011, Seoul Broadcasting System [SBS]) and most recently *Descendants of the Sun* (2016, KBS2) and *Goblin* (2016/2017, Total Variety Network). Their topics vary from romance to fantasy, thrillers and other genres.

K-pop followed K-drama onto the world stage, even though the genre had already existed before K-dramas became successful internationally. It developed from Japanese pop influences, western boy and girl groups (Kim / Jaffe 2010: 169–170) as well as Hip-Hop and has itself become a music genre. Its performers have managed to rise to the same level as American or British artists. One example is the boy group BTS, which has not only won international awards and even performed on American award shows (Herman 2017), but became the first K-pop act to reach the number one spot on the Billboard Artist 100 chart in the US (Zellner 2018).

Among other performances, including rock singers and dancers, K-pop artists such as the boy group EXO and singer CL (who herself used to be in a girl group, 2NE1) led the closing ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics (Ducharme 2018), which underlines their importance to the country's image. Both acts are as famous internationally as they are in South Korea itself. For instance, EXO's "[f]ans say the K-pop band were chosen to perform at the ceremony not just because of their current popularity, but in part because of the unity they have represented in the region. [Their] achievements have placed them in the higher echelons of South Korean pop history, having sold more than 8m albums" (Belam 2018a).

4. Hallyu and North Korea

While Hallyu, with its music and television shows, as well as aspects such as makeup, brands and movies might be considered a harmless cultural phenomenon, it has in fact incited reactions throughout the East Asian region that are not entirely welcoming. "Korean government efforts and the massive influx of Korean cultural products have created in East Asia what could be dubbed as a 'Korean threat'. Japan and China have already started to limit the presence of K-dramas or movies in their markets, out of fear of a cultural domination" (Milanowitsch 2018: 66). While some actions had already been taken, such as imposing quotas (Russell 2008: 130) or reducing screen time for foreign productions, it was only in recent years – roughly from 2015 to 2017 – that China imposed a complete ban on South Korean products, which included K-dramas as well as K-pop. China proceeded to block Hallyu and the Korean cultural industry in general from entering one of its main markets as a reaction to the planned establishment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD)

in South Korea (Jun 2017: 159–164; Kim / Blanchard 2017). The Japanese reaction, of limiting Korean products' inroads out of fear of cultural domination, is astonishing – at least in light of the fact that K-dramas and especially K-pop in their beginnings had been heavily based on Japanese television and pop music (Russell 2008: 102–103).[3]

As a highly isolated country in the hands of a dictatorial regime that has lasted for more than 50 years, North Korea has succeeded in limiting the population's contacts with the outside world. While for other countries Korean productions might mean competition with local ones, in the North Korean case they also mean an infiltration of information from the outside (Lee 2016). The main difference between Hallyu in North Korea and Hallyu in other countries is that the products mostly enter the former illegally (Kang 2011; Lee 2015). The population is, with some exceptions for high-ranking officials, not allowed to watch K-dramas or to listen to K-pop (Lee 2015). "Kim Jong Un has interpreted the continued expansion of South Korean media to be a serious threat, therefore ordering strong crackdowns and punishments and urging […] surveillance units to double down on their duties" (Lee 2016).

The internet, which is Hallyu's main channel of interaction with the outside world, is also restricted for North Koreans (Asher 2016), although it is is the main device that can be credited with the long duration and for the success of the Korean Wave (Kim 2011: 16). Social media and especially the online platform "Naver", which administrates its own online live video platform (VLIVE), search engine, online café and even web drama broadcast network, are being used strategically by artists to interact with their worldwide fans. Except for the North Korean elite, using the internet is not an option for North Koreans (Asher 2016). This might be one of the reasons why there is so much fascination with South Korean cultural products: the lure of the forbidden.

North Korean history, its commonalities and differences with South Korea, the Kim regime and its isolation have also intrigued the South Korean public – as well as producers, writers and directors. For decades, the North has been an inspiration for K-dramas and movies. When the Korean Wave started, North Korea automatically became part of it, as a frequent topic. Examples include the movie *Shiri* (1999, Kang Je-gyu) about North Korean agents present in South Korea and the possibility of a future reunification, *JSA* (2000, Park Chan-wook) an award-winning movie about the friendship between North Korean and South Korean soldiers at the Korean Demilitarized Zone, *As One* (2012, Moon Hyung-sung), *The Berlin File* (2013, Ryoo Seung-wan) and *Secretly Greatly* (2013, Jang Cheol-soo).

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3   The same can be said for Korean entertainment shows, which have themselves become role models for other productions in East Asia. There are e.g. Chinese remakes of long-running South Korean entertainment shows like *Infinity Challenge* (MBC, Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation) or *Running Man* (SBS).

Apart from movies, several South Korean dramas also focus on North Korea. To name but a few: *Iris* (2009, KBS) and spin-offs as well as sequels related to it, *City Hunter* (2011, SBS), *The King 2 Hearts* (2012, MBC) and *Doctor Strange*r (2014, SBS). Most of the plots are related to espionage (by defectors as well as by government agents posing as South Koreans) or to murder plots, which is why they do not necessarily reflect daily life in North Korea. *Shiri* was one of the few Korean Wave products to touch upon a future reunification.

The cultural ties between the two Koreas, as restricted and as influenced by popular opinion as they may be, have also begun to raise attention in North Korea. Korean movies, music and television series are smuggled into the country on a continuous basis (Voice of America 2009). The existing black-market trade is a consequence of the lack of access to the internet and other communication channels that would enable the population to obtain Korean Wave products. For instance, it is illegal in the North to listen to anything other than state-run radio (Kang 2010). Still, some channels for interaction remain available. One example is that border guards, with very low salaries, are open to bribery (Hajek 2017). While it is difficult to establish what came first – South Koreans smuggling cultural products into North Korean for profit or North Koreans buying Hallyu products due to their interest in South Korea – the fact is the Korean Wave has been able to enter North Korea (Kang 2010; Voice of America 2009).

There are different reactions to the growing presence of Hallyu in the North. On the one hand, there is the population, especially the younger generation, which watches and listens to Korean Wave products on illegal playing devices or on Notels4 that have been adapted so that they cannot be traced back (although they must be registered officially). On the other hand, the North Korean government reacts with repression: due to the fear of infiltration of society and of word-of-mouth propaganda, consumption of Hallyu products is punishable by death (Radio Free Asia 2017). As an example, in 2014 "North Korea […] reportedly publicly executed up to at least 50 people […], including several party officials for watching soap operas. Pyongyang […] purged about 10 officials from Kim Jong-un's Workers' Party for watching [them]" (Dearden 2014). According to media sources, since there is so much secrecy surrounding North Korean internal affairs, "viewing or listening to South Korean programs or broadcasts" has become part of the country's criminal code of actions punishable by death (Death Penalty Worldwide 2014).

There is a third reaction, which is that of the South Korean government. It has used Hallyu as a method to taunt the other country. In response to constant provocations by the North Korean government, South Korea experimented with exerting pressure on North Korean soldiers and government offi-

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4   A Notel is a type of portable media player, which can be used to watch, for example, DVDs or videos on USB sticks. It is a device that has been approved by the government (Hajek 2017).

cials at the Demilitarized Zone by installing loudspeakers and uninterruptedly broadcasting K-pop music, as well as government slogans and radio broadcasts (Choi 2015). Famous boy and girl groups such as Big Bang and Apink saw their music and songs repetitively broadcast towards the other side. This led to reactions by the North that included the threat to destroy the South Korean loudspeakers – and to the same technique being applied by the North Korean side, albeit with less success due to the lack of modern technology (Paterson 2016). While this phase has now passed, K-pop is still being used for "propaganda" reasons and for the projection of soft power in situations in which there is contact with North Korea (Herman 2018).[5]

Another aspect that should be analysed is whether cultural soft power, and in this case the Korean Wave, has the potential to trigger regime change. To accept this assumption would be an overstatement. Nonetheless, Hallyu's broadcasts into North Korea proved for instance that "popularity trickles down to ordinary residents and is especially favoured by younger generations. […] Prolonged listening of these broadcasts day and night typically has a gradated and ultimately transformative effect […]. The North Korean government's enraged response is proof positive of the threat these broadcasts pose to its grip on power" (Paterson 2016).

One of the most important arguments against the Korean Wave being able to transform into a type of Trojan horse for South Korean interests, is how it is already affecting the North Korean population. Each crackdown by the government serves as a justification for the North Korean regime to distrust South Korea and allows it to continuously perpetuate the threat narrative. Thus far, Kim Jong-un's regime has repeatedly taken drastic actions again its own people, has jailed many and executed others (Radio Free Asia 2013; Lee 2016) who allegedly smuggled or consumed cultural products stemming from South Korea.

The Korean Wave portrays a specific image of South Korea. Be it K-pop, K-dramas, movies or other products, the fact is that they tend to "beautify" life in that country. Cultural industries, as is also the case with Hollywood or Bollywood, create an imagery that does not reflect reality. This is what North Koreans who watch or listen to Korean cultural products are confronted with. Many defectors are initially inspired to flee, lured by what is perceived to be a better life (Reuters 2011), but might become disillusioned by life in South Korea when they discover the difference between idealised and real-life conditions.

Changing the mentality and ideology from within works better if people's mindsets are impacted with images that show a better life and an alternative,

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5   The South Korean government has been deliberately present in the growth of the Korean Wave (Milanowitsch 2018: 42–45). It has done so by using several channels. One of them is financial support, as well as through the creation or remodelling of institutions centred on Korean culture and on Hallyu such as the Korea Foundation, the Korea Cultural Information Center, the King Sejong Institute, the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange, international film festivals and others (Milanowitsch 2018: 36–43).

such as those offered by Hallyu. They might not necessarily want to defect or flee to South Korea but will still be more open towards change, and towards growing closer to that country than those who do not have any contact with Hallyu. If hard power were used instead, for example by attacking North Korea, then that is the image that would stay with people and that could remain as a collective memory. The direct use of hard power methods might also upset the existing balance, on which all actors have agreed for the past half-century. Furthermore, military deterrence has not worked thus far. The North Korean regime has either refrained from taking any action at all or has responded with threats and missile launches (Kim 2018). With this in mind and considering that other angles of the bilateral relationship are strained or limited (economic pressure, etc.), soft power is a policy option with considerable potential to effect political impact.

5. Concluding thoughts

This research note started by illustrating the use of soft power via the sports diplomacy witnessed during the Winter Olympics of 2018, an event that boosted the international images of both North and South Korea and raised the topic of a future reunification. Subsequent sections noted the penetration of the Korean Wave into North Korea, specifically through K-pop and K-dramas, which have reached that country through a mixture of factors, such as a growing demand for South Korean productions that is met through a flourishing illegal trade.

The considerable impact of Hallyu on North Korea is evidenced by the regime's reaction to it as if it were an existential threat. For an isolated country such as North Korea, which tightly controls ideology and its own population, attractions emanating from other countries, and in particular from its southern neighbour, can be considered dangerous to the survival of the regime. The possession of DVDs and other activities related to the Korean Wave are punishable by death, and Kim Jong-un's regime uses arrests and crackdowns for propaganda reasons to demonstrate to the population how much South Korea is trying to harm the country.

While it can be assumed that productions from other countries are also entering the country, the interest shown towards the Korean Wave might be related not only to geographical proximity, but also to the cultural connections between both countries – including, of course, the common language, which makes the contents easier to understand. Joseph S. Nye (2004: 16) confirms this by affirming that "popular culture is more likely to attract people and produce soft power in the sense of preferred outcomes in situations where

cultures are somewhat similar rather than widely dissimilar". The argument about similar cultures might also explain why there is a reciprocal bilateral fascination from each Korea toward the other. While Hallyu has been quite successful, albeit with limits due to the restrictions in North Korea, the North has also inspired several productions in South Korea.

Whereas the Korean Wave has been able to capture the attention of fans in many countries due to its strong presence on social media and online portals, this does not apply to isolated North Korea, which is why this case is unique within the analysis of Hallyu's development and the reasons for its success. Finally, one key issue that requires further research is the extent to which the South Korean government could potentially encourage change within North Korea through soft power alone. As has been shown, any such effort could well backfire, with Hallyu ultimately reinforcing persistence of the North Korean regime.

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Book Reviews

Stefan Hübner, *Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913–1974*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2017. 416 pages, €36.99. ISBN 978-981-4722-03-2

In 1913 Governor General William Cameron Forbes officially opened the first Far Eastern Championship Games in Manila. Six nations took part, most notably the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan. The opening of the games by an American clearly hints to their imperialist context and marks the starting point of Stefan Hübner's "tumultuous ride, through six decades of the strenuous lives and organizational activities of many leading sports officials and politicians" (p. 261) of Asia. The last Asian sports mega event covered by Hübner is the Seventh Asian Games hosted by Teheran in 1974, which revolved around the Shah regime's self-representation and the question of reintegrating mainland China into the Asian sports world.

Hübner structures his book around Asian sports events from 1913 to 1974, with each event receiving a chapter. He connects these chapters through the overarching concepts of nation branding, body politics and post-colonial resistance. Thus he is able to show how the American YMCA's early initiative towards launching an Asian sport championship was based on the imperialist perception of Asians as backward and not yet fit enough to compete in the modern world. By and by, Asian sports officials pushed back against the Americans to shape these championships according to their own needs and beliefs. However, these Asian sports officials failed to replace modern Western sports, rituals modelled on those of the Olympics, or the ideology of modern nation-building with any visions of their own. As a result, Asian sports mega events remained entangled in a colonial world order. On the other hand, when countries like Japan and Iran staged the Asian Games in 1958 and 1974, respectively, they impressed the world with their organisational skills and substantiated claims of national progress vis-à-vis the West. Hübner also emphasises that the various Asian sports mega events were a contested arena for negotiating the notion of Asia. Conflicts between communist China and Taiwan as well as rifts between West Asian Arab countries and East Asian ones such as Japan repeatedly led to disputes which were only partly resolved through sports.

In pointing out these diverging interests and aligning them with the performative side of the various Asian games, Hübner follows a recent trend in sport history. Sports mega events have received more and more attention in the last decades as highly significant symbolic political arenas of the 20th cen-

tury. Kay Schiller and Christopher Young's *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany* (2010) and Eva Maria Gajek's *Imagepolitik im olympischen Wettstreit: Die Spiele von Rom 1960 und München 1972* (2013) are two outstanding examples of this trend. These books prove how symbolic politics are at work in the Olympics and defy the naive belief in apolitical games so dear to IOC officials and organisers of the games.

Hübner, however, is much more ambitious than Schiller / Young or Gajek in covering a whole series of Asian games in one book. He succeeds in including sources in various languages, such as English, French, Japanese and Chinese, thus laying a thorough foundation for his extensive project. In the foreword, Hübner also sets out a very convincing path for integrating his findings into post-colonial studies as well as studies on nation branding. The concept of nation branding, however, is slightly anachronistic as an analytical tool, as it is mostly linked to neoliberal ideologies of turning the state into a market-oriented institution. Relying on classic theories of nationalism might have been more sensitive to the respective historical contexts. Nevertheless, Hübner's theoretical narrative still succeeds in connecting his examples. The strength of moving beyond borders and analysing more than one or two mega events is evident. Hübner is able to avoid the methodological nationalism that is more or less inherent in focusing on isolated sports mega events.

Yet broadening the scope comes at a price. By focusing on only one event per chapter, Hübner loses some of the benefits which might have been gained had he not limited himself to a certain period or country as seen through the lens of one event. He correctly remarks that this way of organising the text caters to readers who are only interested in certain Asian games or countries (p. 13). Indeed, the narrative of each event is dense and self-sufficient. Yet in the end, the reader might have profited from a deeper and more thorough comparison that scrutinised common concepts and the reasons for differences in the staging of Asian sports events over time. Nonetheless, even the harshest critic would still have to concede that the sources used and the descriptions of the various games are both rich and extensive enough to enable readers to draw their own conclusions. Despite its occasional shortcomings, Hübner's approach certainly makes sense and leads to a rich book packed with very valuable information and analysis.

Christian Tagsold

Mechthild Exo, *Das übergangene Wissen: Eine dekoloniale Kritik des liberalen Peacebuilding durch basispolitische Organisationen in Afghanistan.* Bielefeld: transcript, 2017. 448 pages, €29.99. ISBN 978-3-8676-3872-1 (print), 978-3-8394-3872-5 (e-book)

After the valuable contributions already made by postcolonial perspectives in German-language Cultural Studies, History and Sociology in recent years, postcolonialism has finally reached Political Science. The dissertation of Mechthild Exo on the neglected knowledge of Afghan political grassroots organisations aims to go one step further in representing a decolonial critique of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. The intervention in Afghanistan since 2001 has been guided by this logic, which prescribes that peacebuilding is best ensured by transplanting Western market democracy. With the peacebuilding project visibly failing in Afghanistan, a broad-based critique of the theoretical premises and practical implementation of liberal peace has emerged and consolidated. The author emphatically rejects both the idea of liberal peace and the criticism against it, because in her view both approaches depoliticise the conflict in Afghanistan.

The monograph is divided into three main parts. Whereas the introduction explains the relevance and aim of the study – to provide a counter-analysis of the conflict in Afghanistan from a political grassroots perspective – the first major section, "Decolonising Scientific Research", dwells on the need to conduct decolonial research and related issues. The main, second part of the book, entitled "Critique of Liberal Peacebuilding", introduces four "democratic, self-managed, feminist, ethnically inclusive, gender-equitable, justice-seeking political grassroots organisations" as producers of alternative knowledge about peacebuilding vis-à-vis the idea of liberal peace. The author provides in-depth narratives that rely on members' voices to enable the reader to comprehend the individual organisations' evolution, missions, activities, styles of work and also practical experiences.

The organisations comprise the (1) Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers, (2) Afghan Solidarity Party, (3) Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan and (4) Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation. Their critique and protests focus on various responses to the violence that has decimated the country, including demands for transitional justice, the military intervention as occupation, the illegitimacy of the Bonn agreement and the peace process with Islamists and jihadi extremist groups, such as Hizb-e Islami or the Taliban. They call for investigations into the war crimes of members of the US military in Afghanistan and of former Afghan warlords elevated by the intervention into high government positions, and they decry the hegemonic claim of democracy promotion by a dominant group of foreign and Afghan non-governmental organisations that became estab-

lished or entered Afghanistan as an immediate effect of the military intervention. These four "progressive" grassroots organisations stand aloof from those mainstream civil society groups that they emphatically criticise, because they hold the latter to be implicated in the liberal peace project and its practices. They resist the liberal peace mission through regular protests and education efforts.

In the third part, "Controversies and Consequences", the author reflects how the "knowledge" about peace on the part of the activist organisations differs from liberal peace. The discussion focuses on controversies about the form in which democracy is established (via elections vs. "from below"), whether democratic values and experiences already exist among population groups in Afghanistan or have to be installed in a "good enough" fashion by foreign patrons, and how peace can be achieved (via power-sharing vs. based on justice). The section illustrates how academic knowledge production tends to adopt the perspective of liberal Western political actors and thereby reinforces their liberal peace agenda. The book concludes that because liberal peace suppresses the agency, positions and knowledge of those at the receiving end of it, there is no chance for a dialogic interface. By disregarding alternative perspectives, knowledge production about the conflict in Afghanistan follows a colonial logic, exerts epistemic power and implicates itself in destructive peace-building practices.

Overall, the author claims to generate not only a new perspective about the conflict and chances for peace but also an epistemic shift that transfers the authority over knowledge production and the interpretation of what and whose knowledge counts from Western scholars and intervention (security-development-peace) practitioners to the subjects of the intervention – represented by the four grassroots organisations.

However, the persuasion of the analysis suffers from several shortcomings: on the one hand, the lack of clarity as to how (scientific) knowledge is defined differently from a decolonial rather than a "mainstream" perspective creates uncertainty about what is being compared and scrutinised at what level of analysis. The tacit knowledge of the Afghan organisations sometimes features as positions and understandings rooted in collective memory, whereas at other times, it seems to comprise actual information, as when it refers, for example, to the awareness of the war crimes of jihadi groups during the Afghan civil war and of which criminals remain in government positions. It is bold to claim that scholars working on Afghanistan do not have the same state of "knowledge". On the other hand, the analysis does not scrutinise exactly how representative the chosen four grassroots organisations, with their positions, actually are. Do they indeed represent the population at large or is the reader subjected to a perspective of subaltern "elites" who are vocal enough to appropriate the political space to speak for all the various victims and suppressed

people in Afghanistan? Do forms of advocacy and political campaigning quali-
fy as an alternative form of scientific knowledge? Lastly, the analysis is im-
paired by the non-systematic character of its analysis, which is most tangible in
its evidence-jumping between different years (e.g. from 2009 to 2012/2013),
while scarcely regarding the new political situation since 2014.

Despite these flaws, this work and the decolonial interventions it suggests
should be taken seriously: engagement through anti-hegemonic, "modest"
dialogue with Afghans at the grassroots. One might share the decoloniality
approach or not, but on a practical level the analysis shows very clearly that
justice is a precondition for reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan. The
reader immediately understands why peace negotiations as currently prac-
ticed, engaging with war criminals and Islamist groups without any legal ret-
ribution, will not generate peace.

Katja Mielke

Nichola Khan (ed.), *Cityscapes of Violence in Karachi. Publics and
Counterpublics.* London: Hurst, 2017. 224 pages, £25.00. ISBN 978-1-
84904-726-5

Karachi, the largest city of a country called "the most dangerous place on
earth" (p. 164) is a violent place, indeed. Whether it really is one of the least
safe cities of the world, as ranked in the Safe City Index, is a matter of criteria
and quality of data. The editor of *Cityscapes of Violence in Karachi*, Nichola
Khan, a social anthropologist and principal lecturer in the School of Applied
Social Science at the University of Brighton, describes her aim as a "wish to
formalise conversations that occur between academics, journalists, writers
and activists in Karachi, but which rarely populate the same pages" (p. ix).

The focus of the book is on politically motivated organised violence. Kara-
chi was a Balochi fishing village when the East India Company invaded Sindh
on the way to Kandahar during the First Afghan War. It became a Sindhi town
and India's second harbour on the Arabian Sea. At partition, Hindus and
Sikhs, more than half of the population, migrated to India and were replaced
by a much larger number of Mohajirs, i.e. Muslims from Northern, Central
and Western India. The capital of the new country grew rapidly and became
the centre of commerce, industry and trade. When the army took over in 1958,
they moved the capital to Islamabad, in the far North of the "Western wing",
i.e. West Pakistan. The "One Unit" of West Pakistan was dissolved in 1970
and the West Pakistan provinces were re-established. Unlike Punjabi, Sindhi,
Pashtuns and Balochis, the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs had no province of their

own. When Sindhi was made the official language there, violent riots followed. The Mohajirs had left their homes in order to build up the "Land of the Pure". When their major asset, the national language, was devalued, they felt set back.

When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was thrown out of office (and killed) by the army, opposition parties rallied behind the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party, however, never joined the MRD whole-heartedly. The Mohajir Qaumi Movement – later renamed the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) – emerged as the most active opposition party. In 1987 two bombs exploded at the Bohri Bazaar, killing 200 people in the worst terrorist attack the country had ever known – an event not mentioned in this book. This was the beginning of the urban violence which has since produced more than a thousand casualties, according to South Asian Terrorist Portal.

"People around You" is the opening contribution, by Asif Farrouki, which locates Karachi in the poetry of Azra Abbas. Poems are reprinted and speak for themselves, such as "Eye Witness" (pp. 29-30, translated by Asif Farrouki): "A man / shot dead // In front of / your eyes, // Then what? // [...] And later // When your wifesistermother // Is serving you dinner, // You tell her / you have something // Eye-witnessed / hot and fresh // For tonight's dinner."

Five contributions provide a social sciences perspective, often including ethnographic fieldwork. In her contribution "1994: Political Madness, Ethics and Story-making in Liaquat District in Karachi" the editor lays out the genesis of political violence in Karachi, reflecting on her fieldwork. The "divine migration" from India was followed by the pursuit of Mohajir rights. What is "really feared is the dissolution of a unity of identity, which is bound to occur with the disappearance of an enemy [...] the real madness in political violence is the sense of safety it ensures" (p. 57).

Zia Ur Rehman asks, "Karachi. A Pashtun City?" People from the Pashtu-speaking areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North-West Frontier Province) and Balochistan have been joined by refugees from Afghanistan. They already outnumber the Mohajir population in Karachi. Already now Karachi is the largest Pashtun town in the world. A turf war over territory, people, trades and neighbourhoods has been violent for decades; it literally exploded when a Mohajir girl was run over by a bus driven by a member of the Pashtun community. Needless to say, such rivalries were exploited by the military government of the day. Today the Pashtuns are blamed for their Taleban links.

Laurent Gayur, well known for his book *Karachi. Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (2014) introduces in "The Sunday Fighter. Doubts, Fears, and Little Secrets of an Intermittent Community" a part-time "self-restrained" fighter (p. 88), whose "attempt at upward social mobility through party politics remains frustrated" (ibid.).

Nida Kirmani explores life in a "no-go area": The area along the river Lyari is one of the oldest and most densely populated parts of Karachi and home to more than a million people, characterised by a "history of marginalisation and resistance" (p. 106), a "criminalisation of politics" (p. 109), a siege mentality and gangs which count members by the thousands.

Oskar Verkaaik deals with the MQM, the Dawat-I-Islam and Mohajir religiosity. With the usurpation of power by the military under General Zia ul Haq, the Islamic Republic became "Islamised" as never before. Islamic institutions gained state patronage, especially the *madrassa*s. Members of the Dawat-i-Islami were instructed to encourage their fellow Muslims towards greater piety, even as their version of Islam included "several mystical and magical practices and beliefs" (pp. 122–123). Over the years this developed into an "ethnicisation of popular religion" (p. 128) among the average Mohajirs, an aspect also noticed by the MQM.

The next four contributions are the most touching: Nadeem F. Paracha reflects on the prohibition of alcohol and on political protest. It is an irony of history that Z.A. Bhutto started as a liberal (kind of), openly defending his drinking, but was ousted by the military shortly after he had banned alcohol in a last attempt to save his government. Only a few years later, heroin addicts could be counted by the millions. "The Cost of Free Speech. The Media in the Battlefield of Karachi" by Razeshta Sehra opens with the disturbing news that, of the more than 55,000 Pakistanis killed in terror attacks over last ten years, 70 were journalists. In Karachi the MQM burned down the city's newspaper offices (p. 157); meanwhile, the press reported on the existence of "MQM torture cells" (p. 158). The ruling military reciprocated in a similar way. She ends quoting Faiz Ahmed Faiz: "Speak, your lips are yet free / Speak, for your tongue is still your own" (p. 171, translated by Yasmin Hosain).

Arif Hasan describes in his chapter the long journey of Karachi from a cosmopolitan colonial port, to the enrichment of the city by "the Mohajir intelligentsia, which had strong left-wing roots, and [...] by the civil service [...] in the style of an old and well-established decadent colonial tradition", on to the "Islamisation" under Zia. Since then, conflict has taken a new turn, fuelled by the transformation of Karachi society as the lower middle class seeks to raise its standard of living and social status. "Four 'Ordinary' Deaths" by Kausar S. Khan is a "tribute to four Karachiites, two women and two men, who died brutal deaths". Especially frightening is the tendency of militants to target healthcare providers.

Two afterwords by Farzana Shaikh and Kamran Asadar Ali, a selected bibliography and an index conclude the book. In addition to a foreword that introduces the project and the contributions, there is a preface that seems to have been written at the last minute without checking any details (e.g. Ayub Khan ruled until 1969, not 1965; Zia ul Haq took over in 1977, not 1979;

Benazir Bhutto was famously killed in Rawalpindi and not in Karachi). Otherwise this publication is an excellent account and analysis of violence in the megacity Karachi, thought-provoking and recommended reading for all trying to understand violence in a large Asian city.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel

MARKUS KECK*, Navigating Real Markets. The Economic Resilience of Food Wholesale Traders in Dhaka, Bangladesh*. (Megacities and Global Change, 19). Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2016. 240 pages, €49.00. ISBN 978-3-515-11379-3

The book and PhD thesis *Navigating Real Markets* by Markus Keck is a highly insightful study of Dhaka's food system with a special focus on wholesale traders. The work is based on a modern understanding of markets and institutions and on a sophisticated conceptual framework for studying the resilience of food systems from a spatial perspective. Keck aims at moving beyond the view of megacities as places of human misery and hardship. By focusing on the actors within Dhaka's food system, he wants to understand nothing less than what is at the heart of the robustness and resilience of this megaurban food system against the backdrop of the adverse impact of the institutional environment in which it is embedded.

The book offers three major contributions to the existing literature. First, it adds valuable evidence to a modern geography of food systems from the perspective of a megacity in the Global South. The analysis puts people and the dialectics of structure and agency at the foreground. Second, it advances the sociology of markets by recalling institutional embeddedness in the original sense of Polanyi and by expanding the concept through the dimensions of place and informality. Third, the resilience framework is applied to the economic sphere of markets and the resilience of market actors. The limited resilience of wholesalers in Dhaka is well connected to institutional failures.

The book is organised into seven chapters. The introduction is followed by a conceptual chapter that discusses and integrates the theoretical foundation for the empirical analysis. The debates are combined in a conceptual framework for a sociological approach to studying the geography of markets. The third chapter introduces the methodology of the remaining chapters. The analysis is based on careful between-method triangulation that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The complementary use of a wide variety of methods is highly appropriate for the topic. The methods applied com-

prise, amongst others, GIS techniques, (panel) surveys, observations, interviews and participatory methods.

The three main parts of the book are chapters four to six. In chapter four the food system of Dhaka is presented, with a special focus on rice and fish. Despite its predominantly descriptive nature, it is a critical part of the book because it not only provides the reader with essential background information, but also presents unique facts on productivity, spatial organisation and food security based on own data.

Chapter five dives into the food wholesale market in Dhaka. In this chapter, the reader is at first provided with information on the development of food wholesale markets in Dhaka from a historical perspective. The main part of this chapter consists of an in-depth value chain analysis for rice and fish with a particular focus on traders and stores at the markets. Power relations and value capture along the value chain are carefully carved out.

Chapter six examines the resilience of the food wholesale traders in Dhaka. Conceptually, this is the most ambitious chapter of the book. It adds empirical arguments to the core conceptual concern of understanding markets from a social perspective as practices, networks and arenas. Methodologically, the chapter combines statistical analysis with results from interviews, participatory methods and social networks depicted by Venn diagrams. The final chapter concludes by summarising and discussing the main findings and contributions of the study.

The book is very well written, both brisk and accurate at the same time. In the introduction, Markus Keck immediately catches the attention of the reader by sharing his own initial impressions of Dhaka and providing a personal account of the relevance of his topic. Throughout the book, the argumentation benefits from highly illustrative figures, coloured maps at different scales, and 60 photographs. The book is not only insightful for scholars from human geography, development studies and economics, but also for practitioners in the field of social and economic development and anyone with an interest in area studies of South Asia.

Daniel Schiller

Mandy Sadan (ed.), *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar. The Kachin Ceasefire*, 1994–2011. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016. Xxii, 517 pages, £25.00. ISBN 978-87-7694-189-5

This volume is in some ways the counterpart to the book by Marie Lall reviewed earlier in this journal (see Marie Lall, *Understanding Reform in Myanmar. People and Society in the Wake of Military Rule.* Reviewed by Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam in *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 47(3/4), 2016, pp. 311–313). Both studies voice considerable doubt and criticism about the path Myanmar has taken since 2012, but whereas Lall appears to retain a basic optimism, the contributions by Sadan are much more pessimistic. This certainly derives not least from the different points of departure from which the two texts look at the country: Lall takes a "Burmese-centric" view, whereas the volume under review looks at the situation from the periphery/ies. All contributions in Sadan's volume maintain high academic standards, though some are more persuasive than others.

In the introduction the editor discusses the breakdown of the ceasefire in Kachin State and the possible reasons for this beyond the alleged "bloody-mindedness" of the Kachin, who allegedly obstructed the transition in Myanmar when it had just got into its stride. Sadan argues that the renewed fighting occurred after a long period of disappointed and unfulfilled expectations, in which the Myitsone dam and the government's demand to join the Border Guard Forces were only the last straws.

The first chapter, by Mandy Sadan and Robert Anderson, expands on this and discusses what they call the First Kachin Ceasefire (1944–1961), which was characterised by high expectations and bitter disappointments after the end of WWII and independence. These disappointments, they argue, eventually led to a loss of trust that was and will be extremely difficult to rebuild.

Martin Smith draws a similarly bleak picture continuing the discussion into the ceasefire from 1994 to 2011. He also describes the high hopes for peace and autonomy, which again were shattered by Burmese military intransigence. A ceasefire was not enough to secure a durable peace; what the Kachin wanted was what in another context the Sri Lankan Tamils had demanded: peace with justice. Especially remarkable in Smith's account is his emphasis on the role of the Kachin in setting up Civil Society Organisations after the ceasefire, which made them relative trailblazers in this regard. He argues that they were able to do so due to their designation as faith-based groups doing "religious" work. It might be worthwhile investigating why similar Buddhist networks were not tolerated by the government. Also worth noting is the much more equivocal view of Khin Nyunt and his attitudes towards the minority concerns taken by Smith and other authors in the volume, compared to Lall who criticises Khin Nyunt severely.

The articles by Lee Jones and Kevin Woods discuss some of the ceasefire's economic consequences. As Karin Dean has also argued, they point out that the ceasefire has not brought any benefits for the ethnic groups beyond the silencing of arms. Economic development, on the contrary, has become a means for the army and the government to extend their control and relocate the local population in such a way as to lessen any future resistance. "Ceasefire capitalism" robbed the minority armies and populations of means of income they could rely on before, so that "development" became a hated word (p. 121). Jones argues that the current wide-spread support for the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) among the population may be attributed in some measure to this ceasefire capitalism. Wood puts the point even more starkly by defining development, particularly material development, as counterinsurgency. He illustrates this with the cases of timber logging and agribusiness: once concessions have been granted – typically to Chinese businesspeople – they are privately secured and guarded and the local population banned from access to their own resources. Local elites may be co-opted in order to keep them quiet. Even though state control in these areas might not yet be total, the "privatisation of counterinsurgency" lessens the pressure on the military and even brings economic profits. The methods to secure the area bear a striking resemblance to those employed in Northern Sri Lanka.

Laur Kiik looks at Kachin perceptions of the ceasefire, discrimination and suffering, and at their assumptions about Burmese intentions. He emphasises that these perceptions, whether or not they are based on facts, contribute to a breakdown of trust. He voices some doubts about a perceived "Burman conspiracy" to deprive the Kachin of their economic resources. Intentions, he states, might be honourable or based on profit-oriented stupidity, but are not necessarily driven by malice against the Kachin. While the adage that one should not attribute to malice what might be simple stupidity is always worth considering, the evidence adduced by the other contributors and the fact that very similar processes are observable elsewhere (e.g. in Sri Lanka) make one question this assessment. The measures look too much like a continuation of "four cuts", "strategic hamlets" and "new village" to be coincidental.

Myanmar's relations with China, and their impact on Kachin State and people-to-people relations in the border region, are discussed by Enze Han and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, respectively. Han presents changing Chinese approaches to the issues in the border region due to shifting priorities and policy approaches in Burma itself. One clear sign for a changed approach that he sees is China's engagement in the peace discussions in the Kachin conflict. Ho illustrates the developing relations between Kachin in Myanmar and Jingpo (Kachin) in China with the example of the *manau* ceremonies and festivals conducted in very different ways in both countries, but nonetheless leading to a perception of belonging in both cases.

Extending the conversation beyond Myanmar's borders as well are Reshmi Bannerjee, and Joy L. K. Pachuau together with Mandy Sadan with their discussion of ethnic conflict from the Northeast Indian side. Both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have a small Singhpo (Kachin) community, but whereas in Arunachal Pradesh they have the status of a Scheduled Tribe (ST), they do not in Assam, which has led to problems there. Bannerjee shows how the ST status carries both privileges and disadvantages, leading to segregation and exclusion. Land, she says, is a source of conflict in the area, because land rights are often customary and not fixed, presenting an opportunity for "outsiders" like low-landers and Muslims to enter the region and grab land and resources. Northeastern "tribes", she argues, are often considered not "truly Indian" and real devolution of powers has been neglected in favour of a particularly brutal military solution.

Helen Mears extends the discussion further to the international environment, showing how, through the distribution of illustrated calendars throughout the world, both an "imagined community" and a message of resistance and a counter-narrative to the dominant Burmese one is conveyed to the Kachin community in Burma and beyond.

Two chapters relay the experiences of other ethnic groups involved in the conflict. Patrick Meehan and Mikael Gravers present the experiences of ceasefires and betrayed hopes among the Palaung and the Karen. Though their initial situation and the course of the war are quite different, the basic similarities both in the shaping of the ceasefire and the process of ceasefire capitalism are striking and contradict Kiik's assumption of unintentionality. Joy L. K. Pachuau and Sadan describe the Mizo culture of memory of the time of *buai* (calamity). The Mizo were treated particularly harshly before a ceasefire and a political solution eventually bound them as stakeholders to the Indian polity. Significant here is the ambivalence of memory, because the Mizo were attacked not only by the army, but also by hostile Mizo groups. How to deal with these memories and live together with the perpetrators is a problem not easily dealt with, and often only by silence. Teresa Colomba-Beck has described comparable developments in Angola and Mozambique.

Jenny Hedström relates how the conflict affected women. Their role in the struggle was long a limited and seldom acknowledged one, though they often bore the brunt of the suffering. Eventually women got involved in the fight beyond messenger and nursing services, leading to new perceptions of their role. Some of the processes here again resemble those of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), such as the interdiction against marrying, all-women regiments, or the KIA demand for "one child from every family". Hedström paints a rather gloomy picture of the status and power of women, which is in some ways contradicted by the facts: women are very prominent nowadays as

teachers, headmasters, directors of NGOs and even, like Seng Raw, as secretaries to the leaders of the movement.

These theoretical chapters are enriched by three field cases of individual Kachin directly affected by fighting and suffering and/or actively involved in the fight. Nhkum Bu Lu, the wife of a Kachin lawyer and politician, describes her family life from childhood to becoming wife and mother. Particularly poignant is her sober description of the struggle to hold her family together after her husband's arrest and jailing and to provide her children a measure of education and security in the midst of daily danger.

Nhkum Bu Lu's husband Duwa Mahkaw Hkun relates his political activity in setting up an overseas and diaspora network of Kachin activists in Southeast Asia and beyond. He takes pains to emphasise that the existence of different organisations and views should not be construed as disunity. Differences of opinion and discussions do not indicate splits, even if the government would like to portray them as such.

Hkanhpa Tu Sadan narrates his experiences as a Kachin student at Yangon University in the 1990s. Striking here is the Burman students' near complete ignorance of the ethnic groups at the periphery of the country as well as the gradual drifting together of ethnic cliques because of state supervision and suppression. Similarly intriguing is the perception of the Kachin students of having more room to manoeuvre due to feeling secure in their language and church community, which is not as easily penetrated by spies.

Finally, Matthew Walton's conclusion draws together the many topics that surface and resurface in the articles and highlights what I have once called "risks and side-effects of ceasefires". Ceasefires might stop actual physical violence, but they are no substitute for peace. This requires the building of trust as well as mutual respect. Especially the latter often seems to be lacking on the side of the Burmans.

This volume draws together multiple aspects and facets of the ethnic issues on the borders of Myanmar. It highlights the difficulties of both defining war and peace and finding solutions to armed conflict. At the same time it illustrates the connections and repercussions these conflicts have in neighbouring countries with related ethnic groups. For anyone wanting to get a thorough overview of the problems in Myanmar's borderlands, this volume is mandatory.

Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam

Michal Makocki / Nicu Popescu, *China and Russia: An Eastern Partnership in the Making?* (Chaillot Paper, 140). Paris: EU Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016. 51 pages, €3.59 (Print on demand). ISBN 978-92-9198-608-8 (print), ISBN 978-92-9198-609-5 (PDF)

As part of its regular series on security challenges facing the EU, known as the Chaillot Papers, the European Union's security policy think tank EUISS has published an interesting study on the emerging, yet very unequal, partnership between China and Russia, united more in their common dislike of Western political aspirations than by mutual trust and interests.

After President Obama announced the US "pivot to Asia" without much consequence one decade ago, President Putin – following his illegal annexation of the Crimea and his hybrid border war against the Ukraine and consequent Western sanctions – did the same in 2014. This study explores the practical implications and long-term prospects of Russia-China connections.

For Putin the rationale of his rapprochement to China was to demonstrate an alternative to the West, which had been Russia's main trading partner and source of investments, and to offset the sanctions regimes of the US and EU. For China the ensuing diplomatic honeymoon with Russia was a welcome power game to demonstrate the validity of its desired "multipolar world". On Russia's part, teaming up with a much stronger partner required some pro-active diplomacy to engage with other Asian powers as well, in order to avoid over-dependence and the status of being a junior partner with dramatically reduced bargaining power. Both see the world in terms of geopolitics and view the US as a disliked waning superpower. Both claim the status of a great power and project a feeling of encirclement. Yet "whereas Russia seeks to exploit global instability to boost its own power and status, China prefers global politics to remain reasonably stable" (p. 9), in order to continue its economic development in the undisturbed globalised world economy which has served its purposes so well. While Russia resorts to noisy and disruptive megaphone diplomacy, China prefers a more low-key approach, according to the authors.

China and Russia established the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001 to drive the US politically, militarily and economically out of Central Asia (as well as to combat regional Islamists and local unrest). Once this was achieved Russia also wished to curtail Chinese economic influence in Russia's "backyard", pushed for the enlargement of the SCO to include the two arch-enemies India and Pakistan and rendered the organisation predictably dysfunctional. Similarly, both Russia and China tried to organise the BRICS as an instrument against Washington organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Yet once the commodity prices for Russia, Brazil and South Africa burst – and along with them, the BRICS hype – little was left in terms of real investments and finance from these alter-

native sources. On their respective hybrid aggressions – Russia against Ukraine and China in the South China Sea – both sides stick to "passive neutrality" with regard to the other's activities. Yet this neutrality does not prevent Russia from supplying arms to Vietnam and engaging in joint oil exploration with Vietnam in the waters claimed by China. At the same time China sticks to its doctrine of territorial integrity (due to its interests in Taiwan, Tibet and Turkestan/Xinjiang) with regard to the war in the Donbass, while purchasing massive quantities of foodstuffs and military technology from Ukraine, even as Russia blocks all land transit between the two.

Yet official dialogues and rhetoric remain friendly. In fact the only territory that Putin ever returned was the disputed Ussuri river islands, over which a border war was fought in 1969. In return China, ever aggrieved over alleged Western and Japanese colonial misdeeds, sweeps Russian participation in the defeat of the Boxer uprising in 1900, its colonial ventures into Manchuria, its occupation and protection of Outer Mongolia (Sovietised in 1923), and the Sino-Soviet breakup of 1960 under the carpet. As China is reticent as ever to be tied down in any alliance, it calls its relations with Russia "more than a partnership" based on "mutual respect and equality" (p. 17) between the world's second largest and 11th ranked economy (with Russia's economy equivalent to that of Spain or South Korea).

Given the demographic problems of Siberia – its poverty, depopulation and aging population – and China's hunger for raw materials and energy, Russian attitudes towards China are understandably ambivalent. Reactions to the lease of fallow agricultural land and to the presence of Chinese workers on Siberian soil are outright hostile. Yet Russia needs Chinese investment and trade opportunities to revitalise its vast eastern provinces, even as it resents the fact that it is the weaker partner. Minority stakes of the state-owned Russian oil giant Rosneft went to Qatar and not to China (which was also interested). The sale of Russian arms, such as the S 400 air defence missiles, to China, Vietnam and also India simultaneously ultimately leaves all three recipients suspicious of Russian intentions. To Japan, which has been willing for decades to contribute to Siberian development, Putin continues to refuse to return the small Southern Kuril Islands which Stalin annexed in the aftermath of WWII without any legal basis. In the end, for Russia, Japan is too allied with the West, ASEAN too far away and India's resources too limited. By default all Russian roads end in Beijing (p. 25). Yet in the view of the Chinese, Russia's focus remains on its confrontation with the West. Asia for Moscow seems to be only an afterthought.

There is no shortage of memoranda of understanding (MoU) signed between the two on gas pipeline construction. Yet actual implementation progresses only slowly due to unending disputes over prices and control. When China invests, it wants to construct and to control the source – which is pre-

cisely what the Kremlin does not want to concede, neither to the West nor to China. As a result, Chinese investment in Russia, focused only on resource economics and infrastructure and reaching merely 5.6 per cent of total FDI (2014), has been marginal compared to the share of European investment, which has also gone into manufacturing and services. Moreover, Chinese credit conditions for loans are tougher than Western ones, and usually imply the use of Chinese contractors and ultimate Chinese control of the project. Hence they are usually not acceptable to the Russian side. Russia's bilateral trade with China – such as with the EU – fell dramatically during the 2014 implosion of raw material prices and the erosion of Russian purchasing power. The two economies are not complementary. Their economic centres – European Russia and coastal China – are very distant, and neither is able or willing to offer the technologies that the other side needs for modernisation. Russian import substitution policies do not favour Chinese imports, notably affecting Chinese as well as EU exports of machinery, vehicles, pharmaceuticals and foodstuffs. Nor is Russia's unwillingness to offer Chinese investors attractive deals helpful. The business climate in Russia is poor for Chinese and Westerners alike. The presidential honeymoon has not trickled down to regional and local levels, where Chinese investors and workers are distrusted. In the absence of the rule of law, arbitrary administrative decisions abound.

In turn mercantilist China since 2014 has used Russia's international isolation to drive down Siberian gas prices and to increase financing costs for construction projects, with credits usually linked to Chinese procurement and subcontractors. Unlike in Europe, where Russia can play various national clients against each other, in Asia it fears a Chinese monopsony and a strategic dependency for its pipeline-based exports. As a result pipeline constructions agreed years ago, with great fanfare, drag on endlessly (pp. 32ff.).

In Central Asia – as in Eastern Europe – Russia maintains its geopolitical interests as if it is an exclusive sphere of interest. This is challenged by the Chinese "Silk Road" Belt and Road Initiative, which aims at transport corridors (roads, railways, pipelines, fibre-optic cables) which in the name of "connectivity" should allow better Chinese access to the region's resources and markets. As a lender and investor China clearly outcompetes Russia. In order to safeguard its neo-imperial interests, Russia has set up the "Eurasian Economic Union" which, as a customs union with tougher external border controls, has managed to curb Chinese imports into Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Yet China prefers to ignore the EEU and, as in the case of ASEAN, prefers bilateral approaches where its bargaining leverage is stronger. At the same time it respects Russian "red lines" – for the time being at least. Central Asian governments are not passive bystanders in this power game. Since the waning of US interest in the region since the days of Obama, they skilfully attempt to play the two hegemons against each other. In general they prefer China as a

commercial partner and an investor and Russia for military protection against largely internal threats.

In conclusion this is a fascinating, well-researched and documented, yet succinct study on the interactions between two challengers to the Western democratic capitalist order. For China the road to great power status is through continued economic development, with geopolitical interests taking a back seat. For Russia, geopolitical and military posturing comes first, with economic development a distant second. Yet precisely its self-inflicted poor relations with the West have weakened Russia's bargaining power in Beijing. In spite of shared fantasies about a common encirclement by the US and its missile defence deployments, both are unwilling to turn their uneasy partnership into a formal alliance.

Albrecht Rothacher

HELWIG SCHMIDT-GLINTZER, *Mao Zedong. Es wird Kampf geben. Eine Biographie.* Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2017. 465 pages, 23 maps, €30.00. ISBN 978-3-95757-365-0

The last two decades have seen a noticeable number of Mao biographies in the German language, such as Charlotte Kerner's *Rote Sonne, Roter Tiger. Rebell und Tyrann* (2015), Alexander L. Pantsov's and Stephen Levine's *Mao. Die Biographie* (2014), Felix Wemheuer's *Mao Zedong* (2010), Wolfram Adolphi's *Mao – Eine Chronik* (2009) and Sabine Dabringhaus's *Mao Zedong* (2008), to mention just a few examples. The most popular among recent publications is certainly Jung Chang's and Jon Halliday's biography *Mao. Das Leben eines Mannes, das Schicksal eines Volkes* (2005). While the sheer number of postmillennial publications on Mao's life begs the question as to why yet another book on Mao is needed, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer's volume takes an interesting counter-stance to frequent narratives of the former leader's inherently "evil" character – a narrative taken up not only in popular writings such as that of Chang and Halliday but also, more broadly, in China's political cultural discourses. This book specifically counterpoints the volume written by Chang and Halliday, which – in short – argues that already as a child Mao showed the traits of a bad and scheming individual.

Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer contends that Mao was a man of many faces, a point underscored by the renowned China historian John K. Fairbank, who saw Mao as an ambivalent character inhabiting the role of both a revolutionary leader (according to his self-perception) and that of an emperor (in terms of power). Schmidt-Glintzer illuminates Mao's trajectory within the context

of China's modern history and the history of ideas, within China's modernisation discourses since the second half of the 19th century and within the endeavour of China's elites to bring about development and modernisation. In the end he classifies Mao as a key pioneer of the Chinese developmental state, thus rightfully, and rather refreshingly, contrasting with existing Mao biographies.

However, Schmidt-Glintzer's standpoint has provoked considerable criticism among some scholars and journalists. Critics contend that this book has sought to rehabilitate Mao and has whitewashed his misdeeds, perhaps most tangibly felt in the author's rejection of the term "dictator" to describe Mao. In turn, Schmidt-Glintzer argues that rather than seeing Mao as the main culprit causing the "suffering of millions", what needs to be emphasised instead is the "conscious involvement" or joint action "of many individuals". Accordingly, Schmidt-Glintzer's analysis examines Mao in a highly differentiated way by embedding him in the context of China's modern history.

Three overarching sections recognise Mao firstly as a teacher (according to Edgar Snow this was the classification Mao cherished most), secondly as a strategist and thirdly as a visionary. The first part focuses on Mao's adolescence, his maturation and his commitment during the May Fourth Movement (1919), his initial revolutionary steps with regard to the peasant movement in his home province of Hunan and his organising of the peasantry. Part two addresses Mao's strategic acting in the "liberated areas" under control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), his path to power within the CCP and his actions during the civil war against the Guomindang until the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The final part encompasses the dispute with the Soviet Union, the major mass campaigns (Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, etc.) and the new realpolitik in the context of Nixon's visit to China, as well as Mao's final years.

In his final chapter Schmidt-Glintzer makes some broader assessments with regard to his findings: Mao's positive role in creating a unitary state; his establishment of a regime of (dis)order based on legalist concepts; and his creation of the preconditions for a successful process of opening-up and modernisation, as the pillars of the current developmental state.

These benefits are contrasted with the costs of these processes: huge human and material costs and human suffering, although Schmidt-Glintzer does not blame Mao individually but rather shifts focus to the institutions of the party-state and the networks implementing and enforcing these policies. The author is right in arguing that Mao is just one figure in the context of China's Confucian "super-fathers" in the 20th century – super-fathers accepted by a majority of the people and in the alleged interest of national stability and unity. In the end, Schmidt-Glintzer characterises Mao as a "product of modern Chinese history" and not as an inherent "dictator".

However, the volume displays certain weaknesses. By embedding Mao solely in China's historical context, the analysis of his ideas and objectives lacks complexity. In fact, Mao's thinking is the outcome of a synthesis: from Kang Youwei he adopted the utopian imaginations (the "visionary"), from Liang Qichao he borrowed the idea of an authoritarian developmental state, from Sun Yatsen he employed the concepts of national independence, land reform and the necessity of an "educational dictatorship". Mao added three further components which turned out in the end to be disastrous: the mobilisation of and the transformation of the minds of the "masses" by means of campaigns, the idea of class struggle as the driving force of history and the militarisation of society. Mao's principle objective was the creation of a "Chinese" model as a counter-model towards "Western" models (this is, by the way, a very topical subject: see e.g. Xi Jinping's "Thought on *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* for a New Era", enshrined into the Party Constitution at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017), the creation of a new man, national self-reliance and mass campaigns as a substitute for technology imports. Mao aspired to industrialisation without modernisation. It is precisely these factors that are underexposed in this book. However, as Schmidt-Glintzer correctly argues, his successors were able to learn from Mao's failed attempts and mistakes.

In addition, the book contains a number of under-elaborated ideas. To give just a few examples: as when the author tells us that Mao's wife Jiang Qing specifically utilised Mao's female partner Zhang Yufeng without specifying what is meant by this (p. 384). Or when he informs us that Deng Xiaoping had initiated a military reform with the outcome that the armed forces withdrew its support of him (p. 394), without mentioning the contents of this reform and the reason for this withdrawal. On the same page he speaks of the violent repression of a conflict in Muslim villages, again without further explanation. Moreover, at the beginning of the book Schmidt-Glintzer speaks of new and comprehensive Chinese texts and documents on Mao without quoting these new documents or providing any new sources. Finally, it is not very clear why Stalin should be classified as a "dictator" but Mao not.

To sum up, this book is intended for readers interested in a well-written and readable book providing basic information on Mao within the historical background of his time. In addition, it provides ideas with regard to a farther-reaching and differentiated perspective on Mao's personality and his basic intentions. In this way it is highly recommendable.

Thomas Heberer

Rüdiger Frank, *Nordkorea: Innenansichten eines totalen Staates*. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2014. 428 pages, €19.99. ISBN 978-3-421-04641-3

"Terra incognita" is a very restrained euphemism for a country that, since its founding as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) on 9 September 1948, has made the so-called Western nations at best uneasy. Following the death of the country's founder, Kim Il-sung, in the summer of 1994, numerous think tanks in Western capitals, and even high-ranking officials in the CIA (including the director, John M. Deutch) were convinced that an implosion in the country was imminent – comparable to the developments in the former Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe.

What kind of a state is this, then, whose political leadership has thus far consistently refused to open the door even a crack to Western capital and ideas, and instead aspires to join the ranks of the nuclear powers? How can it be that the West notoriously deplores the isolation and reclusiveness of the People's Republic, whereas Pyongyang has long maintained intensive contacts with numerous countries that have become independent since the 1960s, in the so-called Tricontinental Movement?

Rüdiger Frank, who currently holds a professorship at the University of Vienna, where he heads the Institute for East Asian Studies, approaches the country, its leadership and its people in nine chapters. The Leipzig-born author, an economist and Koreanist by education, had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the DPRK as an exchange student a year after the end of East Germany, and to expand upon those experiences repeatedly, at expert conferences and as a member of economic and political delegations visiting the country. Frank's book evinces a high level of competence, resulting in a pleasantly objective tone. Most books on North Korea reveal more about the author's personal longing to confirm preconceived opinions than about the country itself.

In the first chapter, "Tradition and Origin", the reader is confronted directly with Korea's distinctive situation and dilemma: namely its geostrategic location between "Big Brother" China and the country of Japan, with the latter's ambitions for supremacy over the peninsula. After two victorious campaigns against China and Russia, Japan turned Korea into a protectorate and finally into a colony in 1910. With far-reaching consequences: at the end of World War II, it was the victorious powers, the USSR and USA, who divided the country along the 38th parallel into spheres of influence in the North and South, respectively – with the "protective powers" politically supporting anti-Japanese partisan groups in the North and more collaborational elements in the South. Kim Il-sung was at that time only one of many partisans, but he understood how to use his tactical skills and charisma in the years that fol-

lowed, under the aegis of the Soviets, to build up his leadership position, which he had consolidated by the mid-1950s at the latest.

The more international the confrontation between the Eastern and Western Blocs became and the more the Cold War escalated, the deeper Korea became drawn into the maelstrom of a competition between two systems: the capitalist postulate of freedom and the socialist expectation of salvation. In their own different ways, both Seoul and Pyongyang viewed themselves as respective political bastions. The first hot conflict in the Cold War, the Korean War (1950–1953), which saw extremely high losses especially among the civilian population, began as a bitter civil war and ended as an international conflict with a ceasefire that has still not been transformed into a peace treaty, even today.

In the four chapters that follow, Frank focuses on the ideology, politics, economy and reform capability of a regime that – uniquely in the world until now – is run in the form an expanded Kim family business. One of the main reasons for its continued survival is that the structure of government, the state apparatuses and the mechanisms of power remained finely balanced. There is a kind of tri-partite governing system: old war comrades of the country's founder, Kim Il-sung, from the time of the partisan struggle against the Japanese, became an integral part of the government, party and military leadership, much as the specialists and autochthonous cadres in the formerly socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc. In more recent years it is the graduates of the elite Kim Il-Sung University who join the regime.

The emergence of the ideology *chuch`e* ("master of one's own body", "subject" or "creating with one's own power") also served, in particular, to preserve self-determination in all matters and a foreign policy equidistance between Beijing and Moscow, the two rivals for hegemony in the communist and international labour movement. "*Chuch`e* is one of the most important justifications for the Great Leader principle and a source of legitimation for Kim Il-sung and all those who invoke him. In this function, *chuch`e* remains relevant and powerful today. Because of its flexibility, the ideology also offers scope for economic and political reforms, at least theoretically. Perhaps the most important function of *chuch`e*, however, is the – for many Koreans – seemingly indissoluble bond linking socialism, leader and nationalism" (p. 101).

In the sixth chapter, "Special Economic Zone: Cash Cow and Risk Factor", the author very clearly describes the trade and economic relations which have existed between North Korea and its neighbours China and Russia for years, particularly in the border region. The crown jewel of these special economic zones was without doubt the industrial zone of Kaesŏng, which was a direct result of the first inter-Korean summit in the summer of 2000. At that time, during a truly historic meeting in Pyongyang, the heads of state of both Koreas agreed to develop Kaesŏng's industrial zone as a prototype of direct bilat-

eral cooperation. What was initially so euphorically celebrated came to an abrupt end in February 2016. In protest against North Korea's continuing nuclear and missile tests, Seoul argued for the closure of the Kaesŏng industrial zone. Pyongyang immediately hit back, expelling the South Korean personnel from the country and shutting down the complex. If and when it will ever be put back into operation remains one of many unknowns on the peninsula.

Frank dedicates the final three chapters to the government policies of Kim Jongun, the future prospects for the People's Republic and the image that it seeks to project, both internally and to the outside world. Mindful of historical experiences with foreign countries (recently, several US-enforced regime changes in the Middle East) and for reasons of the inherent survival logic of the system, North Korea's nomenclature has clearly adopted the following fundamental approach: if we cannot be respected internationally as a friend, then we can at least be respected as a worthy enemy. At least, so the thinking goes, until we have joined the phalanx of nuclear powers – a strategic consideration that Kim Jongun affirmed in his New Year's address of 2017. At the same time, however, this goal – certainly a balancing act – should be achieved in line with economic development, a policy that is known today as *pyŏngjin* and means "to accomplish two things at once".

North Korea – quo vadis? Past efforts to gaze into the crystal ball have proven utterly misplaced. The author thus wisely and for understandable reasons prefers to avoid any prognosis. "Despite repeatedly urging caution about any predictions," writes Frank on page 380, I am firmly convinced that North and South Korea will one day reunite, even if this currently seems improbable. There are many reasons for this."

Frank's well-researched and commendable study should be read primarily by all those who strive for a deep and serious understanding of the DPRK and who can play a decisive political role in dismantling the enemy stereotypes on both sides and promoting a long overdue culture of dialogue. Three criticisms can be made, which do not in the least diminish the contents of the opus. The choice of the book's title, *North Korea: Internal Views of a Totalitarian State*, is unfortunate, and some passages in the foreword are a bit self-promoting – a state has no views, and an author's seriousness is not measured by the frequency with which he meets with experts or elder statesmen. Last, but not least: occasionally the author seems to want to "work off" his East German past against the foil of a completely different type of real socialist system. This comes across as artificial, especially as he himself rightly warns against false analogies.

Rainer Werning

Yvonne Spielmann, *Indonesian Contemporary Arts: Artists, Art Spaces, and Collectors.* (NIAS Monographs, 138). Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2017. 240 pages, £40.00. ISBN 978-87-7694-230-4

Many Indonesian artists have made a name in the Asian contemporary art world, with record-breaking prices at auction houses in Hong Kong and Singapore. However, even though Indonesian art has achieved a prominent position in the Asian market, it remains relatively unknown to the global arts world.

This book is a refreshing introduction to Indonesian artists, art spaces and collectors. Yvonne Spielmann provides original and stimulating views which seek to free the appraisal of Indonesian arts from a solely Eurocentric perspective. Wary of the privileging self-referential system of Western art production, Spielmann contends that the Western generalising standards of modern and contemporary arts are incommensurable with the evaluation of Indonesian art.

Spielmann writes with a rare insight about the arts in Indonesia. The key to the originality of this book is that the writer's knowledge of Indonesian art results from extended in-depth research conducted in several countries in Asia, sometimes with non-English sources previously inaccessible to a global audience. As might be expected, the author is well informed about Indonesian art history and its socio-political context in the broader Southeast Asian region. She offers an approach that values Indonesian artistic expressions of identity and the "self-confidence syncretism of style" (p. 56). Indonesian artists, in her view, are well versed in a syncretic language of art rooted in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. They employ plural juxtapositions of several influences of local ethnic traditions (such as those of Java, Bali and West Sumatra) and Western influences, especially the former Dutch colonial and Western pop culture.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the emphasis on subversive political motives in Indonesia art. Spielmann highlights the recurrent condemnations of colonialism and the draconian New Order regime, and the resistance against Islamism, patriarchy and racist ideologies, as well as criticism towards Universalism in art production and standards. Spielmann asserts that "politics and aesthetics are closely tied in issues of the production of art" (p. 51) in Indonesia. This does not mean that more abstract and apolitical artworks do not exist in Indonesia. Indonesian artworks are quite diverse, as illustrated by the high-quality photographs found in the book.

Indonesian artists' contributions to the art exhibitions in Asia and Europe mark the "internationalisation" of Indonesian arts since the 1980s. This book tries to problematise why Indonesia is considered a major player in the Asian art world, showcased disproportionately in major art galleries in Asia. The art world is bound to the market economy, yet the success of Indonesian art in the

Asian market has not transferred to international recognition. As Spielmann rightly suggests, there is an imbalance between production, on the one hand, and presentation and distribution, on the other. Indonesian art is generally created from non-governmental initiatives with minimum state support – and in fact many galleries and art spaces in Indonesia are owned by artists proud of their independence from the state, with the exhibition and distribution of art mostly undertaken by private art institutions. Even as these institutions increasingly cater to the growing global market and to collectors, there is the risk that the access of the Indonesian public to the arts may well become limited if not severely diminished if the presentation and distribution of art is increasingly privatised.

This important book presents an evocative exposition of notable contemporary artists such as FX Harsono, Agus Suwage, Heri Dono, Nasirun and many others. Special mention is given to women artists such as Christine Ay Tjoe, Mella Jaarsma, Arahmaini, Melati Suryodarmo, Tintin Wulia and others. Overall, this book is a good starting point for a deeper acquaintance with the most important figures in Indonesia, both contemporary and past artists and their works. The book provides one of the most complete descriptions of Indonesian contemporary art, despite some repetitive ideas in several paragraphs. In her effort to stay true to the non-native speakers and sources, Spielmann suggests that any effort to improve the non-standard grammar and style of the quoted non-native-English sources would not have been acceptable. This decision should be admired even though it requires extra effort from readers to clearly understand the meanings intended by the non-native speakers.

In the light of the opening of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (Museum MACAN), Indonesia's first contemporary and modern art museum in Jakarta, as well as the Jakarta Biennale and Biennale Jogja exhibitions – all of which took place in November 2017 – the publication of the English version of *Indonesian Contemporary Arts* comes just at the right time.

Sita Hidayah

Conference Reports

Rakhine Days: The Rohingya Conflict and its Implications for the Democratisation of Myanmar

Berlin, 9 March 2018

On 9 March 2018 the Wissenschaftsforum Myanmar (WiMya) at the University of Passau, together with the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), organised a one-day workshop at the premises of the DGAP in Berlin. In four panels, experts gave short inputs on the theoretical and methodological considerations of research in conflict areas of Myanmar, the historical background, the differing interpretations among actors and stakeholders, and possibilities for reconciliation.

The first speaker, Rüdiger Korff, described the hyperreality that is heightened by reinforcing loops of information and that blocks out the reality on the ground: the global discussions on the Rakhine conflict are far removed from the discussion inside Myanmar and the situation in Rakhine itself. The distribution of material and financial aid for the affected is thus based on the maxim "who pays the piper calls the tune". Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam also emphasised the importance, for any analysis, of access to reliable data – which in the conflict area can be hard to come by. Moreover, the ethics of research become a factor when questions of neutrality, impartiality and objectivity arise. She stated that it is important not to get hung up on labels but to analyse the situation and structures of oppression in order to help the victims. Focusing on the effects of the media, Oliver Hahn described a media logic that is focused on personalisation, i.e. the stories of the victims; in his opinion, conflict reporting is a kind of storytelling. Myanmar is still more or less a blind spot as regards international journalism and in large parts an inaccessible territory. Moreover, most foreign journalists do not speak the language, which is a major drawback to profound and professional journalism. In order to look at both the problem and the actors involved and to determine the concrete issues at stake, Bernt Berger recommended a think tank. At the moment a battle about narratives is raging, he argued, which leads to talking around, not about, the issues.

Another speaker, Hans-Bernd Zöllner, saw the problem in Rakhine as a cyclical one that reoccurs periodically in a different guise. Many available sources and explanations are not utilised because they are old. He mentioned the riots in 1930 and 1938 that similarly targeted Muslims for alleged defa-

mation of Buddhism or the fear that their number would lead to the extinction of the Buddhists (interestingly, at that time Rakhine was quiet).

How the Rohingya conflict turned from a triangular one in 2012 to a multipolar one at present, with multiple actors – Muslims, militants, AA, ARSA, the army, NLD, foreigners, NGOs, OIC – was described by Jacques Leider. He also noted that the international relevance of the conflict stands in contrast to the perception in Myanmar, where there exists no impression of urgency. Moreover, highlighting the historical background for an explanation is obviously insufficient to grasp the problem, because mindsets are linked to a shared past, but a separate history. In addition, the Muslims were traditionally strongly linked to the army and the USDP, a fact that only changed very recently, in 2012. At the moment historical analysis seems to clash with legal and human rights arguments. In August 2017, the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which was chaired by Kofi Annan, was presented to the Government of Myanmar. As Mandy Fox stated, it provided a glimmer of hope, though there were queries about the Commission's composition and mandate. The report presented 88 recommendations covering the whole range of humanitarian and developmental issues relevant for Rakhine. It is striking that this report is not mentioned among international activists referring to the genocide of the Rohingya.

Aung Tun Thet, a member of the Myanmar Peace Commission (MPC) and Chief Coordinator of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine (UNHERD), provided a nice quotation as the Myanmar delegation outlined their proposals for a possible solution of the conflict. Against an intense engagement with the history and origins of the conflict, he cited Lord Buddha: "If you have an arrow in your heart, do not ask where it came from, how, who shot it and why, just pull it out." In his view, the solutions proposed thus far – sanctions, embargoes and involvement – are not helpful, but would lead rather to a deterioration of the situation. UNHERD presents a fresh approach because it involves all actors and primarily the private sector with a view to economic development. It is driven by domestic resources and intends to start with infrastructure in Rakhine, with roads, electricity, etc. Aung Tun Thet outlined some planned projects, such as a Special Economic Zone in Maungdaw, to increase cross-border trade, banking, SMEs, health and tourism that should be initiated in cooperation with the regional government. Rakhine has to be brought back from a war economy to a peace economy according to the UN global compact: human rights, labour standards, environment, anti-corruption. The private sector, in particular, is being challenged to contribute to these endeavours.

During the discussion that followed, the Myanmar delegation stressed that in the rural areas there is very little knowledge and understanding of human rights, therefore education is badly needed on this topic. Once again Aung

Tun Thet emphasised that historical, political, economic and social factors are deeply interrelated and can only be solved together. In this regard demographics have to be considered. Sometimes the impression is created that the majority in Rakhine are Muslims. That is not true, and poverty affects all. However, the aid response by the international community goes only to this one group. In a view only conditionally accepted by the other participants, Aung Tun Thet dated the beginnings of the current problem to 2012, as an intercommunal conflict turned militant because of ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) attacks, with only the army's response being condemned. It should be kept in mind that Rakhine is a border state, making national security an issue. In fact, the atrocities discussed internationally are concentrated in the three border townships, where the Muslims form a majority of sometimes more than 90 per cent of the population.

Pyone Kathy Naing, Member of the Parliament of Myanmar, pointed out the complexity of the problem that in her view stems basically from colonial times: Rakhine is the poorest state in a poor country, with poverty affecting Buddhists and Muslims alike. The Rakhine Buddhists object to an internationalisation of the conflict because they fear it will disadvantage them. But international commitment can have a productive role if it cooperates with the government. Another member of the Myanmar Parliament, Je Yaw Wu, drew attention to the significance of the military in the solution of the conflict, citing a need for checks and balances.

The question of the return of the refugees and their citizenship status was admitted to be the thorniest problem. Aung Tun Thet complained that in the Kofi Annan Report there is little mention of the state's responsibility towards the Muslims in this regard. The delegation emphasised that the rules of citizenship are crucial, and that the 1982 law is still applicable. The Myanmar government will probably not recognise the Rohingya as an indigenous ethnic group with special rights. But these people have a right to individual citizenship on the basis of individual human rights: their status is equal to the status of Muslims with Indian or Chinese ancestry in other parts of Myanmar. Currently, registration is proceeding at the moment. This involves first a documentation process through the so-called "National Verification Card", which is issued to returnees as a first step, before they obtain citizenship documents. To get this card, no special documentation is needed, but the returnees must state which village they are from and how long they have lived there. However, there are reports that some people who wanted to go through the process were killed or prevented from applying.

The workshop provided a sober and dispassionate view of the problem in the Rakhine State of Myanmar in contrast to the numerous often biased and one-sided events on the issue. Importantly, the views of different sides in Myanmar were given attention, while it was acknowledged that the problem in the

area is severe, and that the Rohingya are definitely subject to oppression and violence. The extent and origin of these conditions, however, are more complex than often assumed.

Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam

Opportunities and Challenges of Democratisation in Myanmar

Yangon, 13–14 December 2017

The conference was held in commemoration of the 97th anniversary of the foundation of the University of Yangon, and was sponsored by the universities of Yangon, Passau and Yunnan and the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation. In continuation of questions raised during the Interdisciplinary Myanmar Conference (WiMya) in July 2017 in Passau, the following issues were addressed: the role of the military in Myanmar, the effectiveness of civil society, aspects of economic development, international factors and implications, especially the effects of sanctions, religio-cultural factors connected with questions of centralisation, decentralisation, autonomy and the situation of minorities, and media and the public sphere. Discussions, particularly with the Chinese participants, were vivid and sometimes controversial, as in the latter's denunciation of the "West" in general and the "Western" media in particular. Across sessions, similar issues were discussed repeatedly from different angles, including the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the current problems in Rakhine state, and the Chinese view of Myanmar politics and economy.

The introductory keynote, "Towards an International History of Myanmar's Transition", was kindly given by Dr Thant Myint-U, the grandson of former UN Secretary-General U Thant. He outlined his view of the transition process in Myanmar as perceived internally and internationally and touched on a number of topics that were discussed again later. He saw the changes as a top-down and intra-elite process initiated by a ruling class that in the 1990s perceived it as inevitable that they would end up in a pact with the National League for Democracy (NLD). Internationally, change was helped by quiet diplomacy and a confluence of lucky moments, with India becoming more engaged and Norwegian negotiator Erik Solheim arriving as an advisor in 2010/11. Though Myanmar is a potential regional hub there is no major Western focus on Myanmar as of yet. But local issues, such as questions of identity and ethnicity/religion and their relation to citizenship and armed conflict have become global issues, not unique to any one country. This applies particularly

to the problem in Rakhine, where Myanmar feels justified in its fear of Islamic attacks tied to global Islamic movements. There arises the question of belonging and how to ride the wave of nationalist sentiment. According to Dr Thant Myint-U, the new elite in Myanmar has not yet fully formed, and it should move away from rigid thinking about ethnicity. He also briefly touched on China as a significant model for Myanmar and raised the question of whether democracy is sufficient as an answer to global challenges.

In the first session, Li Chengyang from Yunnan University, Chaw Chaw Sein from Yangon University, Yoshiro Nakanishi from Kyoto University and Wolfram Schaffar from the University of Vienna discussed the role of the military during the transition and the future of the democratisation process. The first speaker compared the current situation in Myanmar with that of Thailand and Indonesia and claimed that the military saw democracy as a tool for modernisation, rather than a goal. This was in a way confirmed by Chaw Chaw Sein, who stated that civilian control of the government remains rare, but that the current government wanted positive engagement within civil society and wide-ranging reforms. She argued that the peace process should be a triangular process combining the three factors of Disarmament, Devolution and Reintegration (DDR). For that process a civil-military partnership is needed as well as a comprehensive security strategy. Yoshiro Nakanishi, the third speaker, emphasised the new and younger face of the military after the reshuffle of 2010. The hitherto invisible military leaders are now more visible in a new PR strategy, e.g. on Facebook and social media. The non-military activities of the military constitute the justification for its political role. However, the issues dealt with are banal, and one must ask whether this will really generate public support. Finally, the stability of the democratisation process was investigated by Wolfram Schaffar, who drew an interesting comparison with Mongolia and Bhutan.

The second session on "Religion and Politics" provided a variety of papers and viewpoints. Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam (University of Passau) introduced the topic with a short overview of the history of the University of Rangoon and its eminent political role in the struggle for independence. Zu Xianghui from Yunnan claimed that Buddhism was a significant cultural but completely apolitical influence in the relations between China and Myanmar – an assertion that was discussed rather controversially. Jacques Leider from ÉFEO Bangkok described competing ethnonationalisms in Rakhine that cannot be reduced simply to the question of the Rohingya. The Rakhine Buddhists feel equally disadvantaged, and there exist other Muslim communities besides the Rohingya. As is often the case, the problem is perceived very one-sidedly outside the country.

"Civil Society and the Media", the third session, was opened by Oliver Hahn and Ma Thida from PEN International, who presented the state and

perception of the media in Myanmar. Oliver Hahn emphasised two points: Firstly, the character of the media and communication has changed considerably with the rise of social media (mainly Facebook), which are especially popular in Myanmar because they are often used and considered as the only source of reliable information. There exists a new bottom-up public sphere that needs a voice. Secondly, the necessity of journalism for democracy should be questioned. Journalists in the country are activists rather than professionals, he claimed, and both the training and self-organisation of journalists leave much to be desired in the absence of a clear media policy. Journalism may be a check on power but may also serve as an affirmation of the rules.

Ma Thida took the first point further and elaborated on the lack of trust in the rule of law among a population that cannot distinguish between editing of a journalistic piece and censorship. This opens the door to libel and hate speech. As a reaction, politicians increasingly use §66 of the Penal Code (forbidding personal insults and insulting the Buddha) to shut down unwelcome criticism. Mo Mo Thant (University of Yangon) looked at the changing role of CSOs in contemporary Myanmar. She noted that CSOs only emerged in the colonial period, since before then, welfare was a concern of the clergy and pious laypeople. She emphasised the difference between autonomous and non-profit CSOs, often staffed by volunteers working in an honorary and un-salaried capacity, and NGOs that are often organised professionally.

Continuing this topic Rüdiger Korff (University of Passau) opened the fourth session, "International Aspects and Implications", with a discussion on the influence of international development organisations on Myanmar. These organisations often seem to take over tasks from the state and society and thus indicate a deficit. He posed two questions: 1) Which topics (currently concentrated on peace, justice, gender, human rights) are central and why? and 2) Who are the counterparts in the country itself? It seems that state organisations mostly work with the state and NGOs with NGOs, with little overlap. An important point is that negotiations that take place in the public sphere are influenced by international development organisations that have no democratic legitimacy.

Yin Myo Thu (University Yangon) outlined a contradiction, or at least a difference, between universal norms and particular norms and the implications for Myanmar: while the universal norm of human rights applies, in Myanmar the particular norm of citizenship rights is equally important, a point she illustrated with the case of the Muslims in Rakhine. According to Yin Myo Thu, the human rights argument is invalid as a means for international organisations to compel Myanmar to amend the 1982 citizenship law, since from 2013 Rakhine has been a security issue. The population in Maungdaw region is 94 per cent Muslim. In addition, there is a conflict between the people of

Rakhine and INGOs and IOs. Myanmar has a right to deny the internationalisation of the conflict, though it conducts discussions on this with ASEAN.

Rainer Einzenberger from Vienna University illustrated the significance of CSOs within his research area, the Chin State, an upland and frontier region. The state is trying to integrate the frontier, which leads to problems of land and resource-grabbing in these areas. The discourse still turns on indigenism and the centre-periphery paradigm, in which the definition and perception of the frontier as a geographical and virtual space derive from colonial times. The legal framework does not recognise customary law and creates a land market for the Myanmar state in which people with no documented rights are cheated out of their land and its resources. The CSO discourse of indigeneity and indigenous rights tries to countervail these developments.

The value of democracy for Myanmar, as Kong Jianxun (Yunnan University) pointed out, lies not in its potential for individual liberty and choice but in its welfare potential. In her opinion, democracy means the welfare state and public services that secure income, jobs, health care, etc.: democracy should provide a better life.

In the final session on "Economic Dynamics" primarily the Chinese participants presented their papers, as well as Win Myat Aung from the SEAMEO Regional Centre for History and Tradition, who gave a short overview of the Myanmar economy since 2015. Yang Xianzhang from Yunnan University then examined the importance of Myanmar–ASEAN relations under the NLD. In this context, it was significant that the President of Myanmar, U Htin Kyaw, made his first visit to Laos. ASEAN is a priority region for economic cooperation and a springboard onto the global level.

Ying Yao outlined the political implications of Chinese investment in Myanmar, especially in minority regions such as Kachin State, which objects to Chinese investments and exploitation of natural resources.

Dai Yonghong from Sichuan University threw an interesting light on China's intentions with an interpretation of China's initiative "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) and Myanmar's place in the scheme. He claimed that OBOR should be regarded as a mutual advantage for Myanmar in particular, since China would make up for the latter's disadvantages. OBOR thus aims at sincere friendship and mutual economic prosperity devoid of political pressure or control. It is about economies, not geography, and based on three pillars: economic development, peace and political transition. Its three corridors consist of China–Pakistan (CPEC), Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar (BCIM) and China–Myanmar (CMEC), which is an integrated region connecting Kunming, Mandalay (the hub), Kyaukphyu and Yangon. In an aside he denounced sanctions (as currently demanded over Rakhine by the "Western" media) as useless because they would affect the people, not the government.

The conference was remarkable and enlightening not only for the views and perceptions of the Myanmar scholars, who provided frank evaluations in a Chatham House environment, but equally for the presentations and perceptions of the Chinese scholars, whose remarks on occasion generated vivid discussions. It is to be hoped that similar conferences will be conducted in the future.

Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam

2. Mitteldeutscher Südasientag (2nd Central German Conference on South Asia)

Halle (Saale), 22–23 June 2017

This series of conferences for contemporary research on South Asia commenced in 2016 in Leipzig; after a successful first conference in 2016 the second one was held in Halle (Saale) on 22-23 June 2017. The aim of the conference is to provide researchers on South Asia in the German-speaking areas opportunities for networking and interdisciplinary exchange. For that reason, researchers with a focus on modern South Asia from various disciplines and irrespective of their academic level were invited to participate.

The conference was again organised collaboratively by the Institute for Indology and Central Asian Studies of the Leipzig University and the Department for South Asian Studies of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. Other involved organisations and sponsors of this year's conference were four associations, namely the Centre for Interdisciplinary Area Studies of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, the Working Group "Modern South Asia" (Arbeitskreis "Neuzeitliches Südasien") of the German Association for Asian Studies, Bengal Link, as well as the Halle affiliate of the German-Indian Association. They created a platform for 19 presenters, eight chairs and fifty other participants to share views and ideas or enter into interdisciplinary exchange and dialogue.

The conference opened on the evening of June 22 in the main building of the Francke Foundations. Heike Liebau of the Centre for Modern Oriental Studies delivered the keynote speech in German, "Akteure und Praktiken deutsch-indischer Wissensproduktion in translokalen Kontakträumen" ("Actors and Practices of German-Indian Knowledge Production in Translocal Contact Spaces"). Following the speech the curator of the Francke Foundations

guided the participants through exhibitions that, among others, displayed objects from South Asia.

All presentations were delivered on June 23. They were arranged as eight panels, with two panels always taking place simultaneously. The first two comprised topics pertaining to foreign politics and foreign economic relations (Alexander Benatar, Berlin; Stefan Tetzlaff, Göttingen; Wolfgang-Peter Zingel, Heidelberg) as well as literature (Johanna Hahn, Bonn; Hans Harder, Heidelberg; Réka Uta Máté, Erfurt). The following two panels were either dedicated to legal aspects in India (Tanja Herklotz, Berlin; Kalindi Kokal, Halle (Saale)) or city development and cultural heritage (Kati Illmann, Halle (Saale); Rachel Lee, Munich). After a lunch break there were three presentations on religiously motivated identity politics and Islamism in Bangladesh and Pakistan (Kawser Ahmed, Winnipeg; Bilal Haider Rana, Erfurt; Jürgen Schaflechner, Heidelberg) and simultaneously two presentations on Nepal's to date barely explored architectural and theatrical traditions (Gudrun Bühnemann, Madison; Makoto Kitada, Osaka). The final presentations were delivered focussing on the topics women's rights and their realisation in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan (Shikiba Babori, Cologne; Jasmin Mairhofer-Mehmood, Vienna) as well as the relations of religion and science in Islam and humour in Islamic sermons (Arian Hopf, Heidelberg; Max Stille, Berlin). The full programme can be viewed at http://www.suedasien.uni-halle.de/Suedasientag_2.pdf.

Due to the large number of participants, the variety of topics and the fact that interdisciplinary conferences on South Asia do not take place often in the German-speaking area, the Mitteldeutscher Südasientag shall continue in the future. Furthermore, since the feedback from all of the sections was quite positive, it is being considered to expand the conference format beyond the Central German region. If so, it will bear the title "Deutscher Südasientag" (German Conference on South Asia).

Franziska Strich

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