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Violence, Mobility and Labour Relations in Asia

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International Quarterly for Asian Studies

Violence, Mobility and Labour Relations in Asia
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Book Reviews

Violence, Mobility and Labour Relations in Asia

Editorial

Benjamin Etzold

Asia is a continent of mobility. In the course of its history, the region has been shaped fundamentally by the movements of hunters and gatherers, peasants and artisans, workers and intellectuals, traders and seafarers, pilgrims and soldiers. For these and many more groups moving to varying destinations, along diverse pathways and in different rhythms, the search for better lives and livelihoods as well as the flight from violent conflict and other existential threats have always been strong motives for mobility (Liu-Farrer / Yeoh 2018). Mobile populations have thus always contributed to defining and challenging the respective communities, pre-colonial empires, colonial states and, later, post-colonial nation states in Asia and have contributed to transforming them in terms of their ethnic, religious and social composition and their cultural, economic and political structures.

Today, Asia can be considered the most mobile region of the world. 100 million Asian people currently live in a country other than their country of birth, which is equivalent to 40 per cent of the world's international migrants. Almost 60 million Asians have migrated within the region, while 40 million migrants live outside of Asia, mostly in Europe (20 million) and Northern America (16 million). India and China have the largest number of emigrants, followed by Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines (IOM 2017: 54–56). In addition, hundreds of thousands of people are (temporarily) mobile within their own countries. While internal mobility plays a significant role in people's lives and for the respective economies, the exact number of internal migrants can only be estimated (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019). Some of the most significant socio-economic transformations in Asia in the last decades are based on distinct patterns of and structures for labour mobility. The rise of China's industry has been driven by the integration of Chinese enterprises in global production networks, which rely on cheap labour provided through rural-urban

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mobility (Kilian et al. 2010, Bork-Hüffer 2016). The economic transformation and resultant construction boom in the Arabic Gulf rests on the exploitation of labourers and domestic workers from South and Southeast Asia (Malecki / Ewers 2007, Silvey / Parreñas 2019). Singapore's global city development is based not only on global linkages, but in particular on regional mobility and the newly emerging translocal livelihoods of workers (Budianta 2016, Peth et al. 2018). And the deforestation and "palm-oilisation" of Borneo and many other parts of Southeast Asia are related to large-scale relocation programmes and the displacement of local populations (Elmhirst 2017). It is thus not exaggerated to argue that labour mobility has become a defining feature of Asian economies and a transformative force in Asian societies.

Human mobility is, of course, driven not only by labour market needs and the search for better livelihoods. In Asia, existing transnational networks and family relations, educational, medical and social services, and the migration industry play a fundamental role in structuring migration (Christ 2016, Liu-Farrer / Yeoh 2018), as do environmental risks, natural catastrophes and climate change (Hugo / Bardsley 2014, Afifi et al. 2015). Violent conflict, political persecution, human rights violations and social exclusion have also forced tens of millions of people in Asia to become mobile (Ho / Robinson 2018). According to the latest data from UNHCR (2019: 74), at the end of the year 2018, 13.5 million people from Asian countries had fled across international borders and then been registered as refugees or were still awaiting their asylum decision. Moreover, 13.7 million Asians have been displaced within their country of origin due to violence and conflict. Generally speaking, people flee not only from persecution and violent conflicts, but also due to the destruction of livelihoods and the loss of economic security that are linked to conflicts and collapsing security structures. There is a growing body of scholarly work on the causes and dynamics of displacement from and within Asia, on refugees' protection and encampment in particular Asian countries and on the regulatory regimes that structure both the (im)mobilities and the everyday lives of displaced Asian people.[1]

As mobile people – whatever their original motives for mobility – arrive and (temporarily) settle in mega-urban regions, cities and rural sites, they normally engage in economic activities to secure their livelihoods and to build their own futures. They thereby enter into local labour relations and navigate through place-specific policy regimes, modes of production and working cultures. While uncertain, instable, insecure, unsafe and exploitative labour rela-

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1   For overviews see Ho / Robinson 2018 on the multiplicities of displacement experiences in Asia; McConnachie 2014 and Stange / Sakdapolrak 2018 on forced migration in Southeast and East Asia; Banerjee 2014 and Ghosh 2016 on refugee movements and statelessness in South Asia; and Monsutti / Balci 2014 on displacement dynamics in Central Asia.

tions prevail and have grown all over the world[2], precarious work can be considered as a particular challenge in Asia – a region that experienced an extremely rapid socio-economic transformation and incorporation into globalised modes of production over the past fifty years (Kalleberg / Hewison 2013, Cruz-Del Rosario / Rigg 2019). In Asia, informal employment is the norm rather than the exception, as more than two thirds of all workers work without a written contract, without access to social protection and without protection by labour laws. They are thus subject to excessive working hours and potentially to exploitation. Moreover, decent employment is also far from guaranteed even for those under formal contracts (ILO 2018: 37ff). Forced labour – an expression of particularly violent labour relations – is also commonplace, mainly in the fields of domestic work, sex work, construction and manufacturing as well as agriculture and fishing. Four out of 1,000 working people in Asia work under conditions of coercion and are exploited by their employers, in particular through debt bondage, but also in relation to human trafficking (ILO 2017: 10). In general, working poverty is widespread. Around eight per cent of all workers in Asia can hardly meet the needs of themselves and their families on the basis of their working income (ILO 2018: 12).

Amongst all labourers, migrant workers are often particularly vulnerable to unsafe working conditions, abuse and exploitation, a lack of rights and livelihood insecurity, in particular if they took out loans to finance their mobility through brokers and if they are locked into "highly asymmetrical, personalistic, and often violent relations of power and dependency" (O'Connell Davidson 2013: 176) with employers. Migration can thus be seen as a specific pathway into the precariat (Standing 2011: 90). Existing legal frameworks must be seen as the prime cause of migrant workers' enhanced vulnerability. In many countries in Asia, labour migration policies not only fail to protect migrants' rights as individuals and workers, but seem to be purposely designed as a way to limit access to citizenship or at least to secure legal status, to increase their dependency on employers and other facilitators of (temporary) labour migration and to allow for their systematic exploitation in a highly stratified international division of labour.[3]

2   See the work by Standing 2011 on the "precariat", which occupies the lower positions in the fragmented global class structure.

3   See Samers 2010: 412ff. on the basic assumptions of the International Labour Market Segmentation Theory; see Standing 2011: 93ff. on the notion of the "denizen" as the working precariat with strategically limited rights; and Piper et al. 2017 for the case of temporary migrant workers in Asia.

Interconnections between violence, mobility and labour relations

Against this background of growing labour mobility, coupled with protracted violent conflicts that lead to ever new cycles of displacement and persistent conditions of insecure and precarious work in Asia, the contributions in this special issue address the multiple interconnections between violence, mobility and labour relations from various angles and disciplinary perspectives. They thereby clearly address a gap in current research. Scholarship that looks into labour mobility, migrants' livelihoods and precarious labour in Asia[4] focuses on certain groups of mobile people, in particular temporary foreign workers, female labour migrants, irregular migrants and agricultural labourers. People who have been forcefully displaced in the context of violent conflict are, however, rarely mentioned in these labour-focused studies. In turn, while some scholars in forced migration and refugee studies look into livelihoods after displacement and the multiple barriers to accessing work,[5] as well as employment opportunities for refugees and broader economic dynamics in receiving countries (Betts et al. 2017, World Bank 2017), explicit links to scholarly debates on labour mobility, migrant workers' agency or precarity are, however, rarely made.

Exploring the triangular relationship between violence, mobility and labour leads to some interesting research questions that would otherwise remain below the surface if only a two-dimensional approach (violence-mobility, mobility-labour, labour-violence) were used: 1) What defines local labour relations and livelihood conditions in situations of violent conflict, collapsing security structures and mass displacement? 2) How do migrants and refugees experience violence and labour exploitation during and after mobility? How do they cope with, adapt to and resist violence and precarity? 3) How do state policies and other regulative regimes that make use of their monopoly of violence in a given location structure (precarious) labour relations and workers' (im)mobilities?

To my knowledge, such connections between violence, mobility and labour relations are rarely explored – neither conceptually, nor empirically. From a theoretical perspective, the combination of concepts in three fields of scholarship – the "new mobilities" paradigm, labour geography and debates about violence in peace and conflict studies – might be particularly promising for shedding light on violence, (im)mobilities and labour relations in Asia.

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4   See Siddiqui 2005, Breman 2010, Piper et al. 2017, Piper / Withers 2018, Cruz-Del Rosario / Rigg 2019.
5   See Horst 2006, Jacobsen 2014, Bohnet et al. 2015, Missbach 2017, Grawert / Mielke 2018.

The "new mobilities" paradigm[6] considers human mobility as a distinct social practice that is interlinked with other forms of mobility (of capital, goods, information, ideologies, etc.) and yet is rooted in specific economic, political, social, cultural and material structures ("moorings"). Mobility can thus only be conceived of in its dialectic relation to immobility. In many, also Asian, contexts immobility is socially perceived as the norm and as an indicator of stability and security, whilst mobility – despite shaping the everyday lives of millions of migrant workers and refugees – is framed as the exception and as a "security problem". The new mobilities paradigm is of great relevance for the study of labour mobility and forced migration (Gill et al. 2011), because it embraces the central role of multiple mobilities in the everyday lives of workers and refugees while nonetheless acknowledging the manifold borders, barriers, hurdles and selective filters that structure the direction, composition and velocity of the flows. The notion of the "politics of mobility" (Cresswell 2010) has thus been introduced to better comprehend the distinct political practices, instruments and discourses revolving around mobility and how they are rooted in societal power relations and nested in multiple scales – from the local to the national, the regional and the global level.

Every local labour market has its history, its specific working conditions, its local anchor points ("work places" or moorings) and is embedded in regional, national and global circuits of capital, information, goods and people as well as in particular power relations. Local labour relations are thus inevitably tied to places and to multiple mobilities. In "labour geography",[7] relations between labourers and employers, working conditions and workers' everyday lives are seen as an expression of neoliberal capitalism and of ever new waves of structuring and restructuring modes of production and thus also of broader societal relations. Nonetheless, workers' agency is being acknowledged (mobility being a specific facet of agency) as are their everyday practices that contribute to producing specific "places of labour" and that enable increasingly rapid circulation in translocal production networks. In this context, precarious work is seen as being directly related to the disadvantageous position of labour vis-à-vis capital – the employers, the investors and global market dynamics – and to the lack of protection by the state, and options are sought to enhance workers' agency (Coe / Jordhus-Lier 2010).

Peace and conflict studies goes far beyond the study of war and other forms of violent conflict. While there is no uniform theory of violence, most scholars nowadays acknowledge violence's manifold manifestations and consider violence as an inherent part of power relations and thus also as a specific mode of societal organisation (Imbusch 2003, Karstedt / Eisner 2009). According to

6   See Hannam et al. 2006, Sheller / Urry 2006, Urry 2007, Cresswell / Merriman 2011.
7   See Herod 2001, Castree et al. 2004, Lier 2007, Coe / Jordhus-Lier 2010.

Galtung's (1969, 1990) classic three-dimensional approach to violence, violence can first be understood as practices by actors that are aimed at harming or hurting an individual or group by physical and/or verbal means; such an understanding of "direct violence" is the most commonly used. Killing, rape, torture, pillaging and detention are particular forms of direct violence that are strategically employed in wars and violent conflicts and that often produce mass displacement.[8] The second form of violence, "structural violence", manifests itself in specific forms of injustice, exploitation, deprivation and marginalisation that reflect unequal economic structures and power relations between different and within particular societies. Structural violence is a continuous process, rather than a singular event, in which the actors involved are often concealed (Galtung 1969, 1990; Bohle / Fünfgeld 2007). Precarity, insecure livelihoods and workers' exploitation, on the one hand, and unequal access to mobility options, for instance through border controls and highly selective visa regimes, can be seen as prime examples of structural violence. Thirdly, "cultural violence" refers to ideologies, discourses and institutions that produce, maintain and renew violent actions and processes and serve "to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung 1990: 291). This legitimisation of violence can result in the perception of existing patterns of both direct and structural violence as normal and inevitable – even by those who are most severely affected by them; violence becomes internalised (Bohle / Fünfgeld 2007). To give examples from this special issue, cultural violence might manifest itself in the justification of temporary guest worker schemes that lead to the marginalisation, immobilisation and exploitation of migrant workers, as in Malaysia (see Frank / Anderson), or in the discourses about the "necessity" to deport refugees whose asylum claims have been rejected, as exemplified in the case of Afghans' deportation from Germany (see Sökefeld).

Contributions in this special issue

The contributions in this special issue focus on different kinds of mobilities within and across Asian regions and draw on different types of material, mainly the authors' own empirical research. They all develop their own take on the triangular relation between violence, mobility and labour.

In the first paper, "The Cost of Legality: Navigating Labour Mobility and Exploitation in Malaysia", Anja Karlsson Franck and Joseph Trawicki Anderson explore the labour relations in which Burmese migrants working in the Malaysian city George Town are embedded and how they navigate rather con-

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8   See Bank et al. 2017 and Etzold 2019 for a discussion of "migration out of violence" and other facets of the violence-mobility-nexus.

straining governance regimes. The migrant workers in their empirical case study all came to Malaysia in the context of "temporary guestworker schemes" through which they are allowed to work in manufacturing, construction, agriculture and selected parts of the service economy – all sectors in which Malaysia is in need of (cheap) labour. Malaysia's Temporary Migrant Worker Programme ties the foreign workers to specific employers and limits their options to search for (better) work in other places – they become immobilised after moving. The labour migrants are thus extremely dependent on their employers, who also serve as the "sponsors" for their stay in Malaysia. Low pay, precarious working conditions and even abuse and direct violence are endured by many migrants as the constant threat of being deported looms large. The sponsoring employer can always withdraw her/his support and end the contract, which would lead to the migrant workers' forced return. Even though the workers are in a weak bargaining position in these highly unequal labour relations, which could be understood as a politically designed form of "structural violence", they are not without agency. Franck and Anderson present empirical evidence that some Burmese labour migrants nonetheless leave their employers, go to other places and search for jobs in the informal economy. They thereby lose both their residency and their working permit and enter into "illegality", but gain in independence and sometimes even earn a higher salary. Some strategically "move in and out of legal status" several times, which the authors describe as "navigation" through the bureaucratic landscape, an approach that can contribute to reducing the migrant workers' precarity.

The second paper "Cyclical, Temporary and Partial Return: Navigational Strategies of Displaced Persons from Myanmar" by Alexander Horstmann, Markus Rudolf and Clara Schmitz-Pranghe also highlights mobile actors' manifold strategies for navigating through highly constraining conditions. The authors focus not on labour migrants, however, but on people who have been forcibly displaced within and from Myanmar and now try to eke out a living in the violent Thai-Myanmar borderlands. On the basis of comprehensive empirical research, they emphasise the fact that legal categories such as IDP, refugee, citizen, labour migrant and undocumented migrant hardly say anything about the cause of displacement or motivation for migration. Displaced persons – who mostly belonged to the Shan, Karen and Kachin ethnic communities in this research – make use of, switch and combine different socio-legal statuses in order to cope with displacement, ongoing direct violence and the protractedness of their situation, to enable physical security and to sustain their livelihoods.

Displaced persons from Myanmar are engaged in subsistence work in the fields of their "home communities" in Myanmar or (seasonally) as labourers

in Thailand's booming agricultural sector; they work in mining and road construction on both sides of the border as well as in factories in the newly established special economic zone in Thailand's city Mae Sot; they are self-employed in transport, trade and other enterprises in the border towns on the Myanmar side and have become part of the informal economy in Thailand; some of the better educated also work for humanitarian organisations and some as domestic workers in Thai urban-middle class households. All of these livelihood options go hand in hand with specific mobility patterns – including cyclical, temporary and permanent return, onwards-mobility and enforced immobility – that are constrained or enabled by control regimes that affect different ethnic groups and locations to a quite different extent. Making use of diverse options at multiple places – which can be understood as an expression of agency – many displaced families have become more flexible and less dependent on aid and other forms of external support. In most cases, however, they remain highly vulnerable to precarious, dangerous and exploitative labour relations without formal protection or any guarantee of minimum wages.

Elke Grawert, in her article "Coping with Insecurity: Labour Relations, (Im) mobility and Conflict-sensitive Employment in Afghanistan", looks at the triangular relations between violence, mobility and labour from a different angle. She focuses on the operations of construction companies in Afghanistan in the mid-2010s and thereby exposes the particularity of labour relations in fragile and violence-affected settings and the prerequisites for "conflict-sensitive employment" (Grawert / Shirzad 2017). Based on comprehensive empirical research on construction companies and the livelihoods of local populations in Afghanistan, Grawert portrays how the companies "carefully negotiate access to the communities, try to avoid enhancing social tensions during construction projects and take various precautions to protect the staff, company facilities and the construction itself". In order to do so, the companies need to invest in patron-client-relations with local powerholders – both politicians holding offices in government and Taliban leaders – i.e. those actors and groups that maintain a "monopoly of force" over a particular site or region. Respected elders of the local communities are important "gate keepers" in conflict-affected settings as they mediate between different political groups. They also negotiate wages, employment conditions and breaches of contract with the construction companies, always trying to ensure that the local workers and the wider community benefit from the temporarily limited construction site.

    The article also points to the added value of looking at violent conflict, re-construction and peace-building through the lens of mobility and immobility. Violent conflicts alter the mobility patterns in the affected regions fundamentally, leading to the enforced mobility of some, while forcibly immobilis-

ing others. At the same time, the destruction of infrastructure is a central military strategy to harm societies and economies; rebuilding infrastructure – in this case roads as an example of a particularly vital mobility infrastructure – is thus an important element in the transition from war to peace.

Moreover, there is also a distinct (im)mobility dimension to the labour relations in such violence-affected settings. In case of the construction sector, mobile (international) capital is invested in particular places; large construction companies that often organise their work from the capital cities but are mobile in their operations then "have to temporarily integrate in local political-economic environments to implement their projects". As Grawert's case study shows, certain risks and conflicts but also a particular potential can emerge when construction companies bring together more flexible and skilled workers with local, often lower-skilled labourers. Importantly, while "decent work" is certainly an illusion under such conditions of violence and insecurity as described here in Afghanistan, the construction companies "cannot act arbitrarily upon local labour". The local political alliances, in which the companies become embedded and upon which their own security largely depends, also protect the local labourers from the worst forms of labour exploitation.

The final contribution to this special issue, "Nations Rebound: German Politics of Deporting Afghans" by Martin Sökefeld, shows us yet another side of the turbulent relations between violence, mobility and labour. It traces the development of German politics of deportations – another form of enforced mobility – to Afghanistan over the past 30 years and exposes its underlying logic. Building on wider debates in the growing academic field of "deportation studies" (Coutin 2015), Sökefeld analyses the policy developments and narratives that underpin the current deportation discourse in Germany. He distinguishes two steps in the argumentation: "first, deserving and undeserving refugees have to be distinguished, assuming that a clear distinction between the two categories is possible, and second, those who are undeserving and therefore have no right to stay in Germany have to leave the country – if necessary, by being deported. According to this reasoning, the unrelenting enforcement of repatriation, deportations included, is the basis for the acceptance of the asylum laws in Germany." The notion of deservingness relates to mobility and labour relations in many ways.

On the one hand, labour migrants are clearly distinguished from refugees – a far too simplistic categorisation that in many cases does not reflect the complex realities of trajectories of displacement (Crawley / Skleparis 2017, Etzold 2019). Those who are not accepted as refugees are automatically seen as labour migrants and thus as undeserving of protection under German law or the international asylum regime. On the other hand, deservingness addresses pathways of integration into German society and long-term perspectives for

remaining. Criminals and people who might pose a security risk are the first to be deported, yet their deportation is actually hard to implement. Ironically, those people who receive an expulsion order but who live a regular and "orderly" life by going to school or working are easier to find and thus easier to deport. Deservingness – in the sense that they deserve to stay, if they are "well integrated" and can live by their own means, as often expressed in the public discourse – cannot then protect them from deportation. Overall, the German state's policies and the wider discursive framing of deportation as a necessary tool to being able to guarantee the protection of the "legitimate" refugees and as a means to re-establish and demonstrate state sovereignty can be read as a particular form of "cultural violence" through which the mobility of forced return – a form of direct violence – is being legitimised.

In the case of Afghanistan, the mismatch between state-driven discourses and the reality is particularly blatant and life-threatening. While the German government has repeatedly stated that "parts of Afghanistan are safe enough for deportees", Sökefeld notes that given persistently high levels of generic violence and terrorist attacks "nowhere in Afghanistan is safe, particularly for deportees from Europe". Deportation exposes people who are seeking protection and a better future to direct violence and livelihood insecurity. In the end, this not only jeopardises their lives, but also most certainly leads to new cycles of displacement.

To sum up, the contributions in this special issue cannot, of course, cover the full spectrum of topics and questions that emerge when interpolating the notions of violence, mobility and labour relations. They do, however, expose some fascinating research findings and point to some generic trends that are worth exploring further. First, mobility – for multiple reasons, in different forms, across diverse spaces and in various rhythms – is an omnipresent theme in Asia and has certainly become part of the normal way of life. Instead of "only" trying to explain mobilities and their multiple drivers, it is also necessary to better understand the conditions, meanings and effects of mobilities in people's lives and the relations to different forms of immobilities.

Second, the relations between mobility and violence are not always straightforward. Looking at displacement as a form of mobility that is primarily driven by violence tells only one part of the story. While specific types of mobility such as labour migration and trade continue unabatedly despite violent conflicts in some contexts, in other cases immobilisation instead of forced mobility can be the result; or both may happen at the same time but for specific groups only. Generally, studies of forced migration and refugees should look deeper into changing patterns, rhythms and forms of mobilities – both within and beyond regions that are affected by violent conflict – rather than trying to explain mobility through violence.

Third, the same holds true for the relations between violence and labour. While studies into refugees' livelihoods, precarious work and conflict-sensitive employment are important and further studies are certainly necessary, they should not stop at the examination of only directly visible forms of violence in labour relations, such as the exploitation of workers by their employers. Violence – in the sense of direct, structural and cultural violence – is deeply enshrined in societal relations. The occurrence of violence thus always brings to the fore highly unequal power geometries. In the context of labour, we must be aware that deep inequalities – between people and across spaces – are an inherent part of the organising logic of capitalist modes of production and our world society.

Fourth, the territorial nation state has an important role to play in the triangular relations between violence, mobility and labour. The contributions in this special issue point to the great relevance of borders, policies, laws, government actors, governmental categorisations and also specific discourses fed by state agents in the everyday lives of mobile and working people. In largely sedentary societies that are believed to be clearly delineated by borders, people's mobility continuous to be seen as an exception that raises suspicion and inadvertently requires the categorisation of mobile subjects and tighter border control, or at least a "better management" of cross-border flows. In the 21st century, the territorial nation state largely derives its legitimacy from its ability to react to and direct mobilities to its own advantage.

Fifth, and finally, people are not passive elements being pushed and pulled around by structural forces. They possess agency. There are multiple examples in this special issue: Burmese foreign workers navigate constraining temporary labour mobility schemes, switch their legal status and thereby try to evade labour exploitation in Malaysia (Frank / Andersson); forcibly displaced people from Myanmar diversify their livelihoods, return cyclically and move on temporarily despite violence, social exclusion and mobility restrictions in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands (Horstmann / Rudolf / Schmitz-Pranghe); construction companies and workers build localised alliances in order to cope with insecurity in the context of cyclical violent conflict in Afghanistan (Grawert); and refugees and German citizens resist deportations to Afghanistan through acts of solidarity, civil protest and efforts to change the public discourse (Sökefeld). Such expressions of agency are needed to counter both policies and narratives aimed at restricting workers' and displaced people's mobilities, which in the end only contribute to deepening vicious circles of violence and precarity.

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The Cost of Legality: Navigating Labour Mobility and Exploitation in Malaysia

Anja Karlsson Franck / Joseph Trawicki Anderson

Abstract

Through examining the experiences of Burmese migrant workers in Malaysia this paper analyses the complicated relationship between legal status and protection from violence and abuse. While legal status has often been promoted as a means to protect migrants, we suggest that legal status is actually pursued only at particular moments and on the basis of particular cost/benefit calculations made by migrants. Even as legal status offers some protection from state authorities, the linkage between legal status and employer sponsorship means that it also binds migrants to specific employers. Crucial to these calculations too is the cost of legal status for both migrants and employers, imbuing the relationship with financial risk on both sides and turning legal status into an expensive "commodity". Therefore, while migrant labour is often constructed as being "cheap", our study reveals that a key factor in the exploitation of migrants is that they are in fact so expensive to hire. Thus, as we argue here, it is important to look beyond a narrow focus on legal status and consider the basis on which such status is extended – especially as such status is increasingly predicated on a sponsoring employer and significant financial investments.

Keywords: Malaysia, Myanmar, guestworkers, employer sponsorship, legal status, labour mobility

Introduction

Previous scholarship on the relationship between labour mobility and worker exploitation shows a clear linkage between precarious legal status and precarious forms of work (Fudge 2011, Goldring et al. 2012). The literature has particularly explored how "illegal" status in host countries works to produce a cheap and exploitable migrant labour force (De Genova 2002, Khosravi 2010). Key to this, as de Genova's (2002) famous reading suggests, is the disciplinary power of "deportability". Or, more precisely, how the threat of deportation in everyday life can be mobilised into a very particular spatialised (and racialised) social condition that sustains the vulnerability and docility of "illegal" migrant workers. Yet whereas this connection between migrant "ille-

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gality" and exploitation is well established in the literature (Shamir 2017), there is growing recognition that the abuse and violence facing the migrant workforce is not exclusive to "illegality" (Garcés-Mascareñas 2012: 157). In fact, scholarship both within and beyond the Asian region points towards a growing slippage and blurring of boundaries between "legal" and "illegal" status, as states employ multiple constructions of non-citizenship that grant "legal" migrants limited and differentiated access to rights and entitlements (see for example Cohen 2006, Standing 2014 on "denizens", Menjívar 2006 on "liminal legality" and Nah 2012 on "hierarchies of rights").

What follows from this blurring is often the deterioration of labour conditions, as various forms of inequalities and unfreedom are made an integral feature of legally sanctioned guestworker schemes. A much-cited example of this is the *kefala* system present throughout much of the Middle East (Gardner 2010), but studies have also pointed towards similar dynamics in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in Canada (Basok et al. 2014) or temporary foreign worker programmes in Asia (see for example Bélanger 2014, Killias 2010, Lê 2010 on Malaysia, Bylander 2019, Derks 2010 and 2013 on Thailand and Lan 2007 on Taiwan). Thus, despite international calls to promote "legal" (or "regular") forms of migration as a means to protect the rights of workers (most notably the United Nations Global Compact on Migration, 2018), the above studies give cause for caution in assuming that "legality" connotes "protection" (see Vigneswaran 2019 for more on protection). Rather to the contrary, these studies suggest that the very conditions associated with legal guestworker schemes may increase migrants' susceptibility to abuse, force and even violence in the host labour market.

Based on insights from such scholarship, and drawing on fieldwork conducted in the Burmese migrant community in the Malaysian city of George Town, this study seeks to further disentangle the relationship between legal status and exploitation. In doing so, we show how migrants navigate the framework governing their residence and employment in Malaysia by moving in and out of legal status. Our contention is that migrants choose to have – or not have – legal status based on negotiating the cost/benefit calculations between safety concerns, relationships with employers and financial costs. During certain periods migrants may, in other words, deem it more advantageous or safe to hold "legal" status, whereas "illegal" status may be the preferred option at another time. In light of this, our study moves beyond a binary examination of how legal status functions as a means of protection (or not) towards an analysis of how it is strategically used by migrants and why (see also Coutin 2003).

Malaysia provides an important context for the examination of these issues, considering its importance as a destination country for temporary labour migrants in Asia. The vast majority of these migrant workers, or "foreign

workers" as they are officially termed, originate from the poorer countries in the region, with neighbouring Indonesia being the top sending state, followed by Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and others (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia 2016). For the Malaysian state, these foreign workers have come to play an absolutely essential role in sustaining economic growth (World Bank 2015). While official data puts the number of registered foreign workers at around two million, estimates from the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) suggest that the total number of foreign workers in the country approaches six million (Lek 2016). If these figures are accurate, the share of foreign workers in the Malaysian labour market exceeds 40 per cent (ibid.). However, despite this dependence on foreign labour, the conditions facing the migrant workforce in Malaysia are notoriously poor. Reports from human rights organisations speak of systemic exploitation, abuse and violence – and in 2014 the watchdog organisation Verité released a report that presented evidence of widespread forced labour in the electronics sector, one of Malaysia's key industries (Verité 2014). As will become apparent throughout this paper, the situation facing the migrant workforce can be explained by the social and legal position they are offered in Malaysian society. For those who stay in the country "illegally" the main challenges in everyday life can be traced back to their criminalised status (Franck 2016), which not only puts them at risk of deportation but also of being fined, imprisoned, detained or even caned (Nah 2011, 2012). While many "illegal" migrants in Malaysia have entered the country through irregular channels, many others have overstayed their visas or have absconded from their designated employers, often referred to as "runaway workers" in public debate (see for example The Star 2018).

Like many of their peers, the "runaway workers" interviewed in this study had originally entered Malaysia on a temporary working visa (Visit Pass / Temporary Employment). These temporary working visas are part of the Malaysian foreign worker policy scheme, which allows workers from particular countries in the Asian region to work for a designated employer for a distinct period of time. Much like other temporary guestworker programmes within and beyond the Asian region, the primary objectives of the Malaysian policy framework are to ensure the supply of low-waged labour to select industries, to ensure that the presence of foreign guest workers is temporary and to restrict their mobility in the labour market (Garcés-Mascareñas 2012). To achieve these objectives, foreign workers not only rely on a single employer to sponsor their entry, but these employers are also responsible for the daily management and control of workers throughout their stay in the country. In order to prevent the workers' longer-term incorporation into society, the Malaysian policy framework includes additional restrictions, such as prohibiting workers from bringing dependents or getting married (Immigration Department of Malaysia n.d.). The broader outcome of this policy framework is that

foreign workers face both a legally and socially precarious situation – one in which their bargaining power is severely restricted. In fact, and as Bélanger (2014: 88) has suggested, the above policy framework "form[s] the basis of systemic problems that lead to workers' exclusion, exploitation, forced labour, and, in some cases, trafficking."

As indicated above, the following paper approaches these processes by looking at how Burmese foreign workers in Malaysia move in an out of legal status in order to secure their livelihoods and avoid exploitation, but also points towards some key factors as to why this occurs. Following a conceptual discussion on guestworker programmes and an introduction to our methodology, we focus our inquiry on the experiences of Htet, a 23-year-old migrant from Mandalay in Myanmar, who will be introduced later in the paper.

Temporary guestworker schemes

Despite the sounding of their death knell in Western Europe in the 1980s (Castles 1986), guestworker schemes, also referred to as Temporary Migrant Worker Programmes, have become resurgently popular around the world. Much like the Malaysian foreign worker programme, these guestworker schemes centre on their temporary character, employer sponsorship and a reliance on private actors to source and manage workers (Anderson / Franck 2019). Typically, workers are only granted temporary work permits, rely on a designated employer to retain their legal status in the country and are endowed with relatively few rights (Ruhs 2013). This design essentially means that states are able to exploit the benefits of foreign labour without bearing responsibility for the costs of their long-term participation in society (Sharma 2006). Or, as phrased by Surak (2013a: 88), it allows the state to "maximize economic utility while minimizing social cost". As guestworker schemes are designed within particular parameters in pursuit of various state aims, they can also be highly targeted to particular sectors of the economy, allowing for states to potentially create immigrant categories that are relatively narrowly focused on particular economic needs (Surak 2013b). In the Malaysian case this is, for example, visible in that the state allows foreign workers in particular sectors of the economy and regulates the countries, age groups and genders from which workers can be sourced (Immigration Department of Malaysia n.d.). Myanmar nationals between the ages of 18 and 45 are, for example, allowed to work in all stipulated sectors (manufacturing, construction, plantation, agriculture and services), whereas male workers from Indonesia are not allowed to work in manufacturing, for example (ibid.).

Yet, even as guestworker schemes seem to exist within tightly defined parameters, in practice, their modes of operation are significantly more complex. As this paper will show, stakeholders within guestworker schemes (in our case: migrants and employers) may navigate the (often shifting) regulatory context in ways that produce both unexpected and unintended outcomes. One reason for this is that while guestworker schemes function under the imprimatur of the state, much of the actual operation of these schemes requires the extensive involvement of private actors. These private actors may have roles officially delegated by the state or play a role of their own making. Within the Asian context, there is a particularly well-developed literature on the long string of private actors that facilitate the entire migration process (Franck et al. 2018, Bélanger 2014: 88, Hugo 2005: 94, Lê 2010, Lindquist 2010, Tseng / Wang 2013, Xiang 2012).

What can be drawn from these readings is how the involvement of private actors produces complex sets of relationships between state structures and the variety of private actors involved in migration processes, although the nature of that relationship is not always entirely clear (Anderson 2019). In other words, while these private, or "migration industry" actors if you will (Gammeltoft-Hansen / Sørensen 2013), clearly provide migration services, it is not obvious for whose benefit those services are rendered. Within the migration industry literature there has been extensive debate regarding the ways in which states govern with, through and around private actors in guestworker schemes. Some view the state as delegating functions to private actors in order to increase control over guestworker schemes (Surak 2017), others have noted the ways in which the private actors help states to govern at a distance (Kemp / Raijman 2014) or to govern migrants closely (Anderson / Franck 2019), and still others see the governance produced by states and the migration industry as "co-constitutive" (Goh et al. 2017: 424). Yet regardless of the specific relationship, what emerges from all these accounts is a state that benefits to some degree from the inclusion of these private actors.

It is in this context that both employer sponsorship and costs, the two key factors that we focus on in this paper, have become essential features of the migratory system. As private actors engage in migration processes and services, they come to have new responsibilities within migration management and control. While these functions may be delegated to some degree, private actors often retain significant latitude in how they function, at least in practice if not by law. Likewise, as many of these migration services have been outsourced, costs have risen as more and more actors look to profit from migration services. Although private actors in migration management, particularly in the Asian context, include a broad range of actors (such as brokers, outsourcing and visa agencies, etc.) our particular interest in the role of employers is motivated by the way in which they are heavily implicated in this system

through various forms of employer sponsorship. Employer sponsorship here refers to the system of binding migrants to a single employer for the duration of their stay in the host country. Previous literature shows how employer sponsorship is deployed as a powerful tool in order to maintain a precarious workforce (Basok et al. 2014, Hahamovitch 2014, Wright et al. 2017), through granting employers extensive powers to very closely control their migrant employees (Anderson / Franck 2019). In fact, studies have suggested that employer sponsorship tends to produce a "hyper-dependence" (Zou 2015) upon employers both within and beyond the labour market (Wright et al. 2017).

This hyper-dependence derives from the fact that migrants depend on their employers to retain their legal status – but also from the fact that employers are often granted quite far-reaching responsibilities when it comes to the everyday management and "supervision" of migrant workers (Krissman 2005, Griffith 2014). Also, and as the above indicates, the role of employers in the context of temporary guestworker schemes is not merely to facilitate worker mobility. Quite to the contrary, and as forcefully argued by Derks (2010, 2013) in the Thai context, a key function of employers in host countries is often to ensure the immobility of migrant workers (see Garcés-Mascareñas 2012 for a similar discussion on Malaysia). Not only are migrants often prohibited from changing employers once they have arrived in the host country, but additional policies may also be in place that circumvent workers' mobility within and beyond the labour market (such as linking work permits to geographical restrictions). In this context, employers are thus granted a very powerful role "as they have direct control over the spatial and temporal parameters of workers' lives" (Hennebry 2008: 347). An interesting aspect of this is thus that whereas other private and migration industry actors profit from the process of moving migrants across borders (or, importantly, preventing them from moving across borders), employers here largely profit from migrants' staying put. When employers have had to bear significant fees and costs for the arrival of migrant workers, the immobilisation of those workers is essential for employers to recoup their investment. As we will see in sections to come, this latter condition has dire consequences for the everyday relationship between migrants and their employers.

Methodology

This paper is part of a broader study on the social, spatial and legal conditions of migrants from Myanmar in Malaysia, and builds upon qualitative fieldwork conducted in the Malaysian city of George Town between 2012 and 2017. The broader empirical material consists of observations, informant in-

terviews and in-depth interviews with 32 migrants. Attention to temporary labour migrants from Myanmar is interesting for several reasons. For one, Myanmar nationals are considered to be the fourth largest migrant group in Malaysia. While official data is hard to come by, estimates suggest that the number of Myanmar nationals in the country exceeds half a million. Also, while several studies have provided fascinating in-depth analyses of the situation for Myanmar refugee/ethnic minority communities in Malaysia (see for example Azis 2014, De Vries 2016, Hoffstaedter 2014), few empirical studies have examined the conditions for temporary labour migrants originating from Myanmar. Amongst the respondents in this study, the vast majority belonged to the ethnic majority group in Myanmar, the Bamar, and a limited number were ethnic Kayin. What these respondents all had in common is that they had travelled to Malaysia in search of employment. Whereas the Burmese workers in Malaysia face a similar situation to that of many other foreign workers, their situation is also somewhat distinct in that the Burmese government has only recently taken an interest in its nationals abroad (Hall 2012). While other major sending states have long-standing engagements and agreements with Malaysia, seeking to enhance the situation for workers and secure broader development gains, such endeavours are more recent in relation to Myanmar. Also, the group of migrants interviewed for this study had mostly left their homes prior to democratic reform in Myanmar – and many of them thus shared the sentiment that their government was (or at least had been) largely indifferent to their situation.

The observations and interviews conducted in George Town were facilitated by recurring two-week stays together with a group of Burmese foreign workers in the Jelutong Area of the city. These stays provided the opportunity to follow people in everyday life, build a network in the Burmese community and access respondents. The in-depth interviews conducted focused on retrieving information involving the decision to migrate, the journey to Malaysia, the conditions of work and the experience of immigration control practices, as well as the perception of fear and safety in everyday life. A few field visits also focused on particular themes, such as the involvement of private actors during the respondents' migration trajectories and the experiences of unfreedom in the labour market. During the interviews, one of the two Burmese research assistants working in the project was always present, to provide interpretation when needed. The length of these interviews varied between 30 minutes and several hours, but a number of respondents, depending on their situation and availability at the time, were interviewed on numerous occasions over several years, which allowed us to capture changes occurring in, for example, legal status and working conditions.

With regard to legal status, 19 of our 32 respondents had experienced a shift in legal status over the course of their stay in Malaysia – some of them up

to six times. Interestingly, none of those who had entered the country legally had remained with their designated employers. Instead, they had – at one point or another – taken the decision to abscond. The reasons for doing so were commonly related to the working conditions offered and what they described as deceptive recruitment practices. That is, the employer in Malaysia did not live up to what the recruiters in Myanmar had promised. Several of the respondents had, for example, signed formal labour contracts in Myanmar that were blatantly disregarded upon their arrival at their workplace in Malaysia. While workers who abscond from their employers should be "blacklisted" (Immigration Department of Malaysia n.d.), a number of our respondents had been able to reapply for a work permit together with a new sponsoring employer. In some cases, they had remained with this employer while others had, following disputes over working conditions, ended up absconding once more. A few migrants had entered the country without legal documentation but had been able to regularise their status during their stay. These moves between legality and illegality need to be seen in the context of the many different amnesty, registration and expulsion campaigns implemented over the past decade (see for example Hedman 2008, Nah 2011a, Chin 2017). Critics argue that migrants, in the face of the many different changes to the enforcement strategy of the Malaysian government, have to navigate an ad-hoc or even "enigmatic" policy landscape (Nah 2011b). With regards to the most recent changes (from the Amnesty Programme (3+1) to the Back for Good (B4G) Programme within 12 months), NGOs for example publicly stated that: "One cannot blame migrant workers for wanting to come to Malaysia without proper documentation and wait out until the next amnesty exercise, given the government's track record" (Malay Mail 2019).

In the next section we will take a closer look at one of our respondents, Htet. We interviewed Htet on several occasions between 2012 and 2015, and we have here selected his story for the way that it captures migrants' experiences of shifting legal status. While Htet's story is by no means exceptional with regard to the experiences of other Burmese migrants we encountered in Malaysia, it allows us to illustrate how the rules governing migration in Malaysia play out in migrants' decision-making and relationships to their employers.

Htet's Story

When we meet Htet for the first time he walks into our research assistant's house with a motorcycle helmet under his arm. He has just finished work, and after the interview he invites us to join him for some food in a nearby street

stall where his friend works the night shift. The Free School area, where both Htet and our research assistant reside, is not a typical "migrant neighbourhood". Many Burmese migrants can, however, be found working in (primarily Chinese-owned) street food stalls, shops and smaller businesses. While the advantage of not living in a typical migrant neighbourhood is that the authorities do not conduct too many larger raids in search of "illegal" migrants, the police still perform random identity controls or roadblocks in the streets (Franck 2016). Htet, however, states that he is not too bothered by these controls. He has been stopped by the police on numerous occasions, particularly when riding his motorbike, but he has always managed to bargain his way out of the situation.

Like many other Burmese migrants that we encounter in George Town, Htet has moved in and out of legal status during his stay in the country. He first arrived in Malaysia through an outsourcing agency, with a contract to work as a mechanic. Upon arrival in Malaysia, however, he was transferred from the airport to a different type of job, a machinery factory outside of Malacca. The conditions of work in this factory were further not in accordance with what he had been promised. "The pay was bad," he states. "I only made RM700 and we worked from eight in the morning to nine in the evening." Two months into his stay, he therefore took the decision to abscond from his employer. "When everybody went to work one morning, I ran away," he says. He took the bus to Butterworth, a few hours north of Malacca, where a friend provided food and shelter for a couple of months. Running away from the factory not only meant that Htet was now out of job, but also that he had moved into "illegal" migrant status. As such, he had to find an employer that was willing to hire an "illegal" worker.

Five months after his arrival in Butterworth, Htet travelled across the bridge to the island of Penang and managed to secure employment in a garage in George Town. His previous experience as a mechanic in Myanmar worked in his favour and this employer found it worthwhile to sponsor his application for a new work permit. Because the employer paid the fees, he deducted the costs from Htet's salary and confiscated his identity documents. Asked if he is now free to leave his employer, Htet states: "If I say that I want to go back to Myanmar, I can leave ... If [I want to leave] for another job, he [the employer] will keep the passport. [...] The boss paid for the work permit and passport so he doesn't want me to leave." At the time of our last interview, Htet had remained with his employer for two years. He likes the job, the pay is decent and (depending on how much he drinks, he laughingly adds) he is able to remit around 1000 ringgit (220USD) per month back to his parents in Myanmar. "I want to stay a long time in Malaysia," he says. After that he wants to go back to Myanmar to get married – to "someone that my mother and father also like".

The experiences of Htet speak to the need to recognise that migrants do not merely passively accept the conditions offered to them in the Malaysian labour market (see also Bélanger 2014). On the contrary, his story illustrates how migrants actively (and selectively) navigate these precarious conditions in order to "live a normal life" (Teng 2017), secure their livelihoods and avoid exploitation. As recognised also in previous literature, absconding – or "running away" – from employers is an oft-used tactic by migrants in order to improve their conditions (Franck et al. 2018; Garcés-Mascareñas 2010, 2012; Killias 2010; Lan 2007). While indicative of the way that workers may use "illegality" as a means to counter (or "resist", Killias 2010) exploitation, Htet's story shows how migrants may also *move in and out of* legal status during their stay in Malaysia. As such, "illegality" may present itself as a preferable (or necessary) option during certain periods, but "legality" may be favoured during other periods. For Htet, as seen above, "illegality" functioned as a means to counter the exploitation faced in his first place of work, whereas the deal he was able to strike with a later employer made him pursue (re)regularisation. This, we argue, captures how migrants navigate the regulatory framework according to a calculation of the costs and/or benefits that it brings during particular moments in time. In the sections to come we will further analyse what we see as two key factors promoting this move between legality and illegality: employer sponsorship and financial costs.

Navigating employer sponsorship

While employers and employer sponsorship have long been features of foreign worker control (Hahamovitch 2014), employers have gained an increasingly important role within systems of migration management in Malaysia. As the Malaysian government has worked to increase pressure on undocumented workers, it has frequently done so by making employers more responsible for foreign workers. One example of this is the "Strict Liability Principle", which "ensures that employers are responsible and accountable for their foreign workers, from the application, hiring, and employment until they return to their home countries" (Chin 2017: 120). The rules governing foreign workers further explicitly stipulate that "[u]pon completion or termination of employment" it is the responsibility of the employer to "ensure that foreign workers are deported to their origin countries" through the official procedures (Immigration Department of Malaysia n.d.). Therefore, one's employer, and the relationship with that employer, becomes essential for all aspects of obtaining and maintaining legal status in Malaysia.

For migrant workers a central component of this "hyper-dependence" (Zou 2015) upon employers is that the conditions of their work permit prohibit them from changing their employer or employment sector during their stay in the country (Immigration Department of Malaysia n.d.). Unlike citizens faced with unsatisfactory or abusive labour conditions, foreign workers are thus deprived of the right to counter such situations by seeking new employment. Instead, they face two basic options: resign and be deported back to their country of origin or "run away" from the employer to find work "illegally". While the issue of workers "opting" for "illegality" as a means to counter exploitation has been discussed above, it is also important to note that where-as the disciplinary power of "deportability" (i.e. using the threat of deport-ation as a means of coercion) has mostly been discussed in relation to migrant "illegality" (see notably De Genova 2002), both "legal" and "illegal" foreign workers in Malaysia are "deportable subjects" (Garcés-Mascareñas 2015: 137). The threat of termination (and thus deportation) is therefore present in the employment relationships of all foreign workers – and the condition of "the legal foreign worker" is, as argued by Rajaram / Grundy-Warr (2004: 52), in fact "not terribly distant from the illegal migrant". While we may as-sociate extortion by law enforcement officials as well as deception, fraud and coercion from employers with migrant "illegality", many of the migrants in this study who enjoyed legal status shared these experiences. In fact, many described employer practices that qualify as indications of forced labour (Franck / Brandström Arellano 2014), including deceptive recruitment, the withholding of identity documents and salaries and threats of denunciation to the authorities (ILO 2014; see also Verité 2014). Many of these practices can be directly traced back to the disciplinary power held by the employer under the employer sponsorship system, which leaves migrants in an (intentionally) weak bargaining position vis-à-vis their employers, recruiters and the state. Importantly, and as will be discussed in the coming section, migrants' suscep-tibility to abuse under employer sponsorship needs to be understood in the context of the high costs associated with legal migration.

Before turning to this issue, we would like to point out, however, that while there are plenty of "bad" and even unscrupulous employers in Malaysia that take advantage of migrants' precarious legal and social position, the relation-ships between migrants and their employers cannot be understood through simplistic notions of "bad" employers and "victim" migrants. Instead, and as revealed in Htet's story above, our interviews with Burmese foreign workers show that the relationship between migrants and employers is often both com-plex and mutable. While some certainly spoke of employers' treating them "like slaves" (Franck / Brandström Arellano 2014), others described their re-lationship to "the boss" in far less negative terms. Some, typically those work-ing for smaller and more informal businesses, had stayed several years with

the same employer, during which time the relationship developed in various ways. In family businesses (such as street food stalls), such relationships may also have extended to other family members (see also Bélanger 2014). Some migrants also described how the employer "helped them out" in various situations – navigating bureaucratic procedures and/or paying bribes to smooth such processes or concealing them from the police (see also Derks 2010 and 2013 for similar findings from Thailand).

Also, while the widespread practice of withholding workers' identity documents is both illegal and deeply problematic for the foreign workers, it does not always imply that employers are trying to gain "total" control of migrant workers' lives. In Htet's case, the employer would for example (at least in theory) return the passport should Htet want to travel back to Myanmar. He would, however, withhold the passport if Htet wanted to search for another job. This can be directly linked to the high cost of hiring foreign workers, as we will return to shortly. In this case, Htet's employer had made it explicit that he wanted to ensure that his investment paid off before Htet would get his documents back. Our contention here is not that migrants are not taken advantage of in these processes (they are!) but rather to suggest that the actions of employers need to be understood in the context of the policy framework that governs their relationship to migrant employees. As we examine migrant decision-making in relation to employer sponsorship we cannot treat employers as a constant "bad", but rather need to recognise that migrants have varying relationships to their employers – whereas some promote good outcomes for migrants, others are far more exploitative and thus lead to poor outcomes (see also Bélanger 2014: 101). Along similar lines, the assumption that migrants are merely passive victims of exploitation is inherently problematic. This is clearly illustrated by the very example of how employers so eagerly seek to protect their investment through withholding migrants' documents or salaries – in response to the widespread tactic of labourers' avoiding exploitative conditions by absconding. Employers are, in other words, well aware of the risk that foreign workers who are unhappy with their situation may "run away". Again, we are in no way seeking to "defend" (illegal as well as unethical) practices of withholding workers' salaries or identity documents. Rather, we are suggesting that employer sponsorship involves unequal and inherently problematic power dynamics, but that the relationship between migrants and their employers is neither static nor unidirectional. Quite the contrary, as our study reveals, it involves a broad range of power relations, negotiations and contestations across different scales (see also Rogaly 2008: 1444).

The cost of legality

This brings us to our second point, which is that an important factor of the migration process and the decision-making of migrants is the financial aspect. While migrants are often constructed as "cheap" labour, the key to their exploitation in Malaysia, we suggest, is the fact that they are so "expensive" for employers to hire and that migrants themselves have often made significant financial outlays to secure work permits. With regards to the latter, previous studies have underlined how the high costs associated with (legal) labour migration increases migrants' susceptibility to abuse (see for example Bélanger 2014, Lê 2010 and Verité 2014 on the Malaysian case). The key to this is the high fees charged by recruitment companies and brokers, which often leave migrants with high levels of debt. The general understanding is that migrants in this context are more likely to remain with abusive employers for fear of failing to make enough money to repay their debts. This relationship between debt and exploitation is clearly exacerbated by employer sponsorship, given that migrants in such a situation are further deprived of the right to change employers. Our study provides no exception to the finding that brokerage increases both the costs and risks associated with migration. Indeed, the migrants we interviewed had paid up to 5500 RM (around 1500 USD) in recruitment fees to outsourcing companies and recruitment agents in Myanmar – sums large enough to complicate the possibility of absconding from employers (Franck et al. 2018). However, whereas previous analyses have largely been confined to the role that costs and debt play in the first step of the migration process, we are concerned here with highlighting the range of decisions made throughout the entire migration process and the ongoing role played by financial costs for both migrants and employers.

Starting with the recruitment phase, the costs of sourcing and hiring foreign workers are perhaps not excessive for large manufacturing companies, but they can be a significant burden for smaller businesses. The role that these costs play for such businesses has become evident in public debates on the management of migration in Malaysia and the increasing responsibilities that it shifts to employers (see Chin 2017 for a longer discussion on this). Business associations representing both larger and smaller companies have, for example, publicly protested the transfer of responsibility to pay the levies of foreign workers – stating that their members would be unable to bear the costs (Lo 2017, The Star 2017). Regardless of the accuracy of such statements, the reactions from business organisations here serve to illustrate that the cost of hiring of foreign workers is a contentious issue also for employers. At the same time, as the story of Htet reveals, the issue of the high cost of hiring foreign workers

creates fertile ground for coercion – as employers seek to protect their investment through measures intended to prevent workers from leaving.

Importantly, however, the employers' responsibility for foreign workers during their entire stay in Malaysia also includes a responsibility for the annual renewal of work permits (Immigration Department of Malaysia n.d.). The total cost of this procedure varies depending on the sector and the migrant's country of origin, but for Myanmar nationals working in manufacturing, construction or services the fees exceeds 2800 RM (including levy, work permit, visa, security bond and processing fee; see Immigration Department of Malaysia n.d.). While a report from the Malaysian Employer Federation (2014: 40) finds that the costs of renewing work permits (including the annual medical check-up) are largely born by employers, our interviews indicate that foreign workers still end up bearing the costs, through employers deducting from or withholding their salaries (see also Chin 2017). As Htet's story reveals, migrants face the same issues when they attempt to (re)regularise their status, as employers either charge migrants the fees or deduct the cost of the procedure from the migrants' wages. In both cases this translates into a situation where new debt and dependency upon employers continues throughout the migrant's stay in the country (see also Lê 2010).

Whereas the government has recently taken steps to ensure that levies and fees are covered by the employers, there is little oversight in ensuring that the total cost is not, in the end, borne by the migrants. In fact, transactions of this kind are often part of the intricate relations and negotiations between migrants and employers. This is exactly the kind of situation and decision-making faced by Htet. Having previously worked for an abusive employer, Htet needed to find a new position where the costs of obtaining legal status would be worth it. After initially working for his employer as an undocumented worker, Htet (and his employer) determined that regularising his status would be worthwhile even given the fees involved. While Htet did not have to pay these costs upfront, they were deducted from his wages. Furthermore, his employer kept his passport, a document that is difficult and expensive to replace and therefore represents a significant cost and financial investment in this employer. In this case, Htet's decision seems to have paid off and he was able to earn decent wages in a relatively stable context.

Costs, as we have seen, cannot therefore be separated from the overall relationship and dynamic between migrants and their employers. As discussed earlier, unlike employment relationships with citizens, where either party can easily terminate the agreement and move on, with migrant workers each side is making a large financial gamble that the relationship will be beneficial. By turning legal status into an expensive "commodity", migrant workers bear not only the direct costs of such status, but also the indirect costs, as employers confiscate documents or otherwise limit workers' movement in order to

recoup the investment they have made. Writing about the Thai context, Derks notes: "While the registration of migrant workers allows employers to operate their businesses without the constant threat of police raids, it also constitutes an investment employers do not want to lose. Many employers, therefore, keep the original identification documents" (2010: 926). This precisely mirrors the experience of Htet, who was forced to give up his passport as collateral against the costs incurred by the employer. Nonetheless, Htet felt that the "cost" of giving up his passport was worth the stability he gained by maintaining a regular legal status. At the same time, while workers with a regular status generally earn higher wages, the additional costs associated with having a regular status significantly undercut those wage gains (see also Bylander 2019), as several migrants told us. Thus, although legal status may be useful for workers seeking to avoid arrest, "legality" nonetheless creates financial costs and a context that exposes migrants to abusive practices of employers who seek to keep their workers immobile (see also Garcés-Mascareñas 2010, 2012; Killias 2010; Lan 2007). Ironically, the mechanisms put in place to keep migrants immobile end up making them more likely to abscond in search of better opportunities. If legality becomes too punitive, illegality can become a more attractive option.

Taken together, the above examples challenge some of the dominant notions of the protective capacity of legal status. By creating a system that is expensive for both employers and migrants, it attempts to lock them into a set relationship and creates a system that is detrimental both to migrants' wages and their ability to move to seek better conditions. Legal status therefore becomes an expensive commodity or insurance scheme.

Conclusions

This paper has looked to examine the issue of migrant exploitation through the lenses of employer sponsorship and financial costs. By examining how migrants strategically move between legal and illegal status in order both to protect themselves from violence and to maintain their livelihood, we can see how the twin factors of employer sponsorship and financial costs end up featuring heavily in their decision-making.

Such an analysis is useful, as employer sponsorship is a pervasive feature of guestworker programmes, present in all contexts from Canada's "model" programme (Hennebry / Preibisch 2012) to the *kefala* sponsorship programmes of the Middle East (Gardner 2010, Surak 2013a) and every context in between, including the Malaysian one. In fact, employer sponsorship has become entrenched as a way for states to control workers and pass supervisory powers

off to private actors while also reducing responsibility for any abuse that might take place (Kemp / Raijman 2014, Anderson / Franck 2019). Yet in this study we have sought to understand migrant precarity not just through the lens of unscrupulous employers or structural forces, but in an examination of how migrants themselves navigate these conditions. In this context, legal status is just one of the tools used by migrants – a tool that carries with it potential risks and costs. Also, while stories of malicious employers are plentiful, simply viewing employers as inherently bad actors can obscure both the larger structural issues at play as well as the ways in which migrants and employers alike navigate these contexts and these relationships.

One of the key factors behind migrant precarity is the issue of cost. While this is captured in the literature through the problems it creates for workers – through, for example, the proliferation of indebtedness (see Xiang / Lindquist 2014) – the Malaysian foreign worker scheme is expensive for employers as well. That employers are responsible for the bonds if workers abscond mean they are also caught up in a system that encourages them to protect their investment, limiting the mobility of their workers. For employers, hiring workers with legal status has both costs, in terms of significant financial outlays, while also providing potential benefits in the form of protection from sanctions for hiring workers illegally. Yet, as discussed in our paper, these costs also have secondary effects, as employers are both more likely to confiscate migrants' documents in order to ensure that they can recoup their investment, and potentially also to garnish wages in order to pay back the costs of regularisation. These are actions that, paradoxically, might make workers more likely to abscond as they seek better conditions and better wages.

This paper thus emphasises that legal status itself can be a source of precarity and abuse. Crucially, however, by examining how migrants move in and out of legal status to protect themselves from such abuse, we can build a more nuanced appreciation of the complex relationship between migrant agency, the legal framework and exploitation.

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Cyclical, Temporary, No Return
Multiple Navigational Strategies of Displaced Persons from Myanmar

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Abstract

Displaced persons in and from Myanmar employ a wide array of coping and navigational strategies to secure their livelihoods and to find physical protection. Placing these in the context of the security situation in Myanmar, the paper demonstrates that organised violence and related concerns for safety are not only the main cause of displacement, but constitute an important factor that continuously shapes livelihood options and strategies for those who find themselves in cycles of protracted violence and displacement. The array of strategies is situated between or beyond the classic paradigms promoted by international refugee organisations: return, local integration and resettlement. Beyond aid and non-aid related strategies, we observed such vital coping mechanisms as cyclical return movements, the establishment of transnational networks and webs, and the development of self-established infrastructure. Return and local integration are two options in a continuum of strategies comprising cyclical and temporary return processes, transnational networks and patterns of de facto local integration. The cases presented show that refugees weigh the risks of return in relation to their current situation. Decisive factors include security, access to legal documents, public services and infrastructure. Our research showed that any dichotomy that contrasts non-refugees as masters of their own fate as opposed to displaced persons as victims without agency is obsolete. The coping patterns of displaced persons are highly flexible and adaptive.

Keywords: Myanmar, displacement, coping strategies, cyclical return, transnational networks

Introduction

The recent opening of Myanmar, the country's national elections in 2015 and the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with several ethnic armed movements raised hopes in the international community that Myanmar's protracted conflicts – and one of the world's worst protracted crises – could be settled in the near future. Accordingly, international policy changed: international sanctions were lifted and increased cooperation and development assistance were granted. This was based on the hope that the problem of displacement would fade away as affected persons returned to their home communities in Myanmar. This hope was soon to be terribly disappointed (Cheesman / Farrelly 2016).

The period from 2014–2018 has seen some of the most violent military atrocities against the Muslim Rohingyas in Arakan state, Western Myanmar, producing as many as 727,000 deeply traumatised new refugees, trapped either in overpopulated camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh or worse, in camps guarded by the Myanmar border police in Rakhine state without food and drinking water, medical help or educational facilities (Ocha 2018; Ware / Laoutides 2019; personal observation and interviews in the areas of Sittwe, Kyauktaw and Mrauk U in 2016). In northeastern Myanmar the breakdown of the ceasefire initiated some of the worst assaults against the Kachin, with the army using Chinese and Russian helicopters to drop bombs and chemical weapons. Like the Rohingyas, the predominantly Christian ethnic Kachin are fleeing killings, torture, rapes and other violations by the Burmese military. Internally displaced Kachin flee toward the Chinese border, but are not allowed to cross it, staying in makeshift camps in the forest or at the edges of Kachin's urban centre in Myitkyina. In both cases, the Myanmar military has prevented aid organisations from helping, threatening local groups such as the Kachin Baptist convention with imprisonment for helping refugees in rebel-controlled areas (Cheesman / Farrelly 2016; Sadan 2016; personal observation and interviews in Bahmo and Momauk area in 2016).

Moreover, the situation in the Shan states, Karen state, and Chin state remains highly volatile. Armed clashes as well as harassment of villagers continue up to the present. The ceasefires here are highly precarious and the newly formed Border Guard Forces are perceived by the villagers as a source of insecurity, extraction and corruption, not as peacemakers (Woods 2011; personal observation and interviews in Hpa-an, Kawkareik and Lashio areas in 2016).

This article assesses current displacement processes and the state of return movements against the backdrop of ongoing violence and persistent developmental challenges in Myanmar and scrutinises the strategies used by forcibly

displaced persons in Myanmar and Thailand to cope with these challenges and secure their livelihoods. The main question of this paper is how displaced persons respond to the challenges posed by physical and livelihood insecurity and which strategies have been actively used to navigate in the context of organised violence.[1]

The Myanmar borderlands show many of the typical patterns ascribed to the concept of the frontier and contemporary projects of land acquisition (e.g. Geiger 2008). The frontier areas of Myanmar, where most of the minorities reside, have long been inaccessible to the state, but are increasingly being claimed by the military commanders of the Myanmar army and the different militia and ex-military leaders. These different violent actors compete for the benefits from the extraction of resources, the development of large infrastructural projects and the establishment of special economic zones. The area is opened up for capitalism, with some ex-military leaders getting rich on casinos, real estate and bribes. Special economic zones enable production at low cost and mostly without organised unions whereas the remaining villagers are vulnerable to eviction, land-grabbing and speculation. For the military as well as for various war entrepreneurs, the state of structural and actual violence on the ethnic frontier following the ceasefire with ethnic armies is beneficial to the extraction and accumulation of resources in lawless spaces – a state that has been aptly called "ceasefire capitalism" (Woods 2011).

Another explanation for the question of why Myanmar's ethnic frontier areas have spiralled into cycles of war and violence after the military's rejection of all claims for cultural autonomy in the hills (Sadan 2016) can be given with reference to Schetter and Korf. They show that many of the contested spaces in frontier areas today are conceptualised as spaces of exception (following Agamben 2004) and, in military eyes, as ungoverned spaces or ungoverned territory (Schetter / Korf 2012: 165). To enforce control of land in the frontier zones, the national army Tatmadaw thus considers it as its "national interest" to integrate those spaces into its dominion.[2] The presence of competing armed actors, extortion and ongoing violence provides the context in which (returning) migrants and refugees as well as internally displaced per-

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1   In our understanding "organised violence" includes the "planned and co-ordinated application [or threat] of violence by social and political groups" (BICC 2015: 4). This refers not only to physical force and the threat of violent death or bodily harm or armed conflicts between two or more groups, but comprises all measures that any social collective comes up with in order to deal with the problem of physical violence. "Organized violence responds, in other words, to the need to organize violence in one way or another – to ensure predictability in social interactions and minimize the danger of any sudden, violent ruptures and thus is inherent in any kind of social order. This includes, for example, devising and implementing various social norms and institutions (e.g. treaties, laws, 'killing taboo') that determine when, where and by whom which kinds of violence may be exercised. Organized violence thus frequently entails the establishment of organizational bodies entitled to use force in certain circumstances (e.g. the police, the armed forces), the arming of these bodies (e.g. development and acquisition of weaponry) – as well as ways of controlling and curtailing them (e.g. discipline, accountability, oversight, arms control) (BICC forthcoming: 7)."
2   For details on governance, legitimacy, everyday life activities and strategies in conflict areas such as e.g. Karen state, see South 2010, Thawnghmung 2008 and Thawnghmung 2011.

sons try to navigate their everyday lives in the search for livelihoods and physical security (cf. Phan / Hull 2008).

Here, we use the term displaced person for all those who at a point of time have felt or feel compelled to leave their place of residence involuntarily. Thus, we neither adhere to the legally motivated, static differentiation between refugees and migrants and undocumented migrants, nor do we exclude internal displacement. Instead, we understand displacement and return as a process that is oftentimes not linear, but interrupted and sometimes characterised by cyclical movements and multiple displacements. Moreover, the legal status of people may change over time: categories might become blurred both in time and space; internally displaced persons (IDPs) might become refugees, refugees might become internally displaced during return, and refugees frequently leave the "temporary shelters" to become illegal migrant workers or even obtain official migrant worker status. We find educational migrants in the camps and, on the other hand, people who fled violence and conflict, who have not registered in the camps but have applied for migrant status instead or live and work as illegal migrants. Accordingly, though we recognise the consequences of different legal status for the situation of the individuals concerned, we do not adhere to the legally motivated differentiation between refugees, migrants, undocumented migrants or IDPs in this article. The concept of displaced persons enabled us to apply a transnational approach that places points of transition and commonalities that exist within this group, despite undisputable legal differences, at the centre of our research.

Roughly, one can differentiate three major groups of Burmese displaced persons. First, there are members of ethnic minorities who have been fleeing violence and the direct and indirect impacts of armed conflict in the eastern borderlands. In Thailand, ethnic Karen and Karenni mostly reside in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands. They live as (undocumented) labour migrants or students in rural areas or the urban centres such as Mae Sot, or as refugees[3] confined in one of the nine camps along the border. Also most ethnic Shan have the status of (undocumented) migrants. There is, however, a small informal Shan camp north of Chiang Mai (Kuang Jor) where those who did not qualify for refuge in the nine official camps are tolerated.

Many of those who did not manage to cross the border and are internally displaced within Myanmar are living in spontaneous shelters, camps, church or temple compounds, or with local hosts. Those who stay in areas administrated by ethnic armed groups such as the KNU (Karen National Union) get assistance through the respective organisations – in this case the Karen Office

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3   Thailand is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention or its protocol. Hence, displaced persons from Myanmar are not recognised as refugees but are usually referred to as "displaced people escaping from fighting". Confined in nine so-called "temporary shelters" in the border region with Myanmar, they are neither allowed to leave the camps nor to take up work.

of Relief and Development and The Border Consortium (TBC) across the border. In Karenni and Mon State most IDPs stay in areas controlled by the Karenni Army between Loikaw and the Thai border, or by the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) close to the Three Pagodas Pass to Thailand. In addition, we find a number of immobile IDPs in the eastern border areas. Especially in Kachin and Northern Shan state, civilians close to the front line are stuck due to financial problems, lack of access to alternative livelihoods or any options of safe haven. As they have been unable to escape the threats permanently, they usually flee to the nearby forest overnight or for several days and hide out there. This strategy has the advantage that they do not lose access to their livelihoods. If they leave, they will not be allowed to return – as these areas have been declared unsafe for return by the army. A second important group of displaced persons are the Rohingya, who have been victims of what the UN considers ethnic cleansing. Thirdly, there are those who have faced political persecution and repressions.

The focus of this paper is on displaced ethnic minorities from the eastern borderlands of Myanmar within the country and in Thailand. For decades, the Burmese army has imposed a permanent state of war on the villagers, in the hope of cutting support for ethnic armed movements. Ethnic armed movements, on the other hand, have recruited from the ethnic households and taxed ethnic minority villagers, implicitly accepting the suffering of the villagers. But even in a state of extended crisis, people have to go on with their daily lives, organising food, access to health care and education or simply upholding family and friendship or religious or business networks. Lubkemann (2007), for example, argues that we need a fresh approach, to view war as normality rather than exceptional disruption, as conflicts span decades and generations. This normality of war has shaped social relations and the culture of war. Often the older people have to stay behind in unbearable conditions, while the younger seek fresh life perspectives. Their mobility and earnings often keep households afloat in multiple spaces. "Home", hence, is relative to context, and mobility is crucial for navigating the difficult circumstances.[4] While mobility allows for the possibility to reconstruct or establish new livelihoods and networks and to continue everyday family life, forced immobility shrinks spaces of opportunities.

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4   For a long time, mobility of refugees and other migrants has been perceived as a linear, unidirectional and predictable process. This stance in academia has changed only slowly, recently and with regard to migration towards the global South (e.g. Benezer / Zetter 2015, Kuschminder 2017, Mallett / Hagen-Zanker 2018). By focusing in this paper on the Thai-Myanmar context, we want to contribute to this debate by highlighting that protracted displacement is much less static and fixed and more dynamic than commonly perceived and serves as a mayor livelihood strategy of displaced persons. For an in-depth discussion of the concept of mobility see Etzold et al. 2019: 25.

Methodological Approach

The article is based on qualitative research carried out by Schmitz-Pranghe and Rudolf in various locations in Thailand and Myanmar between July 2016 and February 2018. Research sites encompassed both urban and rural settings in Kachin, Shan, Kayin, Mon and Rakhine states and Yangon in Myanmar, as well as Mae Hong Son, Tak, Chumphon and Ranong provinces and Bangkok in Thailand. Methods included on-the-spot observations, focus group discussions and in-depth qualitative narrative interviews with displaced persons, members of the host communities, experts, international humanitarian and development actors, local civil society organisations dealing with the topic of displacement and human rights, representatives of refugees and IDPs, (former) combatants of ethnic armed organisations, and political organisations in Thailand and Myanmar. Armed actors proved to play an important role in both return and (re-)integration processes.

In total, over 200 interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Thailand and Myanmar, in refugee / IDP camps and in both rural and urban contexts. Additionally, four research assistants, who had been recruited, trained and supervised, conducted 39 individual interviews plus three focus group interviews with displaced persons and labour migrants. To take into account developments in the highly dynamic context of displacement within and from Myanmar, two of the research assistants engaged in longitudinal field research enabling us to continuously update results.

Though the research does not claim to be representative, it depicts the diversity of displaced persons from and in Myanmar to a large degree. Differences in the ethnic background, gender and age of respondents, diverse livelihood contexts in- and off-camp and the different legal status of the displaced (e.g. refugees, labour migrants, stateless and undocumented persons) were taken into account throughout the research process. Regarding ethnicity, we focused on Burmese minorities, with the Shan, Karen and Kachin as the most prominent cases, but also including Rohingya, Karenni and Mon in our approach. To prevent blind spots, representatives of other ethnic minorities such as the Chin and Rakhine were consulted in expert interviews. Methods and results were discussed with Thai and Burmese counterparts in order to achieve a participatory approach. From the elaboration of specific questions to the interpretation of answers we strove for unbiased triangulation and intercultural sensitivity (e.g. through a kick-off workshop in Bangkok). Triangulation of all interview data was complemented with the analysis of country-specific secondary data and relevant literature. Finally, a workshop in Yangon ensured that preliminary results were made available to and commented on by our partners – without whom this work would not have been possible.

Coping strategies of displaced persons

Displaced persons have developed a variety of strategies to secure and to optimise their livelihood beyond return or full local integration. These patterns of de facto integration have not yet received much attention despite representing everyday practices for displaced persons around the globe (Lubkemann 2007).[5]

People in Myanmar had high hopes for Myanmar's re-establishment of the "rule of law" in the post-2010 "transition to liberal democracy" (Cheesman / Farrelly 2016). One component of this political transition is the formalisation of labour and the transition of workers from casual to formal labour, protected by formal contracts and unionisation. Even today, precarious, dangerous and exploitative labour relations without formal protection or guarantee of minimum wages continue in the domains such as road building, mining, construction and the service sector (Campbell 2019: 68). The transition to more regulated employment is thus particularly relevant for returning migrants, who frequently find work in the volatile and weakly protected frontier zones, such as in the Shan or Kachin states, where large investments are being made in infrastructure. The jobs are sometimes so poorly paid that the brokers bring in migrants from even more destitute regions to work on road construction.

Navigational strategies evolve against the backdrop of ongoing conflict in Myanmar and specific legal and political framework conditions in Myanmar and Thailand. An important coordination point is the legal status of displaced persons. Field research in Myanmar and Thailand showed that, depending on the circumstances, status as a refugee or an IDP in contrast to that of a(n) (undocumented) migrant can be either beneficial or detrimental in the quest to regain access to housing, land, property, services and integration. The status fosters or obstructs access and thereby frames the options. Accordingly, individuals try to claim or refuse labels within the range of choices that they have.

Some navigational strategies are based on the explicit reference to a displacement status. Karen and Karenni in particular use their UNHCR identification papers to access food rations, education or health care in the camps. A majority of Burmese in Thailand do not have the opportunity to gain recognition as displaced persons and remain undocumented migrant workers against their will. Some keep trying to acquire legal residence and work permits as migrant workers. But another coping strategy is to stay below the radar of any authorities and remain and work in Thailand's informal sector.

One of the main findings of our research is that violently displaced people shift in and out of refugee status. For example, a returnee to Myanmar reported keeping his UNHCR identification papers in order to safeguard the option

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5   A notable exception is local scholarship on the blending of Theravada Buddhist Karen and Shan villagers into mainstream Thai rural and urban societies (Rangkla 2013).

to return to the Thai camps when necessary (interview with 19-year-old Karen college student, Hpa-an, September 2017) and thus to maintain access to health care, food provision, job markets, education or resettlement opportunities. Due to the dramatic cut in food rations in recent years, many people who register in the refugee camps eke out a living in rural Myanmar and return to the camps only to stay registered. Young people who stay in areas of fragile ceasefires, backed by the ethnic armed movement, go to the refugee camps to gain an education, returning to the village for the rice harvest. Thus, in order to understand the strategies for coping with displacement, it is necessary to assess a variety of interrelated factors – the options to access land, work, rights, services and protection – in addition to the status attributed to displaced persons.

Access to livelihoods / labour

Many residents of the ethnic borderlands of Myanmar's peripheral areas have been displaced or have migrated to neighbouring countries and have tried to gain a new foothold elsewhere: Karen and Shan people have migrated to Thailand, Kachin people to Northeast India, and Chin people to Mizoram, India. Some of these people have been very innovative, establishing themselves as traders in Yunnan, Southwest China, trading jade, for example (Song 2017). Chinese Muslims from Myanmar have specialised in the jade business, setting up stores in provincial towns of neighbouring Yunnan province in Southwest China (Egreteau 2015). Others join motorcycle repair shops or work in industries and in the informal sector. Along the way, many have collected valuable experience in contacting brokers and middlemen, taking out loans, renting warehouse spaces, importing used cars and bicycles, repairing broken cellphones, etc. These experiences, as well as savings, have enabled some entrepreneurial people who have returned to the border region to open start-up companies, to buy and rent out minibuses, tractors and cars, to import and export commodities, such as used cars, to buy or speculate on land, to rent out warehouses, to open car repair shops, etc. Many start-ups have opened in urban centres, especially in border towns, such as booming Myawaddy in Eastern Myanmar, just across from Mae Sot on the Thai/Myanmar border. Some succeed, but the border trade involves high risks and not a few end up in debt.

Connections to humanitarian organisations, activist groups and religious NGOs and church networks have been very helpful for many return migrants, including those who lost everything in their home villages. Young Karen people who picked up English in faith-based schools or schools in refugee camps constitute a reliable labour force for the international humanitarian organisations that need to hire local employees. Christian church networks and activist groups that were active in missionary work are also eager to hire locals for

their humanitarian projects, projects that target the poor and downtrodden (Horstmann 2015).

However, the income of a majority of displaced persons in ethnic border-lands in Myanmar depends on agriculture. Access to land as a basis of subsistence is therefore crucial. Large infrastructure projects such as road building, the Deep Seaport in Dawei or hydro-electric power projects on the rivers present new threats to the livelihood of villagers, many of whom do not hold land titles, nor even identity papers. Moreover, for young people who have been out of their ancestral villages for decades, subsistence agriculture no longer provides a promising future. Many seek out a new livelihood in Thailand, with better opportunities for income, education and healthcare. Burmese migrants mostly work as agricultural workers on plantations or as unskilled labour in sweatshops and factories. Many Karen villagers along the long border with Thailand work seasonally in Thailand, in the factories or as maids in Thai urban middle-class households. They accept unfavourable working conditions and low wages. Mae Sot's factories in the special economic zone heavily rely on migrant labour, have unsafe working conditions and pay very low wages or, sometimes, no wages at all (Campbell 2018).

Conditions in Myanmar under "ceasefire capitalism" remain difficult too. Various displaced communities that live next to their original settlements reported that the best chunks of land along the main streets had been confiscated and never returned (Northern Shan State). Many areas occupied by the Tatmadaw are situated around or close to mines. Moreover, the army is increasingly occupying land in the border area. "[There] they claim to […] secure the border. But in my opinion, they want to get a foot in the door of the drug traffic," an NGO employee (working in Lashio, September 2016) commented. Returnees and IDPs from ethnic minorities face extortion, forced labour, embezzlement and corruption. Income opportunities are often limited by the lack of infrastructure. In Shan State locals recounted: "The transport routes are blocked by the military. We risk either paying a bribe or losing our products." Respondents also feared being recruited as porters for the military. This, in turn, fosters the choice of farmers to cultivate the poppy. "It can easily be transported on less frequented paths and the price is good" (Shan male, Kuang Jor, July 2016).

Relation of encampment and dependency

Though a majority of displaced persons in the Thai camps and Burmese IDP camps depend greatly on international aid, many refugees have been seeking to combine international aid provisions in the camps with other livelihood strategies: "Usually, the men leave the camp in the rainy season for three or four months and come back only once a month to get registered and to receive

their rations" (Karen refugee, Mae La, July 2016). Even though this has long been a pattern, the rate of such cases has increased lately due to the reduced food rations: NGO staff reported that they had been wondering why young people were not available for farming training courses during the holidays until they discovered that they were farming their fields on the other side of the border. Despite the risks involved, the refugees had to supplement the rations that had been reduced by international organisations due to decreasing humanitarian funding for the region (all camps on the Thai side). Similar cases have been encountered among IDPs in disputed areas.

The modes of livelihood of the Burmese DPs have considerably changed over time. A longitudinal fieldwork study conducted by Lee (2014) showed that the Royal Thai Government (RTG) did not guarantee any institutional support for the refugees nor did it interfere in the NGOs' activities providing food and shelter or in the refugees' livelihood activities until 1995. However, between 1995 and 2005, the RTG changed its stance towards refugees considerably – mainly due to heightened border security concerns resulting from the collapse of Karen strongholds and cross-border attacks by Burmese army and DKBO forces. It initiated a policy of "control" and "regulation" (Lee 2014: 469). 30 camps were merged into 12 camps, guard forces were strengthened, camps fenced and check points established. This severely restricted the refugees' mobility and livelihood opportunities. While until 1995 INGOs supplied only 50% of the food needs of the refugees, now INGOs provided 100% of the food needs of the refugees (ibid.: 470).

The refugees, in other words, became completely reliant on external food aid. The years 2005 to 2011 were again marked by a shift in the RTG's perspective on refugees: from being perceived as a security risk they became a useful economic resource. In 2004, Mae Sot and its surroundings were declared a special economic zone. The RTG approved skills training projects designed to produce household income and improve livelihood and employment opportunities and agreed to support education in the camps by setting up learning centres with a focus on teaching the Thai language. In 2007, Thailand issued identity cards to some 85,000 refugees in the camps (Lee 2014: 472, Betts / Loescher 2011, Loescher / Milner 2008). Today, following the military coup of 2014, confinement policies are still in place and regulations are more strictly enforced.

Inside the shelters for refugees, sewing and weaving are important income-generating activities. In addition, different NGOs run diverse livelihood projects, such as raising small animals and small-scale agricultural activities, as for example in Karen, Karenni and Kachin camps. Another successful livelihood strategy that has evolved in the refugee camps during the last decades of humanitarian action is to obtain rare employment with one of the many INGOs. All organisations heavily depend on camp staff to keep their pro-

grammes running. This offers refugees some income and the opportunity to gain important language and professional skills. These skills, in turn, serve them when they decide to leave the camps and work as either labour migrants or as undocumented migrants in Thai communities or upon their return to Myanmar. Most cases that we encountered during fieldwork where returnees had found jobs were indeed reported to be either with INGOs or as teachers who returned to work with their respective ethnic communities.

The main problem for migrants in Thailand remains their lack of recognition as refugees and their illegalisation by the governments of both Myanmar and Thailand. The Thai government mainly resorts to the marker of ethnicity to distinguish between refugees (Karen) and illegal migrants (Shan). The Shan have been using their cultural capital as Theravada Buddhists and resemblance to the ethnic Thai to blend into mainstream Northern Thai society. They work, for example, in Chiang Mai as cleaners, in construction, as taxi drivers, in local markets, in the red-light district and in NGOs. Around 200,000 Shan people are making a living in Chiang Mai, and sending remittances to the elderly and children back in Shan state. Buddhist Karen have also often been denied refugee status, as the camps have been dominated by Christians. Buddhist Karen villagers have thus been trying to remain under the radar of the Thai police by blending into Thai Karen villages, Mae Sot and even Bangkok (Rangkla 213).

Access to basic services

In Myanmar, members of ethnic minorities lament the lack of access to health care and education in their native tongue as well as the poor quality or high expenditures for both. The ethnic minorities feel that they are not only on the periphery in a geographical sense, but also with regard to basic services. Denounced as hill tribes, montagnards or highlanders, many of the ethnic minorities have been discriminated against by the respective majorities throughout South East Asia. The groups are quite diverse but they are united by the fact they have been excluded on multiple levels from state services (Scott 2009, Michaud 2013, Formoso 2010, Winland 1992, Smith 2005, Toyota 2005, Laungaramsri 2014). In Myanmar, they are foremost excluded from Burmese education by their vernacular. The ability to speak Burmese is required as a sine qua non in the school system, even though many non-Bamar are not able to understand it. This contributes to the widely shared impression of ethnic minorities that the current ethnocentric regime disadvantages them and that the system represents a policy of cultural hegemony (Walton 2013). The demand for cultural autonomy and the fear of the cultural hegemony of Bamar culture has, for example, been a major driver of resistance among all ethnic armed groups (EAGs). By deliberately pursuing an agenda of resistance, eth-

nic educational policies used to run counter to the official Burmese curriculum. The negative result of this system has been that the chances to access education have, in fact, been traditionally slim for ethnic minorities (Lall / South 2014).

The lack of access to basic services such as health and education for displaced persons has led to a multitude of responses from both affected persons and international aid organisations in Myanmar and Thailand. These responses show, on the one hand, how local coping strategies evolve in interrelation with external aid and, on the other hand, how this combination influences future trajectories in novel directions. For years, health care in the periphery has only been provided by non-state actors (Horstmann 2017, 2018; McCarthy 2016). Also in Thailand, undocumented migrants often cannot access health services. The Mae Tao Clinic near Mae Sot is an example of how persons affected by displacement manage to help themselves. It was founded by a Myanmar refugee and offers medical treatment for both labour migrants and undocumented migrants free of charge. Despite the fact that the Mae Tao clinic has received considerable international recognition, it is struggling with decreasing funding.

With regard to access to education for displaced persons from and in Myanmar, missionaries and churches have played a strategic role. Ethnic armed groups and other community-based providers have established ethnic basic education providers (EBEPs) throughout their areas of influence – including camps (Davis / Jolliffe 2016). The EBEP education often exceeds the quality of national schools. In Thailand, multiple migrant schools have been set up by Burmese over the years, which partly receive support from international NGOs.

The example of education also shows how displaced persons compare and combine benefits on the one hand and how this, on the other hand, influences individual trajectories across borders. Due to the considerably positive reputation of the migrant schools, some students who would have the chance to attend Thai schools opt deliberately for migrant schools. Mae La camp is said to host approximately 3,000 boarding students. In many cases parents stay in Myanmar, while children live with relatives in the camps or in the boarding houses, visiting their parents during summer break. Camp staff in Thailand recounted that nowadays most of the newcomers are such unaccompanied students. In contrast to families that have stayed in the camp for decades they are more likely to return to Myanmar.

The change in individual options related to displacement has accelerated social change. Especially young refugees, who receive a relatively good education in the camps and the migrant schools, have a different perspective than previous generations or more isolated groups with regard to livelihood activities. The exposure to new options, especially as transmitted through education, is a driver that pulls and pushes people in various directions. On the one

hand well-trained persons are returning; on the other hand, especially in the rural and ethnically controlled areas, people are pushed to camps due to the lack of educational possibilities in Myanmar.

Access to protection

Since the democratic elections, battles have stepped up again and intensified in the border region. "We hear about the peace talks, but we see something different. There are soldiers, air raids, mines," people in IDP camps in Kachin explained (interview in August 2016). Even where, in contrast to Kachin, peace talks are effectively in place, action taken by the army is anything but trust building: "In my area the military told the ethnic armed group: you misunderstood. When we said we will pull back from this area we meant that we now work together. We will both control the area. We cannot and we will not go back" (interview in Southern Shan State, July 2016). Churches and monasteries are among the most important places of protection for vulnerable villagers. They have established infrastructure, schools and public health facilities and often provide vital sanctuary.

On a micro level it is often difficult to see any impact of the political transition and ongoing peace talks. Quite the contrary: in Northern Shan State the number of ethnic armed groups, and those forcibly drafted into their ranks, has been steadily rising due to the divide-and-rule tactics of the army. Minefields remain in place and chances for demining are slim (interviews around Lashio, September 2016). The continuous presence of EAGs worries families with young males in particular. Forced draft into EAGs has been a common strategy among the armed actors and is still both an important cause of displacement and a hindrance to return. A former child soldier with KNU and DKBA[6] stated that he still fears forced recruitment upon return to Karen state (interview with Karen student, Chiang Mai, July 2016). In another case an interviewee in Northern Shan State explained that his father had taken his place and was subsequently killed. To this day young men are sent to monasteries to avoid forced recruitment, such as the brothers of the orphaned interviewee.

6   Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (now Democratic Karen Benevolent Army).

Map 1: Ongoing armed conflicts in Myanmar, 2016–2017
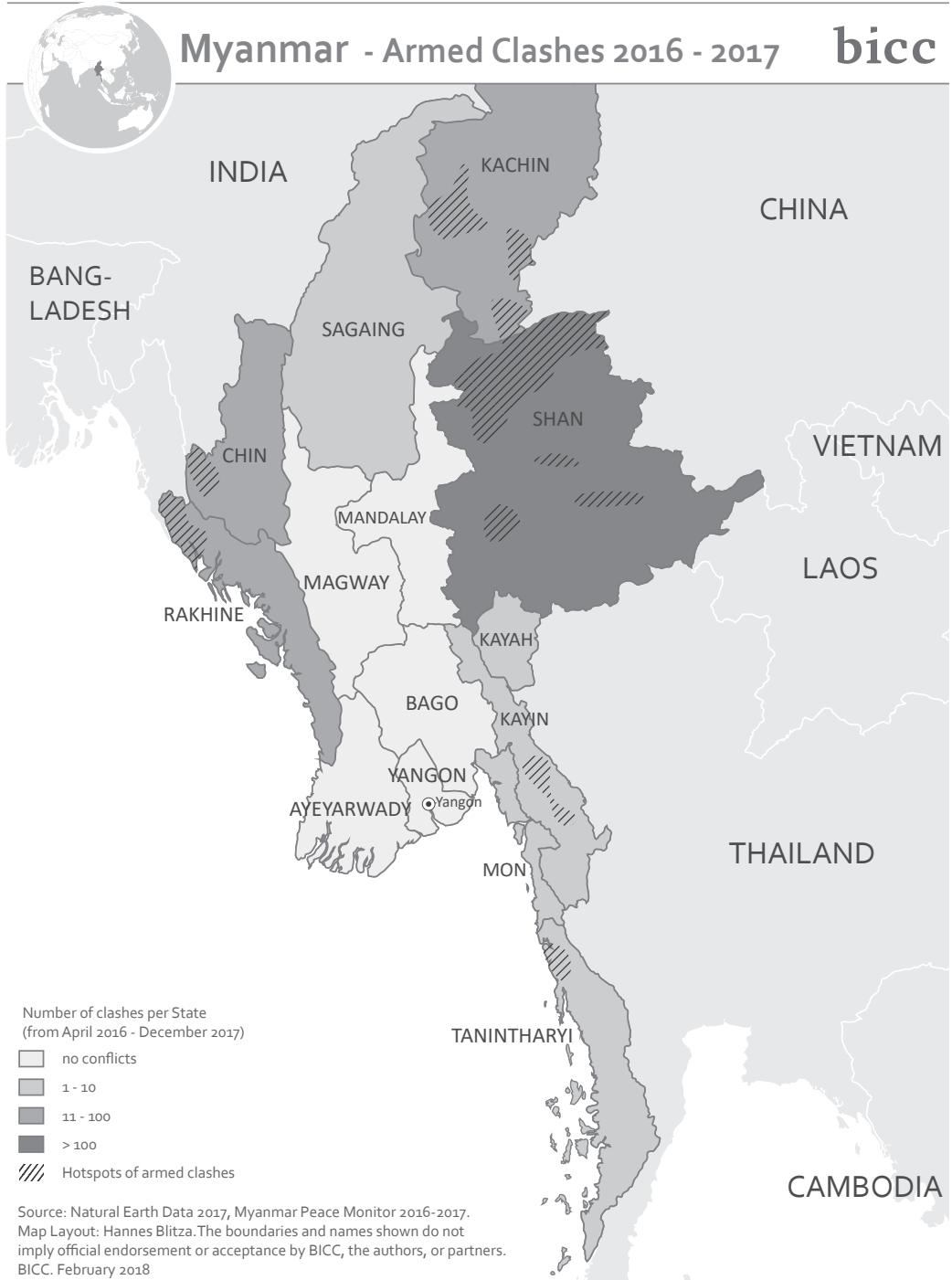
Source: Hannes Blitza, Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC)

Access to rights

Another main obstacle to both de jure and de facto reintegration of DPs and returnees is the frequent lack of documents. In terms of access to legal and political representation, birth certificates and identification cards, in particular, are necessary. In conflict-affected areas, in areas controlled by EAG or in isolated places like the Southern Tanintharyi Region, access to identity documents has been restricted for ethnic minorities. According to an NGO that has stepped in with mobile registration offices to provide Myanmar citizens with legal documents, eleven million persons in Myanmar lack official identification. For example, most of the elderly Shan do not have official Burmese papers and, unable to speak Burmese, they are not able to apply for them (interview with community leader, Kuang Jor, 14 July 2016). IDPs and other vulnerable groups are especially affected by this lack of papers: "Without an official ID card, people cannot access medical services, open a bank account, go to school or travel anywhere, and they can be arrested at any time," the Norwegian Refugee Council explains in a recent report (Jenssen 2017).

The high number of people without citizenship or legal papers is a logical consequence of the Myanmar military junta's triple strategy to simultaneously promote (i) ethnic division, (ii) religious nationalism and (iii) territorial integrity/unity over the last decades (cf. Kipgen 2017). Legal obstacles to obtaining papers have been used systematically as a means to divide and rule (IRIN 2016). Restructuring the legal framework of citizenship had already been identified as one of the major challenges before transition started (Lall 2014: 10 ff.); experts explicitly pointed out that the combination of religious nationalism and citizenship could alienate non-Buddhist groups and divide the nation (ibid.: 42 ff.).[7] Various interviews that we conducted in 2016 showed that Rohingya and other Muslims throughout Myanmar have been denied citizenship (interviews August–September 2016; also Green et al. 2015: 56ff.). The history of scapegoating Muslims is still vivid and has driven many of them into exile (cf. Van Klinken / Aung 2017, McCarthy / Menager 2017).

In exile the problems related to the lack of documents continue. As a consequence of the difficulties in obtaining papers inside their country of origin, many displaced persons and migrants lack IDs, residence permits, birth certificates and work permits. Burmese birth certificates or IDs are a requirement for applying as a migrant worker. The difficulties in obtaining these back in Myanmar include funds for travel procedures and the fact that many DPs come from areas under the control of an Ethnic Armed Group. Even those who have papers from Myanmar face bureaucratic and financial hurdles. Thai

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7   The population in Myanmar is far from homogeneous. Many interethnic marriages could be observed and family genealogies include various nationalities and ethnicities. Cases where married couples, or parents and children, speak different languages were frequent. The number of people that find it hard to reconcile a policy of purity with their personal history is therefore high – especially in the border areas.

IDs are expensive (around 10,000 Baht according to a Shan male, Kuang Jor, July 2016). Many migrants and refugees prefer to get by without them and to mingle in with communities with similar ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds in Thailand.

Access to health services, formal employment, housing and land in Thailand nevertheless often remains limited. As one refugee noted "even the 10-year ID provides only limited permission. Like [you] can only rent a house, [but] can't buy or build your own house. You can buy only [a] motorbike, not [a] car yet. As I have already decided to continue staying here, I need to get [an] opportunity to own a house and other things that I need. If I get a Thai ID, I will also try to earn possessions for the future of my son" (interview with Karen refugee, Mae Sot, 16 July 2016). Without proper documents, movement is restricted. Police checkpoints at entry points into provincial capitals, as on the borders of provinces adjacent to Myanmar (e.g. Mae Sot, Ranong), are common and target non-nationals.

Access to social inclusion: return movements and translocal networks

Despite all the bureaucratic hindrances, in the border areas, especially on the village level, a certain degree of "de facto local" integration seems to be possible. However, the level of integration into Thai society very much differs depending on ethno-linguistic commonalities between the displaced and local host communities. This is exemplified by the Karen and Shan communities. In western Thailand, the porous border to Myanmar and the existence of a Thai Karen community facilitates de facto local integration. Numerous persons from ethnic groups on the other side of the border have been informally integrated into the host communities for decades. Many displaced Karen still settle today in Thai Karen villages on the border. There, it is reportedly easier for Karen people to integrate locally, even to find a spouse, while integration in the city without a Thai ID and language skills is said to be much more difficult (interview with female Karen and representative of DCA, Chiang Mai, July 2016).

DPs usually assess the risks and benefits of different options – including return – carefully and on their own behalf. Instances of spontaneous return demonstrate this clearly (UNHCR 2017a). In general, there are several major obstacles to sustainable return. Firstly, refugees are often not consulted beforehand when decisions are made to repatriate them. "We were told that a deal had been struck, that we could go back, and that our houses had been built without anybody asking us before" (anonymous interview, Northern Thailand, July 2016). In other words: the community was not involved in the process and had neither chosen the site, nor verified the commitment of the

armed groups. As they did not share the assessment of the NGO that had initiated the return process and built the houses – that the new site was suitable and safe – they did not return. Secondly, the legal access to land is unclear.[8] Nobody is certain that the people who have acquired land and access to resources thanks to the displacement are willing to give it up. Thirdly, trust in the NCA is low and long-term prospects for peace seem dubious. Many therefore prefer to stick to what they consider safe options.

Burmese refugees fear discrimination in the event of their future return. Those who stayed behind see refugees as "[…] lazy, reliant on other people, uneducated and unable to work like them. So, there will be some argument among refugees and local people in Myanmar" (focus group interview with young refugees, Nu Po camp, August 2016). Another Karen college student stated:

> If we go back to Myanmar, we will surely face discrimination among local people against us. Currently, some people from my village […] think refugees are bad people because refugees are those who are against the country. So that there are wars because of refugees. We are rebels and they stare like we are bad men (focus group discussion with Karen junior college students, Umpiem Camp, July 2016).

In addition to those fears everyday trials of a seemingly less problematic nature play an important role. "I did not know where to go, I did not know anybody or anything about the place," a young refugee recounted his visit in his parent's village of origin in Myanmar (Mae Sot, August 2016). Many other refugees who were either born or raised in exile recounted similar experiences about different behaviours, different ways of relating socially and different living standards on the other side of the border. Their social capital and their networks in Myanmar are therefore insufficient. Furthermore, there are different perceptions and related expectations of life in exile: the people who stayed feel that they have suffered and endured more than those who allegedly abandoned their homes, whereas the refugees see it precisely the other way round. Practically this means that returnees often do struggle to gain the support they expected from their villages of origin and vice versa (interviews in Chiang Mai, July and September 2016).

Well aware of the obstacles to return with regard to the persisting conflict in Myanmar and the lack of livelihood opportunities, many displaced Burmese thus view return as one, but not necessarily the favoured, option. "We are only guests here [in Thailand] and have to go whenever asked to," a Karenni representative explained, "but we cannot go now. Maybe in 30 years." Asked about the advantages and disadvantages of being a camp resident compared to a legal work migrant the same person answered: "We cannot become

8   For those returnees who manage to acquire land for cultivation there are significant differences regarding legal entitlements in Myanmar. While the KNU for example issues land titles (ownership of the land), the government only issues permission to use the land (interview with representative of the CIDKP, Mae Sot, July 2016; for the situation of Karen IDPs see Hull 2009).

migrants, because they can be sent back whenever their permit expires" (Ban Mai Nai Soi, August 2016). What the representative was referring to was the principle of non-refoulement, which derives from the 1951 Refugee Convention and forbids a state from returning refugees to a place where they would face persecution.[9] This example shows that DPs are well aware of the rights, restrictions and opportunities – access to aid, resettlement, work, etc. – that are connected to different statuses. The basic lesson DPs have learnt after multiple displacements is that you have to expand your options and be prepared for any eventuality.

For a long time Burmese migrants and displaced persons from the periphery have crossed the border to search for job opportunities, economic and social purposes, to flee persecution and violent conflict, and to find better health care and education. The border between Myanmar and Thailand has for a long time been less of a dividing line than a resource in the everyday practices of those communities and remains highly porous. Crossing the green border via motorboat, without any passport or visa control, is easy. In Mae Sot, for example, boats cross the Mo river every minute at peak times to bring people and goods from one side to the other. Better-off Burmese cross the border for one-day shopping trips. Against the background of substantial obstacles to local integration for DPs in Thailand and to their reintegration in Myanmar, due to the uncertain future of the ceasefire processes and persisting economic hardship, it is crucial especially for DPs to have a variety of alternative livelihood options available. The establishment of translocal livelihoods,[10] moving back and forth as well as partially returning, has evolved as an important coping strategy (Aung 2014).

A study by the Jesuit priest Vinai Boonlue confirms that young and old Karen have been navigating back and forth along the Myanmar border with Thailand, and that their struggle for survival involves constant movement (Boonlue 2015). Vinai observes that the displaced rarely stay in fixed places but are constantly on the move. They live neither in their home community nor in a fixed place abroad in Thailand, but rather in translocal life-worlds, tied together by specific place-knots (Saxer 2017) such as, for the Karen, the border, the refugee camp, urban Mae Sot in northwestern Thailand and, as a consequence of large-scale resettlements, in urban districts abroad such as in

9   Though Thailand is not a signatory to the Convention, non-refoulement is considered to be customary international law.

10   Our understanding of translocal livelihoods is based on the concept of transnationalism that describes transnational migration as "the process by which immigrants form and sustain simultaneous multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Glick Schiller et al. 1995: 48). In contrast to the concept of transnationalism the concept of translocality evades "methodological nationalism" (Glick Schiller 2007: 7).

Sheffield, St. Paul and Toronto.[11] Family-splitting and cyclical returns are typical strategies of families whose members are spread over large distances. Thus, kinship ties continue to play a crucial role, but in innovative ways.

Long-term migrants who earn incomes through work as cleaners, construction or agricultural workers, factory workers, or as employees in international NGOs or church ministries invest money in the education and social mobility of their sisters and brothers, or in the health and welfare of their parents. Burmese children attend migrant schools or camp schools cross the border, or stay in boarding houses and go back to their families in Myanmar in the summer break, as mentioned above. The downside of sending unaccompanied children to school is that this often increases the children's vulnerability, as caretakers belong to a variety of actors with different motivations and agendas. It is not only pupils who travel back and forth. Quite frequently those in the camps travel regularly back to their communities of origin to meet their relatives and to participate in the harvest. These trips also help them to defend possible property rights back in Myanmar and to stay informed about the situation back home. Such trips also clearly illustrate that – despite confinement policies and precarious living conditions – close linkages exist across both sides of the Thailand-Burma border (Lee 2012).

However, the option of movement is not the same for all displaced persons. Besides the ones who cannot afford to travel or those who are hindered by security constraints, age or health problems, political activists who have not been resettled are particularly restricted with regard to visits or financial remittances. These persons often fear difficulties with the Burmese authorities and explicitly ask their exiled relatives not to return (interview with KRC[12] representative, Mae Sot, July 2016). Furthermore, there are those who have already returned to Myanmar but refrain from repatriating to their village of origin: "They are scared of me because they don't want to be in trouble because of me and I don't want to give them trouble and put them in danger, too" (interview with 54 year old Burmese, South Dagon, July 2017).

Motives for moving are, in sum, complex. Rather than finding neatly separated realities of refuge and return, our research revealed a high level of interwoven in-between layers. More research on such translocality and cyclical return movements is needed. Such movements are empirically of greater significance than permanent return or facilitated repatriation. DPs have experienced the fact that it is vital to maintain multiple access points to health care,

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11 In 2006, IOM and UNHCR started one of the largest resettlement programmes in their history, and since 2005, more than 100,000 refugees from Myanmar (and a small number from other countries) have been resettled from Thailand, mainly to the United States, Canada and Australia (Loescher / Millner 2008: 318; Chantavanich / Kamonpetch 2017).

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food provisions, job markets, education or resettlement opportunities, etc.[13] They have developed strategies of family or community separations, that are, like seasonal internal labour migration, not solely correlated with armed conflict. Little is known, finally, about immobility, i.e. when communities are forced by armed groups to stay in a restricted area. More investigations into such cases – that are not visible on the radar of most aid organisations – are needed to better understand and distinguish causes, forms and long-term impacts of violent conflict.

Summary

This paper has described a wide array of coping strategies applied by displaced persons in and from Myanmar in order to secure their livelihoods and to obtain physical protection. Placing them into the context of organised violence, the paper shows that organised violence is not only a main cause of displacement, but is an important factor that continuously shapes livelihood options and strategies of people who find themselves in cycles of protracted displacement.

The wide array of identified navigational strategies of displaced persons can be situated in between or beyond the three classical solutions promoted by international refugee regimes (return, local integration and resettlement). Beyond aid and non-aid related strategies we observed (cyclical) return movements and the establishment of translocal networks, as well as the establishment and institutionalisation of self-organised infrastructure, to be vital coping mechanisms. Return and local integration (and probably resettlement) should thus be considered neither as an exhaustive list of alternatives nor as completely unconnected approaches. They are rather two options in a continuum of strategies comprising cyclical and temporary return processes, transnational networks and patterns of de facto local integration.

The role of risk-benefit considerations for decisions on return

In a focus group discussion with college students in Nu Po camp, July 2016 the following concerns were raised:

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13 DPs stressed their wish to stay independent in their decision to return: "I heard bad news about those who return … That's why I'm returning on my own. If I come back with a repatriation programme, there will be a lot of procedures and restrictions that we are required to follow. They will give you money but there will be monitoring and evaluation and that undermines my freedom […]. I want to be a free person with no restrictions […]. People will call you to evaluate you […]. I don't like to be controlled. If the government could provide assistance – financially and mental health programmes – for those who return, it would be good. But now, they are asking too many questions and our freedom will be undermined" (Burmese returnee from Mae La Camp, South Dagon, May 2017). Recently intensified battles and the low trust in the peace process make this assessment appear sound.

> If we go back, we don't have cash to go hospital […] Do we have to be refugees again to return into Thailand? […] We don't have Myanmar IDs and some refugees lost them or they were burned during war in their villages. Without ID we will probably face difficulty travelling to other regions.

Displaced persons from and in Myanmar weigh the risks of return in comparison to their current situation. Decisive factors concern security, access to legal documents, public services and infrastructure. The lack of infrastructure is directly related to security concerns:

> We [are] still afraid of the Burmese military. If war comes again, how should we ask for help, communicate and spread news to the media without phone or internet lines […]. For travelling, our land and regions are not developed yet with roads and bridges, we worry for one thing that if we need to go to the town or countryside, or to the Thai-Burma border in emergency cases, it will be very difficult to travel" (focus group discussion, Umpiem Mai Camp, July 2016).

In addition, decreasing prospects for resettlement, the general uncertainty about the future of the camps, fear of forced return, and the prospect of discrimination at a place that is not home influence the trajectories of DPs. "Integration is a European idea", many correspondents stated, indicating that they have to develop other options based on a more diversified tactic in the long run (interview with Burmese NGO worker living in Thailand for 30 years, Bangkok, July 2016).[14]

Our research showed that any dichotomy that contrasts non-refugees as masters of their own fate with displaced persons as victims without agency is obsolete. The coping patterns of displaced persons are highly flexible and adaptive. The legal status of people is relatively flexible though the legal categorisations that frame individual coping options: a person can shift from one status to another or hold different legal statuses simultaneously. Conditions for pursuing certain strategies very much differ for the Shan, Rohingya, Karen and Kachin and within those groups themselves. But if circumstances require or allow it, IDPs might become refugees, refugees might become internally displaced while trying to reintegrate, and refugees frequently leave the temporary shelters to become illegal migrant workers, or obtain official migrant worker status.

This list is by no means exhaustive and the options are not mutually exclusive. We found persons who were immobilised in conflict zones, educational migrants in camps, people who fled violence and conflict that have not registered in camps, and a variety of other patterns: some displaced persons have applied for migrant status instead of applying for asylum. Others live and

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14 According to a representative of the Committee of Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), 70–80% of the IDPs in Kayin State have returned. The majority of these former IDPs have gone to their place of origin, while some, especially those who do not own land, have gone to the newly built settlement sites. Reportedly, there is also a generational difference. While the elderly usually want to return to their home villages, the younger ones prefer relocation sites. The better educated ones – in contrast – would prefer to move to the cities or to be resettled in a third country (Mae Sot, July 2016).

work as illegal migrants. As legal-normative categories are blurred in both time and space we thus argue that it is rather counterproductive for descriptive studies (probably also for humanitarian interventions and development aid) to remain fixated upon them (cf. Horstmann 2015, Sadan 2013).

Time in exile and prospects of return

The assessments of IDPs, migrants and refugees on their options to either stay or to return are not necessarily in line with official policy. The factors that influence the decision vary: those who fled conflict and repression often stressed that they would not return until the conflicts had been settled. Those who, in contrast, fled indirect consequences of conflict such as poverty or escaped preventively would be more likely to go back, if there were public infrastructure and individual opportunities. Even though the different weight given to the factors varies, livelihoods, peace and security, regulated availability of land and housing, access to health services and education, marginalisation and discrimination by the authorities, and conflict with local communities are crucial determinants in the decisions of all displaced persons on whether or not to eventually return. The choice therefore depends to a large extent on the amount and quality of knowledge people have of the political situation, the political transition process and ceasefire negotiations in Myanmar.

Older persons who have experienced many displacements (sometimes stretching back to the Japanese invasion) are more sceptical about return than younger ones (who usually have not experienced as many traumatic events). The latter are described as more hopeful, and more willing to return – even to a place different from their place of origin (interview with local expert and activist, Mae Sot, September 2016). As noted above, education is a decisive factor in this regard: children are sent (often on their own) to benefit from migrant schools on the other side of the border. Responsibilities towards younger relatives who attend school in the camps, in turn, play a role in the decision on return for camp residents (interview with Karen male refugee, Nu Po camp, July 2016). Finally, the time in exile and the number of contacts with the area of origin is of utmost importance for movement dynamics. The longer the displacement lasts, the less likely people are to go back. The existence of social networks and contacts with relatives or friends in Myanmar has been positively related to the likelihood of return. Many displaced persons travel to their community of origin on a regular basis and thus are able to maintain these networks.

DPs have developed a wide range of mixed strategies in response to these circumstances – some members of the family are sent to safe havens while others remain in high-risk areas. Livelihood activities that became insufficient due to the violent conflict were complemented with labour activities, seasonal

national migration and international migration. Refugees in camps resorted to their fields across the border to compensate for diminished food rations. Numerous IDPs found temporary shelter arrangements in camps, temple compounds or with hosts. Some IDPs are still in the vicinity of their houses and fields, some with, others without access to them. Many are confined in areas with very limited opportunities to make a living (e.g. Rohingya), while others are in areas where their labour force is highly sought after. However, diversification is not by definition beneficial for DPs. The desperate situation opens the door for abuses and exploitative practices by employers and authorities (Marschke / Vandergeest 2016, Brees 2008) – including cases of trafficking, especially of female victims (Beyrer 2001, Thomas / Jones 1993, Young et al. 2006).

Moreover, it needs to be stressed that different groups of displaced persons have very different experiences, opportunities to access the labour market, access to services such as education, health care or justice and aid, as well as very different choices available to them. The differences in the ability to cope with the challenges of displacement depend not only on their respective legal status (refugee, undocumented migrant worker, IDP) but also on ethnicity (e.g. Shan and Karen in Thailand), religion or the place of refuge (camp or urban or rural context). Ethnic identity, religion and location greatly impact on and shape the mobility and transnational networks of the displaced villagers. Different minorities in different border regions receive different treatment and recognition or discrimination in neighbouring countries. For example, the Shan and Karen or Kajah are classified differently in Thailand, which means, for instance, that Shan people have greater opportunities to assimilate in Thailand, because of their cultural similarity, but rarely receive refugee status. Mobility, the switching and combination of different socio-legal statuses or the establishment of self-organised infrastructure in the fields of health care and education feature among the most important practices applied in order to secure physical security and livelihoods (South 2012). Our findings demonstrate that displaced villagers regularly move in and out of different statuses – IDP, illegal migrant, refugee and citizen – throughout their lives.

In sum, the experience of multiple displacements and protracted conflict have led to a diversifications of livelihoods (e.g. farming, gardening, day labour), income sources (e.g. work, aid, remittances), residency (e.g. rural, urban, bi-national), poly-local households (split-up of family members) and entitlements (right to stay, resettle, return, compensation, option of work permit or amnesty in Thailand). Those strategies have not in all cases diminished vulnerabilities. In some cases – e.g. for trafficked persons – the effects have been plainly counterproductive. But the bottom line is that those coping strategies define the agency upon which any durable solution strategy of international actors has to build.

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Coping with Insecurity: Labour Relations, (Im)mobility and Conflict-sensitive Employment in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Forced migration studies and research related to the "new wars" paradigm have drawn attention to the modes of operation of war economies and the coercive labour relations involved. Field research findings by the author and an Afghan team in 2015–2017 on employment by local construction companies revealed that remnants of the war economy have persisted in Afghanistan's fragile and violence-affected settings and continue to shape labour relations. To avoid acts of sabotage and fulfil construction contracts, relationships with local powerholders – politicians holding offices in government or Taliban leaders – are crucial for mobile Afghan companies operating on construction sites for limited periods. The research findings indicate that these relationships provide a field of interaction and negotiations about conflict-sensitive employment between company managers and local elders representing community interests – and through them, local powerholders. The involvement of elders affects the labour relations between company managers and local workers, both mobile and immobile.

Keywords: Afghanistan, conflict-sensitive employment, labour relations, infrastructure, mobility, immobility, construction companies

Introduction

Studies connecting labour relations and mobility in the context of violent conflict mainly exist in two separate scholarly fields: forced migration studies and research related to the "new wars" paradigm, which has drawn attention to the modes of operation of war economies and the coercive labour relations involved. This paper provides insights from research in Afghanistan into the role and potential of local companies working in the fragile and violence-affected settings that persist after war and brings the two research strands together in an attempt to understand "violent mobilities and labour relations" from a new angle.

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Re-building infrastructure after war is considered "fundamental to moving popular support away from pre-war or during-conflict loyalties and to moving spoilers in favour of post-war political objectives" (Mashatt et al. 2008: 12). During armed conflicts, small and medium-sized companies continue to build premises, roads and bridges and to supply goods, construction materials and edifices to troops, armed groups and communities. In fragile and violence-affected settings local construction companies mostly work as sub-contractors, in particular when international agencies subsidise the government in efforts towards reconstruction (Mashatt et al. 2008, Grawert et al. 2017). Typically, construction companies move labour and equipment to varying sites for temporary operations. The accruing infrastructures and buildings can become the basis for different economic activities involving a range of further companies and employment opportunities – if armed violence subsides. Scholars have investigated the macro-economic conditions and hindrances for investors in infrastructure (Hoeffler 1999, MacDonald 2005) and solutions for infrastructure-related conflicts (Mashatt et al. 2008, Boudet et al. 2011). However, there is a lack of studies about the development of labour relations and the role of mobility in infrastructure-related sectors in the context of persistent violence and fragility.[1] This paper sets out to close this research gap by addressing the following questions: 1) Who are the stakeholders in construction in areas affected by recurrent violent conflict? 2) How do mobile and immobile stakeholders in construction projects interact in fragile and violence-affected settings? 3) How does the concurrence of mobility and immobility affect labour relations in local construction companies operating in fragile and violence-affected settings?

The paper aims to understand whether and how labour relations in construction companies (as crucial actors in infrastructure building) change from coercive relations to relations that gradually incorporate labour rights in fragile and violence-affected settings. To answer the research questions the paper looks into the ways that construction companies operate in the fragile and violence-affected settings of Afghanistan, focusing on the mid-2010s. It analyses the relationships between Afghan company managers and representatives of the communities the companies operate in, taking into consideration how the decades-long context of armed violence has shaped the rural communities where companies implement construction projects. In most communities income opportunities are precarious and the inhabitants complement casual jobs with agricultural subsistence production. The loss of residents who were displaced, killed or fled violence-ridden areas, as well as frequent incidences of

1   Such contexts tend to prevail where the government has incorporated former commanders of armed groups that control certain population groups and territories, and where "dispersed domination" (Migdal 1994: 9) through the government and oppositional (armed) groups persists. Examples are, among many others Afghanistan, South Sudan and Colombia.

armed clashes between government forces and Taliban groups or among further armed groups, continue to affect these communities. Some communities are facing social and political tensions that can have divisive effects (Akseer et al. 2017: 64–71, 167–181).

To cope with this insecure environment some Afghan companies apply the approach of conflict-sensitive employment (CSE). They carefully negotiate access to the communities, try to avoid enhancing social tensions during construction projects and take various precautions to protect the staff, company facilities and the construction itself (Grawert / Shirzad 2017). To assess changes in labour relations, the paper analyses the potential and limitations of CSE, drawing on the perceptions of skilled and unskilled workers, owners and managers of small and medium-sized Afghan companies, as collected during field research in different parts of Afghanistan between 2015 and 2017.[2] The construction companies studied operated in areas contested between armed Taliban groups and government forces as well as between the Taliban and other armed groups. The context in which these companies employed workers was a highly militarised society, members of which continued to use arms in local conflicts and recruited youths into armed organisations or criminal gangs.

Analytical approach and research methods

Private companies operate in any context and even in the most violent environments as long as they generate profit. Whatever the conditions, there is a constant need for labour (Naudé 2007, Peschka / Emery 2011). Scholars looking into the "new wars" (Kaldor 1999) have shown that in war contexts companies focus on short-term, often illicit, gains, as the physical infrastructure breaks down and capital flight prevents firms from mid-term and large-scale investment planning. They decentralise production and distribution and create cross-border networks for (illicit) trade and export of commodities from war areas (Ballentine / Nitzschke 2005, Peschka / Emery 2011). Research on mineral resource extraction in war economies has revealed highly coercive labour relations in companies and inhuman working conditions in artisanal mining (Le Billion 2005, Ganson / Wennmann 2016).

Mobility is characteristic of asymmetric warfare. Armed groups (including government forces) that directly engage in fighting, the people in charge of logistics and the recruitment of fighters, those who supply fighters and community inhabitants, as well as those who ship minerals, food, arms, construction materials and other commodities across borders are highly mobile entrepreneurs upholding a war economy (Duffield 2001). Migrants seeking opportunities in resource extraction and other trades that flourish in war economies are further mobile actors in such contexts (Ganson / Wennmann 2016).

Whereas studies on "new wars" by political economists refer to mobility only implicitly and concentrate on the economic basis of political and military power, scholars on forced migration focus on mobility as a "violent process" (Bank et al. 2017: 14), considering direct armed violence as a "precipitating driver" and civil war as a "proximate driver" of flight and migration (Van Hear et al. 2018). Studies on (forced) "migration trajectories" (Mallet / Hagen-Zanker 2018, Wissink et al. 2017) have identified factors that influence how and where uprooted people move and factors preventing movement ("immobilization"; Mielke 2016: 245). Forced labour, extreme exploitation of labour and resources, pillage, predation, extortion and the capture of trade routes and migrants' remittances are practices that affect immobilised communities during conflicts and in fragile and violence-affected settings (Ballentine / Nitzschke 2005, Grawert et al. 2017). Research has revealed that the majority of the displaced and immobilised have to cope with exploitative labour relations as they compete with other marginalised groups for precarious jobs in the irregular economy, most often within their own or a neighbouring country. They rarely gain safe legal status or access to the documents required to obtain an education and enter the formal labour market (Cramer 2008, Grawert / Mielke 2018). Labour codes and regulations for decent work do not apply to this large group of people.

To transfer these scholarly findings to the study of labour relations in construction companies, it is helpful to consider some particular characteristics of infrastructure building. Construction companies bring their own workers to a site for a limited period and hire local, mostly unskilled, labour from the nearby communities. They move material, equipment, vehicles and machines while at the same time relying on businesses and workers that stay on the ground. Mobility thus pertains to skilled workers and managers of construction companies, drivers supplying materials and goods, and unskilled or semi-skilled labour migrants moving to construction sites. Casual labour, small entrepreneurs running hotels, restaurants, repair workshops and suppliers of local construction materials encompass people who stay put in the communities. Hence, the construction sector is characterised by a combination of mobile and locally bound workers. Whereas some workers move in a "migrant circuit" (Rouse 1991: 14, Monsutti 2008), staying temporarily at places where

they find jobs, others are "immobilised" (Etzold et al. 2019: 11) and remain in the communities where construction companies temporarily operate.

The interplay of mobility and immobility takes place within the particular social relations that characterise fragile and violence-affected settings. Social divisions and distrust prevail in communities where state forces compete with other armed groups over the control of territory, inhabitants and resources. Security provision becomes a matter of supply and demand; armed groups take over the "protection" of communities, sometimes alternating with state forces (Mehler 2004). Scholars studying war economies have found that this environment creates a hybrid type of businessperson – the commander of an armed group or military officer who engages in business. Such figures combine military, economic and political power and operate as patrons who build up networks of dependents around them (Le Billion 2005, Schlichte 2009).

In fragile and violence-affected settings, labour relations tend to remain entangled in patron-client relations, often with former or still active commanders as patrons, and kinship networks – leading to the exclusion of some and inclusion of other groups (Cramer 2008). Whereas most local inhabitants try to find jobs and income opportunities under these conditions – either within their communities or, if they can afford it, by moving regionally between their own and neighbouring countries, others may join locally operating armed groups (Peschka / Emery 2011, Ganson / Wennmann 2016). Hence, mobility can imply the opportunity to leave constraining patronage networks or avoid being recruited by armed groups (including the armed forces of the government). Immobility may require partaking in social networks and patron-client networks that maintain the power of former commanders because they offer livelihood opportunities.

Taking part in patron-client relationships is not only a means of improving livelihood opportunities for immobilised community inhabitants. As competitiveness hinges on the ability of entrepreneurs to adjust to violence-affected settings (Brück et al. 2011), private companies, too, build special relationships with powerful groups and thus connect with patrons. Moreover, they rely on networks of persons that can be trusted – preferably family members, kin and members of the same ethnic or other common identity groups. In this way, private companies – including local companies – become agents of war economies as "legally operating commercial entities [… that] may have a vested interest in the continuation of conflict and instability" (Ballentine / Nitzschke 2005: 2). Entrenched relationships between powerholders and local businesspeople tend to persist long after the end of the war, preventing the establishment of accountability to state institutions and the rule of law. Relationships of violence continue to influence social interaction even after the economy recovers from war, with the result that coercion still prevails in labour relations.

Companies cannot operate as non-political agents in the highly political context of fragile and violence-affected settings (Ganson / Wennmann 2016). Local businesses are inevitably parties in an armed conflict (Naudé 2007, Peschka / Emery 2011) and hence, part of the "political marketplace" (De Waal 2014, Hoffmann 2014) that often persists after war. Studies and reports commissioned by the World Bank and conducted by governmental and non-governmental development agencies hold that because of these relationships, local companies have the potential to both exacerbate and ameliorate conflict (Killick et al. 2005) or contribute to peacebuilding (Peschka / Emery 2011). According to the business economist Naudé (2007), entrepreneurship can become a tool to facilitate peace and improve the living conditions of people in fragile and violence-affected settings where the government is not capable of promoting security and prosperity.

Fragile and violence-affected settings in Afghanistan 2001–2017

Violent conflict has affected Afghan society in waves, rising and falling, since the late 1970s. Whereas the migration of Afghans in the larger region has a long history, the armed conflicts caused large-scale displacement within Afghanistan and created about five million Afghan refugees, mostly in Pakistan and Iran. Hundreds of thousands returned temporarily and fled again when armed violence re-escalated.[3] After the US army intervened in Afghanistan and deposed the Taliban government in 2001, infighting among followers of individual commanders who – under the umbrella of the Mujahedin[4] – had already engaged in the struggle against Soviet occupation (1979–1989) continued in many districts. Several commanders had formed political parties in exile in Pakistan and established armed wings with weapons and funding supplied by the Gulf States, Pakistan and the USA (Ruttig 2009). Some of those commanders continue to play a role in politics even today. They control particular territories so that communities and businesses are forced to interact with these powerholders. These conditions strongly affect the livelihood options of Afghans and the ways in which companies operate and carry out their projects.

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3   In 2018, UN OCHA registered 343,341 persons who were newly displaced by armed conflict in Afghanistan (UNHCR 2019a). The number of Afghan refugees in Iran was 951,142; in addition, there were an estimated two million Afghan migrants or undocumented refugees (European Commission 2018) and 1,407,033 Afghan refugees were registered in Pakistan (UNHCR 2019).

4   The Mujahedin comprised seven Sunni groups operating from Peshawar, Pakistan, that spearheaded armed resistance (as a *jihad*) against the Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan until the latter's withdrawal in 1989. The Mujahedin formed the interim government of Afghanistan in 1992 and joined the Northern Alliance fighting against the Taliban between 1996 and 2001.

The wars (Mujahedin fighting against the Soviet forces during the 1980s; civil war 1992–96) and the rise of armed Taliban groups had induced many Afghan businesspeople to relocate abroad during the 1980s and 1990s, leaving space for the emergence of a new generation of businesses with close ties to factions and commanders of armed groups. After 2001, this new generation expanded its activities and took over the position of the established business families that had emigrated. Commanders of armed groups and factional leaders had financial reserves available for investment and were looking for ways to safeguard their long-term financial autonomy once direct foreign aid to the militias would stop. One means of securing their capital was to get co-opted into the Afghan government. This explains the direct nexus between political and economic power in Afghanistan that prevailed after 2001 (Giustozzi 2006).

International agencies poured large-scale aid into Afghanistan in an effort to develop and stabilise the economy (CSO 2016, World Bank 2017). The demand by international troops and organisations for construction as well as programmes of reconstruction and infrastructure building led to a boom of Afghan businesses supplying international troops and agencies with construction services (Grawert / Shirzad 2017). However, already in 2006, Taliban groups resumed fighting against the government and regained control over parts of Afghanistan.

Between 2003 and 2012 Afghanistan experienced rapid economic growth at a rate of around nine per cent annually (World Bank 2015). Inflation was relatively low and international assistance allowed rising access to clean water, basic health and education for the Afghan population. Life expectancy and maternal mortality improved markedly. More than 920,000 Afghans returned from abroad between 2002 and 2014 (UNHCR 2015). However, despite substantial growth, the nationwide poverty rate remained stagnant at about 36 per cent between 2007 and 2015 (World Bank 2016). In the fiscal year of 2015–16, real GDP growth slumped to 0.9 per cent when opium production was included and -2.4 per cent when excluded (CSO 2016).

In 2014, the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), headed by the United States, completed the gradual handover of responsibility for security to the national forces of Afghanistan and provided limited assistance under the Resolute Support Mission. Mediated by the then US secretary of state, a coalition between the two competing presidential candidates who had won the most votes formed a National Unity Government. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani was sworn in as the new president and Abdullah Abdullah as his "chief executive officer" (The Economist 2014). Ghani's political endeavours were shaped by his background as an economic advisor to the World Bank during the 1990s. Abdullah is a member of Jamiat-e Islami, one of the groups that formed the Northern Alliance and fought against the Taliban in the 1990s.

Power struggles were hence almost inevitable at the top leadership and short-term intra-elite bargaining among shifting armed groups continued in the same way as it had over the previous forty years. Direct violence and the threat of violence by a range of powerful groups remained an integral part of the political process. Administrative positions in government as well as privileged access to economic resources – public procurement contracts, revenue sources, land, mining contracts and proceeds from illicit economic activities – were some of the spoils over which elite bargaining took place (World Bank 2016). Security incidents escalated and spread throughout the country. Taliban splinter groups, criminal gangs and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) stepped up attacks on Afghan security forces and compounds as well as hotels where the international staff of aid agencies was based. Fighting between government troops and factions of the Taliban intensified; commanders were co-opted as politicians and acted as businessmen and the government was torn between the demands of militia-backed powerholders.

In 2016 Taliban factions temporarily captured 24 district centres (UNSC 2016) and in 2017 Taliban groups controlled or contested about 40 per cent of Afghanistan's districts (Roggio 2017). The ISIL-KP claimed responsibility for several deadly attacks in Nangarhar, eastern Afghanistan and Kabul (Mielke / Miszak 2017). Attempts by the National Unity Government to include Taliban leaders in peace talks failed. Power struggles between various leaders of armed groups and members of the government, being part and parcel of political power struggles, shaped the context in which construction companies operated.

Labour conditions in Afghanistan

According to the ILO (2016a), employment conditions in the informal economy where most Afghan enterprises operate are characterised by a lack of protection for workers. They are often not paid for their labour; employers demand compulsory overtime or extra shifts and lay workers off without notice or compensation. Working conditions are often unsafe and there is neither health insurance nor other social benefits. The informal economy has maintained a considerable degree of self-organisation, following regulations that emanate from non-state actors and informal institutions (Wilde / Mielke 2013). The Afghan state has always been engaged with the informal economy; state officials are entangled in it, pursuing their own informal economic activities. They thus have vested interests in maintaining this sector where negotiated arrangements over taxation or regulatory policies prevail over compli-

ance with official rules and law enforcement. Political leaders rely on interconnections between politics and business. Hence, it is not the government or state authorities but rather the social legitimacy attributed to economic activities and the relative power of particular groups that determine what is considered legal and illegal – a typical characteristic for remnants of a war economy (Schoofs 2015).

In 2016, 80.5 per cent of the men and 26.7 per cent of the women of working age participated to some extent in the labour force in Afghanistan. 65.7 per cent of the active labour force was gainfully employed or self-employed (CSO 2017), with 60 per cent working in agriculture. More than one third of the active labour force was occupied partly in subsistence production and partly in low-productivity jobs; most of them had precarious casual or temporary jobs (ILO 2012). Perception surveys by the Asia Foundation between 2014 and 2017 showed that nearly every Afghan perceived unemployment as devastating. Unemployment forced many Afghans to migrate in search of work, which not only placed a strain on the areas where they resettled but also left a vacuum in the areas they had left (Hopkins 2014, Akseer et al. 2017). In 2016, more than 70 per cent regarded unemployment as the biggest problem facing the youth of Afghanistan (Warren et al. 2016). In this context the informal sector plays an important role in skills development through on-the-job training for youth.

For the formal sector, since 1999 a labour code has been regulating labour relations in Afghanistan according to ILO standards. It includes sections stipulating social protection (ILO 1999). In fact the labour code applies to government and NGO staff, whereas registered private Afghan companies incorporate only parts of the labour code in contracts with employees. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled is meant to safeguard "continued monitoring and guidance of observing labor related laws, safety measures, heavy and hazardous jobs, working times, wages and other benefits" according to Article 146 of the labour code (ILO 1999). However, during the period 2015 to 2017, the ministry did not function effectively and was known for corruption among its staff.[5] It failed to take an active role in enforcing the implementation of the labour code in private Afghan companies.

Labour relations in Afghan construction companies

The following analysis of labour relations in construction companies is based on two exemplary case studies on construction sites in northern Nangarhar

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5   Author's observation during visits at the ministry and reports by World Bank staff working on a collaboration project with the ministry in 2016.

and the northern Balkh region. The research process is first outlined before the cases are analysed.

Research methods and the development of a conflict-sensitive employment framework

The research team conducted a qualitative survey of 40 registered construction companies in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif in 2015 and 2016.[6] The survey included interviews and discussions with company owners and managers, employees of various departments, workers and casual labourers, and was complemented by talks with stakeholders from ministries, the chamber of commerce, construction company associations and experts in order to structurally vary the perspectives. Thematic coding and template analyses served to determine companies' employment practices and rationales in fragile and violence-affected settings. The team identified economic crises, self-protection measures, security measures, corruption by state officials, payments to powerholders, violent attacks, negotiations with local elders, recruitment of local unskilled labour, and skilled labour/engineers as the leading themes.

The field research provided insights into company practices that reduced violent conflict as well as practices that exacerbated violence. In 2017 the research team conducted a workshop with five company owners that applied conflict-reducing measures to improve the companies' operational security, among them specific employment strategies. The result was a comprehensive definition of CSE, which included the following criteria: creating jobs where unemployment is a problem; preferential employment of local inhabitants wherever possible; avoidance of a hire-and-fire approach; ensuring that jobs allow employees to build a future (for example, by skills training on the job); inclusive employment in order to prevent discrimination (which in fragile and violence-affected settings can easily lead to re-engagement in armed conflict); and compliance with the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) standards for decent work (ILO 2016). CSE is thus a way of gradually altering the labour relations that prevailed during armed conflict.

Subsequently the team drafted a CSE framework that systematically listed the measures applied by Afghan construction companies operating in the fragile and violence-affected settings of Afghanistan (Grawert et al. 2017a). The CSE framework was tested on four construction sites in rural districts of Nangarhar, Balkh, Herat and Kabul regions. The Liaison Office (TLO), the Afghan project partner, selected local researchers who were able to move in Tali-

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6   Researchers of the TLO – mainly Rahmatullah Amiri, Taqi Amini and Mohammad Murtaza Haqeeqat – as well as the then Master's student in Economics Fazalrabi Shirzad conducted most of the interviews for the survey in Afghanistan.

ban-controlled areas to conduct interviews with community members, local elders and company employees. Whereas this proved to be a viable solution to overcome the inaccessibility of these areas for the research team, the effect was that some potentially interesting aspects, such as the perspectives of unemployed inhabitants and excluded groups, were not adequately covered. On this basis, the team developed the CSE framework further, translated it into Pashto and Dari and spread it to stakeholders in Afghanistan.

The two selected cases for this paper represent companies that have developed deliberate strategies of dealing with the insecure environment and have fared well compared to many other formally registered construction companies.

Case Study: Two construction companies 2015–2017

The economic crisis following the withdrawal of international troops and agencies between 2012 and 2014 severely affected employment in the formally registered Afghan construction companies that had been sub-contractors of international companies contracted by international agencies and the ISAF. These Afghan companies had made investments in modern equipment to construct airports, army bases, city buildings and roads, developed engineering knowledge and increased their standards. Due to the sharp decrease in demand after 2012 many of them closed down their businesses or laid off a large portion of their personnel. According to an estimate by a member of the construction companies' association in Herat, 80 per cent of the construction companies had closed down by 2015 (author's interview, November 2015). Competition became harder; corruption in procurement increased and more operations had to be carried out in violence-affected settings. Extra payments, due to demands for bribes by government officials and for protection money by armed groups, further constrained companies so that managers were compelled to reduce wages and salaries, keep investment in workers' safety low and economise on the social protection of workers' families. For Afghan construction companies the costs of completing projects in government-controlled areas were more difficult to calculate than in Taliban-controlled areas, as they depended on arbitrary decisions by state officials. Taliban groups usually levied ten per cent of the project budget or income as a tax on companies, shopkeepers and farmers. Company owners reported that this amount was fixed and thus easy to calculate as long as there was no competing armed group that also demanded its share and no incidences that the armed groups considered as a disturbance. Otherwise they would threaten the company owners or managers, kidnap them or engineers working on site, burn premises or destroy the company's equipment (Grawert / Shirzad 2017: 27–29).

The two cases in focus are a road construction project connecting two villages east of Kabul on the way to Jalalabad, contracted by the Ministry of

Public Works, and a project to erect a three-storey building and sports grounds for a boys' school in Dara-i-Nur district in northern Nangarhar region, contracted by the construction directorate of the Ministry of Education. The companies carrying out these projects were founded in 2009 and 2011 and have their headquarters in Kabul. Both companies had laid off staff due to the crisis. In 2016 the road-constructing company had 12 permanent employees, among them relatives of the owner. Experience and merit were relevant employment criteria, but honesty and trust were equally important. The five engineers received relatively high salaries as they got additional allowances for working in a conflict area.

The owner of the company conducting the school project was a civil engineer who acted as company manager. The company had 15 employees and constructed buildings and roads in several provinces south-east and north-east of Kabul, partly through sub-contractors. Both companies hired between 80 and 120 temporary workers from the communities around the construction sites according to their varying needs. Established connections of the company owners with the *maleks* (village chiefs) and *khans* (tribal chiefs)[7] of the area were important in selecting the local workers.

Both construction sites were located in largely Taliban-controlled areas at the time of the research. Taliban groups tolerated government-funded projects as long as there was no presence of government forces. In the district in northern Nangarhar several clashes between government troops, police officers and Taliban had occurred prior to the project start; five policemen had been killed. When the road project started, no incidences occurred until national police officers visited the construction site. The local Taliban group immediately responded with an attack on the camp of the company's security guards, signalling that they refused any intervention by Afghan security forces.

The school project did not face any large-scale incidence of violence although there was occasional fighting between government troops and the Taliban and clashes between the Taliban and the Haqqani network in the area. One local worker explained:

> The security situation of our district is getting worse day by day. In the past, we had good security and there weren't any anti-government troops and armed groups in our area, but now there are so many armed people active in certain parts of our district. In the area where they are building the school the security is bad at night and in the morning; only in the afternoon is the security usually good. The control of this area is in the hands of the Taliban and the Haqqani network. Frequently there is fighting between these groups and government, but no one wins the war. Livestock and innocent people are killed and people cannot do their daily work (interview with a local construction worker, school project, Dara-i-Nur district, May 2017).

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7   *Maleks* and *khans* have the roles of intermediaries with formal authorities and conflict mediators mostly in rural areas of Afghanistan (Kraemer 2010).

This explanation indicates that local residents live under the continuous threat of losing their lives or their livestock when moving around in the area to pursue their livelihood activities. In this case, government officials and organisations targeted by armed Taliban groups did not visit the area as it was known that the majority of the residents were followers of the local Taliban group. Official visitors would have incurred a high risk of being kidnapped or killed.

Self-protection measures by construction companies

To protect their staff, assets and the project, the road construction company hired 60 guards from a private security company. The company manager visited the local elders together with the head of the security company to get their approval. Nevertheless, the local Taliban group remained suspicious and attacked the camp of the security guards as a response to the visit of national police officers.

The school construction company faced a particularly high risk as its project was funded by USAID, one of the main targets of the Taliban. The project budget did not include funds for security costs and the company would incur a penalty if it did not finish the project within two years. The management did not consider it safe enough to rely on the Afghan police for protection of the construction site and staff and contracted 15 armed local security guards at its own expense upon the recommendation of the local tribal elders. Each guard was paid differently based on rank, experience and responsibilities, around 20,000 AFN (USD 290) on average per month. The guards received guns from the district security commander; it was the responsibility of the elders to make sure that they would return the guns after finishing the contract. Among the security guards were local farmers who depended on leasing land. For landless people the income as a security guard was attractive. A further selection criterion was previous experience as a guard.

Compliance with the employment recommendations of the elders guaranteed the company the loyalty of the guards and hence, protection in the volatile environment. From the perspective of risk avoidance, the cost for local security guards was negligible compared to the cost of ransoming kidnapped staff or replacing destroyed machines or demolished construction. This measure of self-protection on the part of the company benefited local residents, who obtained comparatively well-paid job opportunities, albeit only as long as the company was operating in the area.

In neither case did the companies follow Presidential Decree 44, valid since 2014, which states that private companies have to hire security guards through the Afghan Public Protection Force. The reason was that in Taliban-controlled areas, security guards deployed through any government force were targets of attack and would thus increase insecurity for companies operating in these

areas. Apparently Decree 44 was not enforced and its violation did not occur to the company managers as a cost factor.

The most important means of self-protection was negotiating access with the powerholders of the districts as mediated by the local elders. Those companies in the survey who had not taken the time for such negotiations reported incidences of kidnapping, destruction of equipment or already built parts of construction, and repeated attacks. In the rural areas of Afghanistan, the local –sometimes tribal – elders are the intermediaries between company representatives and the powerholders that control the area. The managers of the two companies visited the elders about two months prior to the start of the work to convince them of the projects' benefits for the livelihood of the local people. The manager of the school construction project was accompanied by one government official and engineers and also met influential individuals from the area, the community development council, the district development assembly and the tribal council to win their support and cooperation. The team explained how the community would benefit from education and from the permanent employment of staff running the school: teachers, cleaners and others. As an immediate incentive the company offered to hire local workers for construction and to use resources such as bricks, crushed rock and wood produced in the area; it would also rent local trucks.

In both cases the company managers paid money from their own funds through the local elders to the Taliban group dominating the area so that the construction work could be completed without disturbance. The amount was subject to an agreement between the parties. The Taliban instructed the local elders about what was permitted and what was not and made sure that no company activity would contradict Islam. In both cases the companies started their projects only after the elders had obtained the agreement of the local Taliban leaders.

Labour relations between employers and skilled employees

Engineers fear being killed or kidnapped when they have to move to sites in Taliban-controlled areas. They are generally reluctant to join construction projects in areas outside government control. Hence, construction companies in Afghanistan have a major problem finding professional engineers for the technical work. Although engineers receive an allowance when working in risky areas, they do not feel sufficiently protected. One engineer suggested introducing an insurance policy that covers the heightened risk for skilled labour of working in violence-affected settings. The mobility of skilled employees thus has its price. Skilled labour has some leeway for negotiation and may quit a contract if the working environment appears to be too difficult. This became evident after Taliban attacked the security camp of the road construct-

ing company. Asphalting slowed down as engineers and other staff members feared further attacks and came only reluctantly to work or gave notice. The incident had the consequence that the project could not be completed on time.

The lack of insurance for skilled labour reveals that the government of Afghanistan has failed to safeguard the implementation of the labour code in private Afghan companies. Deficient law enforcement is characteristic of fragile settings. In this case it hampers the recruitment and advancement of skilled labour in the construction sector.

Labour relations between employers and local workers

Most local residents around the construction sites were illiterate and had been working as casual labourers in construction, in the fruit and vegetable market, on farms and in cleaning jobs. The educated inhabitants of the district had largely moved away to work in the capital of the province, Mazar-i-Sharif. The road construction company paid wages of 200 AFN (USD 2.90) for unskilled and up to 1,000 AFN (USD 14.50) per day for workers with some skills. Labourers that already had connections with the contractor and experiences in previous projects and workers recommended by the community elders and other influential people were hired preferentially. The crucial role of relationships as a pre-condition for access to jobs was reflected in labour relations, as the report of a truck driver shows:

> We are not hired based on a paper or written contract but we are hired based on a verbal contract, which only talks about what our job is going to be but not about the details of our responsibilities. Therefore, when I started working my responsibilities were not limited to being a driver nor were my working hours as expected and I had to perform many other responsibilities in my free time and work till late at night (interview with a truck driver, school project, Dara-i-Nur dirstrict, May 2017).

Informal labour relations without contracts and mostly on a daily basis prevailed on site, even though the construction company itself was part of the formal sector. Construction companies also did not allot workers particular tasks but used them for a broad range of duties, as another worker confirmed:

> It has been almost seven years now that I have been working in different projects and in different areas – in our village, in Mazar-i-Sharif and in Kabul. I work in this project as a labourer. My responsibility is to do anything required by the site supervisor. I have to do many different things; I bring the water, start the generator, clean up the area and sometimes I even cook lunch for all the labourers. I mix the cement and sand and have so many other responsibilities (interview with a local construction worker, school project, Dara-i-Nur district, July 2017).

Mobility was natural for this young worker and on his job he showed great flexibility. However, the job was precarious and his future uncertain:

> I really don't know what the future holds for me. I might get another job as a labourer, but one thing is sure: I won't find jobs here, because only one construction site is here and thousands of people are looking for work. Hence, once I am done with this job, I will go to my land. I have a garden of peaches, and by that time the peaches will be ready for transport. I will do that, and that will take around a month of time. After that I will see what happens; to be honest, I don't know as of now (interview with a local construction worker, school project, Dara-i-Nur district, July 2017).

The workers were aware that the company did not comply with any standards regarding the safety precautions required in construction. One worker explained:

> There should be safety caps, safety working tools, safety gloves, safety shoes, safety clothes, safety glasses. Currently we do not have even one of them. We use outdated or damaged tools. I can't say how much it would cost, because I have never purchased these things, but all I can say is that it might not cost a lot of money (interview with a local construction worker, school project, Dara-i-Nur district, July 2017).

The lack of a written contract or clear job description or safety protection is characteristic for labour relations involving patron-client relationships. Another local worker confirmed the precarious position the informal job entailed and reflected on the role of the current job in reaching his aims for the future:

> I am an original resident of this village and currently work as a labourer on this project. My job is to provide water, mix cement with sand and bring it to the mason. Sometimes I bring bricks for the mason, as well. Before I got this job I used to travel to Mazar-i-Sharif to find jobs in construction sites, mostly during the summer season. Now, as I got the job here, I do not travel any more, but the problem is that this job is not permanent. Whenever the construction work ends I will be jobless. I do not have any contract with the company. They have hired me verbally and pay me daily, sometimes weekly. My plan is that once I earn a bit of money from this job, I will start a shop here. My plan is to bring items from Mazar-i-Sharif and sell them here. We have a weekly bazaar and everybody comes on that day to purchase the things they need. My plan is to keep my shop open for the whole week. For that I will need about 50,000 AFN (about USD 730). I already have the space and other things required; I only need this money to purchase items and bring them here (interview with a local construction worker, school project, Dara-i-Nur district, July 2017).

For this worker, the temporary presence of the construction company provided an opportunity to earn money locally and avoid travelling to town for casual work. However, as for many others, wages were too low to make significant savings. The lack of a contract created uncertainty and the income perspective after the end of the construction project was bleak.

Elements of CSE

Both construction companies hired almost all the local workers the elders recommended, around 90 individuals each, which made up about half of the total labour force working on the projects. The elders deliberately chose work-

ers from different ethnic and social groups so that the companies would have the consent and support of all the relevant groups for their projects. Whenever the companies faced a problem with a local worker they discussed the issue with the local elders before making a decision about firing anybody. Through these precautions the companies made sure that there was no bias in employment that could cause or enhance violent conflict. These measures enhanced the companies' security and increased the legitimacy of their activities. Hiring local workers provided immediately visible benefits to the communities as the workers received wages, acknowledged the value of the project they contributed to and communicated this positively within their social environment. When community inhabitants had misconceptions about the companies' work or the aims of the projects, the local workers would defend the companies and explain the aim and benefits of the construction to the communities. Moreover, hiring local youths prevented young men from joining armed groups, as they were busy working and getting paid.

However, several local workers considered their wages too low in relation to the risks they took and some were not employed according to their abilities. Moreover, the local workers were hired on a daily basis and were not guaranteed any continuation of the job. Due to the dependence on the consent of the elders, the company managers hardly had any leverage over workers they considered lazy or that did not obey the orders of their superiors. Labourers were tempted to work less because they knew that they would be paid anyway. If the companies fired local labourers, the laid-off workers could create problems in the name of the Taliban. Out of fear of violence and destruction through angry local inhabitants the construction companies thus kept the local workers even if they did not perform well. The managers would instead fire one of the migrants for being lazy so that the local workers would learn from this and work harder. Obviously the violence-affected setting provides local workers with a certain leeway towards the employers, as the companies are entangled in the local networks in which the elders play a significant role. The networks are linked to the local Taliban leaders, who serve as patrons controlling the economic activities of external, mobile companies.

The main elements of CSE that apply here are the creation of jobs where unemployment is a problem and inclusive employment in order to prevent discrimination and to pre-empt the involvement of local inhabitants in violent organisations. However, as the workers are only employed for casual work, the company uses a hire-and-fire approach, which contradicts the intention of CSE to reduce conflict in the mid- and long-term. The companies also do not ensure that the workers gain skills on the job that they can use for future employment. Does this suffice to gradually alter the labour relations that prevailed during armed conflict?

Conclusion and outlook

The paper focused on construction as a sector that combines mobility and immobility and addressed the question of how this particularity affects labour relations in fragile and violence-affected settings. It showed that construction companies are mobile actors that have to temporarily integrate in local political-economic environments to implement their projects. This requires interaction with a range of stakeholders. In the case of Afghanistan, companies firstly have to comply with (corrupt) state authorities and budget a certain amount for bribes to obtain a contract for a construction project. Secondly, companies pay protection money to the locally powerful armed groups – here groups of Taliban. Thirdly, company managers interact closely with the local elders, *khans* and *maleks*, the tribal and community development councils and sometimes the district development assembly – all of whom act as intermediaries between the managers and the powerholders. In addition, the managers engage private security companies or local security guards. Last but not least they hire different groups of local residents, among them labour migrants and permanent inhabitants, as casual labour.

The local elders appear as strong "immobile" actors with the role of gatekeepers and hence the power to safeguard benefits for themselves. They play a vital role in legitimising companies' projects and gaining the local population's and powerholders' support for construction projects. Influential individuals such as a member of parliament or the provincial council or a commander of the local armed group form a second tier of support. District development assemblies and community development councils are the third-most important institution to which company managers may turn to facilitate the implementation of a construction project in a conflict-sensitive manner.

Afghan construction companies are thus drawn into the local political marketplace as soon as they arrive at the intended construction site. Managers comply with the conditions negotiated with the local elders and stay connected with them throughout the project to gain protection for their building sites. They also benefit from their relationships with the elders in order to find "the right workers". These comprise local inhabitants with the required experience and abilities, individuals whose welfare must be benefitted so that they will not create trouble and relatives of influential persons (including the elders) that are eligible for a special favour. The demand not only for capable construction workers but also for armed guards, local construction material, workshops, restaurants and hotels expands the employment opportunities readily grasped by local inhabitants.

These opportunities are provided in line with the principles of CSE, which include the creation of jobs through hiring local labour without creating any

bias that might lead to violent conflicts. Apparently the authority of the elders is sufficiently strong to strike a balance between the requirements of the company and the local inhabitants. The labour relations are thus shaped by a limited leeway of the managers with regard to choice and treatment of labour. Here the interplay between mobile and immobile actors comes in. The elders are community representatives with their own interests that differ from the business interests of the managers. The elders' interests range from enhancing social cohesion through jobs for community inhabitants to favouring certain individuals. The elders' leeway to put pressure on Afghan companies is high; they may extort materials or money from them in the name of the powerholder in the background or for their own benefit. As construction companies are not embedded in a particular community, they do not have established relationships with the local powerholder. Hence, the mobile, temporarily present construction companies and their mobile skilled employees are confronted with local, mostly immobile unskilled workers/peasants who are linked in one way or the other to local networks, with the elders as relatively powerful nodes. As the mobile actors are easily suspected of collaborating with the government they are particularly vulnerable to the potential of violence looming in Afghanistan's Taliban-controlled rural districts.

The case studies showed that in the fragile and violence-affected settings of Afghanistan companies rely on trust-based relationships and hence favour the employment of family members and kin. The need to operate in non-familiar areas leads to the extension of trust-building beyond family networks, preferably with people living around the construction sites. The negative side of the endeavours of building personal relationships and trust is the lack of written contracts, fixed working times and clear assignments that cannot arbitrarily be extended. Labour relations are thus incorporated in two-fold patron-client relationships – between the workers and employers as well as with the local elders (with the powerholders of the area in the background).

Whereas these relationships seem to reinforce the loyalties that persisted during the time of war, the role of the construction business as a driver of change should not be underestimated. The case studies show that local inhabitants appreciate the opportunity for jobs even if they are only temporary and poorly paid. They are no longer caught up in coercive labour relations but are even able to criticise the working conditions, the lack of training opportunities and the informality of the labour relations. They sometimes make use of the checks and balances imposed on the managers by the elders, working slowly or performing poorly without risk of being fired. Low wages and the exploitative use of the labour force can thus backfire; workers can commit acts of sabotage or attacks in collusion with the local armed group.

Hence, in the violence-affected settings of Afghanistan construction companies cannot act arbitrarily upon local labour and determine labour relations

unchecked. They adopt CSE approaches as an outcome of their relationships with the elders and driven by their own security interests. The case studies revealed that companies are under pressure to improve labour conditions as soon as local workers and elders ally and challenge the employers to provide the workers with more safety in the workplace, training, insurance and future perspectives. There is scope to improve labour relations in favour of the workers where Afghan companies, local elders and community development councils cooperate. This may gradually lead away from the personal ties that characterise business activities in fragile and violence-affected settings. Afghan companies may bring some of these issues to the government authorities that contract them for construction projects so that they include additional items in the budget. Donors such as the World Bank, which supply considerable funds to the government of Afghanistan, may consider this in future programmes.

Beyond the fact that the mobility of construction companies brings new dimensions of labour relations to rural areas, the construction itself can be a driver of change. Long after the company will have left the site, roads and schools and other infrastructure projects will still connect scattered villages and inhabitants and provide the basis for small businesses, more employment and education opportunities. The mobility of construction companies hence works as a catalyst for change that reaches the remote areas of the country.

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Nations Rebound: German Politics of Deporting Afghans

Martin Sökefeld

Abstract

This article traces the development of German politics of deporting Afghans. Since the great influx of refugees in 2015 – which doubled the number of Afghans in Germany – the asylum acceptance rate of Afghan refugees has been reduced while at the same time the government has made efforts to increase the number of deportations, arguing that parts of Afghanistan are "safe" for deportees, in spite of increasing violence in the country. Using a logic of deservingness, politicians maintain that the only persons deported are those who refuse to "integrate". In fact, however, more "well-integrated" Afghans are deported than persons with a criminal record. Within the context of an increasingly restrictive asylum system, the emphasis on deportations has to be understood as an attempt to counter the rise of right-wing populism in Germany. Yet activists who support individual refugees and rejected asylum seekers, trying to prevent their deportation, increasingly contest this approach. By pointing out that particular persons who are threatened by deportation are "well integrated" and therefore deserve to stay, these activists essentially accept and reinforce the logic of deservingness. The article argues that the deportee epitomises the current reterritorialisation of nation-states and global system of unequal (im)mobility.

Keywords: Deportation, refugees, deservingness, asylum, politics, Afghanistan, Germany

Introduction

At the beginning of the 1990s a new paradigm began to dominate migration studies: transnationalism. Migration could no longer be conceptualised exclusively as a unidirectional movement governed by push and pull factors. The figure of the transmigrant entered academic discourse: someone who moves back and forth between different national spaces and is almost equally integrated in two or more national societies. These were the heady days of neo-liberal globalisation euphoria after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when time and space appeared to become increasingly compressed and the world shrank

into a global village inhabited by cosmopolitan citizens. Almost without hindrances, goods, capital, ideas and to a lesser extent also people seemed to cross national boundaries, which in any case were soon expected to lose all significance. Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, who were among the leading protagonists developing the transnationalism paradigm, published, along with many articles, a book with the programmatic title *Nations Unbound*. While the authors certainly did not argue that national borders had lost their significance, they emphasised transmigration and the deterritorialisation of the nation-state.

Thirty years on the world has changed dramatically. Globalisation euphoria is certainly a thing of the past. While capital still flows around the globe with great ease, many people increasingly view these flows as pernicious. And although many people are on the move – perhaps more than ever – all manner of attempts are made to limit and direct their flow. States erect walls and fences at their borders and tighten border controls to prevent immigration. Through increasingly ingenious instruments and techniques of surveillance, bordering is no longer simply a matter of the external margins of states and nations. "Everyday bordering" can occur anywhere within a national space (Yuval-Davis et al. 2017, Strasser / Tibet 2019). An (almost) global wave of populism (Brubaker 2017) redefines societies in essentialist and reterritorialising terms, vowing to stop immigration and to exclude and even to expel people regarded as aliens. Those who are granted the right stay have to earn their "deservingness" by submitting themselves to a regime of "integration". Concomitantly, border studies have gained substantial prominence in academia.

Nations have been "re-bound"; states are reterritorialised. Accordingly, transnationalism studies also increasingly reemphasise the state and state practices of bordering (Glick Schiller 2007: 456f). Today, somewhat symbolically, the epitomising figure of migration is no longer the "transmigrant" but the "deportee" – the deportee whose removal is required in order to maintain the sovereign order of the territorial nation-state.

Although four years have passed since the "summer of migration" (Hess et al. 2017) the "refugee issue" continues to dominate political debates in Germany to a large extent, also because new right-wing parties and organisations have entered the scene. Discourse about refugees is increasingly dominated by the question of deportation. Compared to the number of new arrivals, the number of actual, "successful" deportations is quite low: in 2018, around 57,000 persons were scheduled for deportation from Germany, but in almost 31,000 cases the deportation could not be carried out, for various reasons (Spiegel 2019). But the government is attempting to increase the number of deportations. At the time of writing in spring 2019, the Ministry of Interior was drafting a "Law of Orderly Return" (*Geordnete Rückkehrgesetz*) that not only intends to further limit the rights of migrants without a secure right of

residency, but also to criminalise activists who support rejected asylum-seekers bound for deportation. According to the first draft of the law, activists and civil society organisations that leak the news of imminent deportation to migrants will be held accountable and may be sentenced to up to three years in prison.[1] This provision reveals a fundamental conflict between government institutions and anti-deportation activists over the issue. In May 2018 Alexander Dobrindt, the leader of the Christian Social Union faction in the German Parliament (CSU, the conservative regional party of Bavaria), coined the contemptuous term "anti-deportation industries" (*Anti-Abschiebe-Industrie*) to refer to lawyers and activists who attempt to prevent deportations (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2018a). From the perspective of the government and its supporters, deportation has become a significant issue where both the territorial sovereignty of the state and the rule of law need to be maintained. Yet in early 2019, a commission of linguists selected the term as the "non-word of the year 2018" (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2019a), again revealing fundamental disagreement over deportation policies. Deportations to Afghanistan, in particular, have become highly controversial. While the government reiterates that parts of Afghanistan are safe enough for deportees – in spite of the fact that two years after the bombing of the German embassy in Kabul, Germany still does not have a fully operating diplomatic representation in the country – refugee support activists emphasise that nowhere in Afghanistan is safe, particularly for deportees from Europe.

In this article, I will first briefly survey current research on deportation in the social sciences before turning to recent shifts in German policies of deportation in general and to the deportation of Afghans in particular, which is also intended to counter anti-refugee right-wing populism. Finally, I will analyse activism for the prevention of the deportation of Afghans in Bavaria, arguing that this activism often affirms the dominant logics of integration and deservingness, thus resorting to what I call strategic integrationism.

Deportation studies

The study of borders and border regimes has emphasised that globalisation has by no means dissolved national boundaries and enabled general mobility. On the contrary, borders have been tightened to serve the channelling function of granting passage to some while stopping others (De Genova / Peutz

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1   In its final version, the law defines dates of deportations as state secrets, the disclosure of which is a criminal offence. While this provision is aimed primarily at officials, also activists that instigate the disclosure of such information are criminalised. Dunja Mijatović, Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe, strongly criticised this provision (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2019b). For a critical assessment of the law see also Hruschka 2019.

2010, Tsianos / Karakayali 2010, Fassin 2011). Further, borders not only mark the margins of states but increasingly structure societies and their practices as a whole (Yuval-Davis et al. 2017). Thus, the "mobility paradigm" (Sheller / Urry 2006, Urry 2007) requires a decisive qualification exemplified by the figure of the refugee: borderless mobility does not apply to everyone; refugees' crossing of borders is unwelcome and "illegal" and they are subjected to detailed determinations of whether or not they deserve admission (Holmes / Castañeda 2016, Yarris / Castañeda 2015, Chauvin / Garcés-Mascareñas 2014). During these determinations and afterwards, refugees are often immobilised in camps and confined before being physically deported. While the neoliberal regime produces those global inequalities that increasingly compel people to resort to strategies of refugee-migration in order to gain security, including the chance to secure a livelihood, the states of the north increasingly adopt programmes of remigration or deportation to reduce the number of migrants and to serve as a deterrence. Research has shown, however, that this deterrence rarely works: for many migrants, deportation or remigration is merely the beginning of the next cycle of migration (Khosravi 2016, Schuster / Majidi 2013).

Ultimately, deportation and remigration serve the purpose of maintaining north-south inequality (and inequity) through the establishment of a pervasive and strictly selective border regime.[2] Deportation prevents the labour of the global south from taking part in the wealth of the north and maintains a stable pay gap between North and South (Khosravi 2017, Golash-Boza 2015). The exclusion of "economic refugees" is crucial for upholding the distinction between "desired/legal" and "undesired/illegal" migrants, between "good" and "bad" refugees, between those who "deserve" protection and those who are considered undeserving because they have escaped only from unfavourable economic conditions. Deservingness is the central category of this distinction[3] and also plays a central role in the German government's decisions about deportations to Afghanistan, as I will show below.

Research on deportation and (more or less voluntary) remigration has become an important part of the study of migration and (im)mobility. It shows that deportation and remigration take place within a complex field of practices, structures, expectations and power relations in local, national and transnational contexts. A neat analytical distinction between "refugees" and "migrants" is as impossible as is the distinction between deportation and remigration – unless one uncritically accepts the premises of the asylum system that stipulates that only "genuine refugees" deserve protection and ac-

2   See Collyer 2017, Khosravi 2017a, De Genova 2016, Drotbohm / Hasselberg 2015: 552ff, Golash-Boza 2015, Casas-Cortes et al. 2014, Fassin 2011, De Genova / Peutz 2010, Hess / Kasparek 2010, Shamir 2005.
3   See Holmes / Castañeda 2016, Yarris / Castañeda 2015, Chauvin / Garcés-Mascareñas 2014, Coutin 2000: 11.

commodation.[4] "Voluntary" remigration may just be a desperate strategy to escape deportation, as deportations come with high costs for the deportees. Not only is the deportation often a traumatising experience itself, but deportees are banned from re-entering Germany and the Schengen area for at least five years and they have to pay the expenses of their deportation before being able to apply for a visa to Germany. Migrants who re-enter Germany "illegally" after having been deported may be sentenced to up to three years in prison.

Peutz (2006) calls for an anthropology of removal that examines the deportation regime. The danger of deportation looms over migrants in all stages of migration, during which they run the danger of being detained and ultimately removed. This is often a condition of extended periods of waiting and insecurity (Griffiths 2014, Lakha 2009), not necessarily governed by comprehensible rules, that establishes the migrant's state of "deportability" (De Genova 2016). This article contributes to the anthropology of removal by taking up the specific case of deportations from Germany to Afghanistan. To provide some context, however, a more general look at asylum and deportation politics and policies in Germany is required first.

Recent politics of deportation in Germany

Deportations have often been controversial, especially in Germany after the ruthless deportation regime of the Nazi government. While historically deportation was an instrument for the expulsion of foreign criminals and a means to prevent aliens from disturbing the public order (Paoletti 2010: 8), in recent decades it has become an instrument for the control and "management" of migration and is considered necessary and legitimate by governments (Schuster 2005). Paoletti thus speaks of a "deportation turn" in which "deportation has emerged as a form of state practice distinct from other forms of expulsion as a way to deal with failed asylum seekers as well as foreigners convicted of crimes" (Paoletti 2010: 8). "Deportation today is not an exception, but rather a normalised and distinct form of state power," writes Ines Hasselberg (2016: 1). The ability to allow or deny non-citizens the right to stay in a country is seen as a fundamental aspect of state sovereignty. Yet because only those who refuse to leave a country "voluntarily" are deported, deportation is always an act of force that violates the autonomy of a person. For many migrants who lack the secure right to stay, deportation is a continuous existential threat. In order to cover up this violence to some extent, governments and bureaucrats often use "softer" terms. In Germany, for instance, politicians increasingly

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4   For a critical review of the debate about the refugee-migrant dichotomy see Crawley / Skleparis 2018.

use the term *Rückführung* ("repatriation") instead of *Abschiebung* ("deportation").

The 1990s were the decade of the deportation turn in Germany. With the cold war ending, the situation of asylum changed fundamentally: what had before mainly been an opportunity for dissidents from the socialist states now became largely an avenue of migration for people from the global south. As the grievances of many refugees coming to Germany did not fit the legal definition of asylum or their experiences of persecution and threats were doubted, few of them were granted asylum. Since the late 1980s, the figure of the *Wirtschaftsflüchtling* ("economic refugee") and the *Scheinasylant* ("bogus refugee") who purportedly misused the asylum system rose to prominence in German political discourse. Governmental policies of asylum became almost exclusively geared at reducing the numbers of claims and grants of asylum. In principle, all those who were not granted asylum had to leave the country and were potential deportees.

The politics of asylum (and of migration in general) has always been highly contentious in Germany. Right wing mobilisation has been a standard result of growing numbers of refugees and immigrants. The early 1990s were notorious for racist attacks on immigrants in Germany, some of them with deadly results, as well as for electoral gains of extreme right parties.[5] The government tried to pre-empt such reactions by introducing limitations to the right of asylum (Ellermann 2009: 54f). Thus, among other things, the *Asylkompromiss* ("asylum compromise") of 1993 introduced the notion of "safe third countries": if a refugee entered Germany from such a country, he or she had no right to asylum and had to return to the other country. This was a kind of predecessor to the EU's Dublin Regulation. As all neighbouring countries were regarded as safe, no refugee coming on a land route to Germany could claim asylum in the country.

For many years, the German government did not centrally publish numbers of deportations. Figures had to be gathered from different sources, most importantly from the government's responses to enquiries by Members of Parliament (Schuster 2005: 610). According to figures going back to 1990 which were published in 2015 by the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees), the number of deportations peaked in 1993 (47,070) and 1994 (53,043) but gradually decreased to less than 10,000 per year until 2012 (BAMF 2015: 141). There is a certain parallel between the numbers of deportations and the numbers of new applications for asylum (which, mainly due to the disintegration of Yugoslavia also peaked in 1992 with nearly 440,000 applicants). Yet the curve of deportations lagged behind the curve of arrivals and new applications and never reached

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5   For an analysis of the dynamics of right-extreme mobilisation against refugees see Rucht 2018.

the same heights. Beginning in 2015 the deportation curve surged again (Statista 2019). The great majority of deportations since 2015 have involved persons from the Balkan states (Deutscher Bundestag 2016a), while figures of deportations to non-European countries remain low.

Legally and administratively, deportation is a complicated matter in Germany. For various reasons, most persons whose application for asylum is rejected are not deported and many of them get a *Duldung* (literally a "toleration"), a short-term permit that needs to be renewed frequently. Legally, a *Duldung* is just a temporary suspension of deportation. Persons get a *Duldung* if their deportation is impossible, for instance because their identity is unclear, they lack the papers to enter their country of nationality or that country is not willing to allow their entry, but also for humanitarian reasons including the state of health. Persons also cannot be deported to countries where they are expected to suffer any serious harm. Only deportations to those countries that have been legally categorised as "safe states of origin", i.e. where it is assumed that there is neither personal political persecution nor degrading or inhuman treatment or punishment, are relatively straightforward.

Already before the "summer of migration" of 2015 with its all-time peak of new entries and 476,649 new applications for asylum (BAMF 2016: 10), numbers had risen considerably. In 2014 some 202,834 applications were submitted, almost one third of them by persons from the West Balkan states with hardly any prospect of being granted asylum. The number of persons with a *Duldung* grew, because only a few of those who did not get asylum left the country. In order to reduce the number of persons under *Duldung* and to increase the number of deportations, the Federal Government drafted a law in early summer 2015 on "the right to stay and the termination of residence". By emphasising the difference between deserving and undeserving refugees, this law set the tone for the subsequent politics of asylum and deportation. The then Federal Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maizière, justified the law with the following words: "This law has two clear messages: the right to stay for well-integrated and law-abiding foreigners, on the one hand, and the termination of residence of those who are not in need of protection, on the other. Both messages belong together" (Schwarze 2015, translation MS).

Later that year, another reaction to the great influx of refugees from, mainly, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in 2015 was the passing of Asylum Package I, which categorised Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro as safe countries. In order to reduce the number of refugees in Germany, the federal government continues to seek to extend the list of "safe countries of origin" and to speed up asylum processes, including possible deportation. Asylum Package I also

prohibits informing deportees of their imminent deportation[6] and introduces the *Abschiebegewahrsam*: the taking of persons into custody for up to four days in order to ensure their deportation (Deutscher Bundestag 2016b: 8). In extreme cases, detention can be extended up to 18 months.

Yet while the federal government sets the guidelines for the politics of deportation and initiates laws, and a federal agency, the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees, BAMF), decides upon asylum applications and issues "deportation orders" (*Abschiebeandrohungen*), the actual implementation of deportations lies in the hands of the federal states, which have a certain legal leeway to follow their own policies. According to Section 60a of the Residence Act, a government of a federal state may suspend deportations of certain national groups for up to three months (Dejure 2019a). If the government wants to suspend deportations beyond this time frame, it may issue resident permits, according to Section 23.1 of the Residence Act (Dejure 2019b). Thus, not all federal states always comply with the guidelines of the federal government – there is instead a great variety of state policies, ranging from lenient Schleswig-Holstein to hard-line Bavaria.

For more than a decade now, the German politics of migration has been governed by an integration paradigm: immigrants and foreigners in general are called to "integrate themselves" by learning German, adapting to local ways of life, etc. This has been a major paradigmatic shift, because the "guest workers" that came to Germany from the 1960s onward were explicitly expected not to integrate but to return as soon as possible to their countries of origin. Beyond the surface, however, the integration paradigm is not integrative but exclusionary, as the call for integration generally emphasises migrants' shortcomings and deficiencies. Thus the call for integration implies they are (not yet) sufficiently integrated (Sökefeld 2007).[7] Since 2015, the integration paradigm has been increasingly applied to newly arriving refugees. A few years ago Heide Castañeda (2010: 258) observed a shift in the conceptualisation of ideas of deservingness in the German asylum system, "moving away from a response to political oppression and increasingly toward policies of compassion in the face of suffering. Today, deservingness is defined chiefly by humanitarian considerations (such as illness or pregnancy), and the state is compelled by notions of compassion and justice." Meanwhile, deservingness in terms of "integration" comes on top of this, as expressed by interior minister De Maizière in the quotation cited above.

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6   In the past, deportees were served deportation notices in advance, which enabled activists to organise solidarity campaigns in order to prevent deportation (Hinger et al. 2018). Furthermore, many rejected asylum-seekers went underground after receiving such notices.

7   For a general critique of the integration paradigm see Schinkel 2018.

Those deemed deserving receive support such as "integration courses" and language training. Deservingness is measured here in terms of the *Bleibeperspektive*, i.e. the probability that a person will be granted protection and stay in Germany. The *Bleibeperspektive*, a concept introduced by Asylum Package I, depends on the percentage of asylum seekers from a particular country that are granted protection. If this "protection quota" (*Schutzquote*), which includes not only asylum but also subsidiary protection, lies above the threshold of 50 per cent, people have a gute *Bleibeperspektive* ("good prospects to stay") and are eligible for language training and other measures of support. While Syrians have good prospects, persons from safe countries of origin do not.[8] The political goal is to prevent them from "integrating" and to return them as soon as possible to their country of origin.

Deporting Afghans

In this context, the deportation of refugees from Afghanistan is particularly contentious. Although Afghans come from a country that for almost four decades has been torn by internal conflict and war, Afghans are not generally granted protection today, in contrast, for instance, to refugees coming from Syria. German asylum politics towards refugees from Afghanistan have become increasingly restrictive. Migration from Afghanistan to Germany started in the 1950s with students and businesspeople, especially carpet merchants (Stroux 2002). With the beginning of the Soviet occupation in 1979 refugees started to come, mostly members of the Western educated elite. Subsequently, other groups began to arrive; after the Taliban came to power these were especially members of the urban middle class, but also rural ethnic and religious minorities.[9] In Europe, Germany was the most important country of destination for Afghan refugees and by 2004, around 40 per cent of persons of Afghan origin in Germany had acquired German citizenship (Baraulina et al. 2007: 8f, Haque 2012).

With the increasing violence in Afghanistan and the opening of the Balkan route in 2015 many more Afghans came to Germany, now mostly single young men and unaccompanied minors. The number of applications from Afghans surged dramatically and reached 127,012 in 2016 (BAMF 2017: 24).[10] Alto-

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8   Like the safe countries of origin, the *Bleibeperspektive* implicates a certain breach in the German logic of asylum: while the right to asylum is strictly conceptualised in terms of individual persecution, which needs to be ascertained individually, the *Bleibeperspektive* depends on a collective frame, irrespective of any individual circumstances.

9   On the emigration and transnational networks of Shia Hazaras from Afghanistan see Monsutti 2012.

10 The figure for 2014 was 9,115, for 2015 it was 31,328. The huge number of applications in 2016 largely results from persons who entered Germany in 2015 but filed their application the following year. In 2017 the figure dropped to 16,423 (BAMF 2018: 21).

gether, around 250,000 Afghans were living in Germany by 2017 and the Government tried to reduce this figure. While in 2015 some 78 per cent of Afghan applicants were accorded protection (either asylum or subsidiary protection) by the BAMF, this rate dropped to 61 per cent in 2016 and 47 per cent in 2017 (Pro Asyl 2019a). This is clearly not the result of an improvement of Afghanistan's security situation, but of increasingly restrictive asylum politics.[11] According to the refugee advocacy organisation Pro Asyl, the Afghans fell prey to the German government's "deterrence strategy" intended to prevent further immigration from Afghanistan (Pro Asyl 2018). At a meeting in Brussels in November 2015, the German Federal Minister of Interior said: "At the moment, our concern is the great number of refugees from Afghanistan. We want to send the signal to Afghanistan: 'Stay there! We will return you directly from Europe to Afghanistan!'" (Bundesministerium des Inneren 2015, translation MS). The Afghans' protection quota therefore fell below the threshold of 50 per cent, leaving them formally without a good *Bleibeperspektive*. This, however, does not take into account the fact that more than 60 per cent of the negative BAMF decisions in Afghan asylum cases that were judicially challenged were corrected by the courts (Pro Asyl 2018, Süddeutsche Zeitung 2018b) – the official *Bleibeperspektive* counts only the BAMF's original decisions.

In December 2002 – that is, one year after NATO troops had started their ISAF engagement in Afghanistan – the conference of the interior ministers of both the federal government and the federal states decided that deportations to Afghanistan would be suspended because of the security situation in the country. Only criminal offenders were exempt from this general suspension of deportation. Many of the Afghans were also accorded an individual *Abschiebeverbot* ("prohibition of deportation"), which often had to be secured in court. Only sporadic deportations of criminal offenders took place: from 2013 to 2015, for instance, less than ten Afghans were deported per year. In 2016, around 3,300 Afghans returned "voluntarily". Given the pressure and electoral success of right-wing mobilisation against refugees in Germany, the federal and several state governments were eager to reduce the number of Afghans by increasing deportations and remigration. The government of Bavaria stood at the forefront, together with the federal government. Arguing that parts of the Afghanistan were safe enough for deportees – also because of the efforts of German troops to enhance security[12] – the federal government signed in October 2016 a "Joint Declaration of Intent on Cooperation in the Field of Migration" with the government of Afghanistan. This declaration was an agree-

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11 According to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, Afghans "faced the largest variation in recognition rates in Europe, with the rate varying from 6% to 98%, depending on the country, with no apparent reason for the divergence lying in the nature of the cases" (ECRE 2019: 1).

12 This was an argument of the Bavarian Minister of Interior Joachim Herrmann; see Spiegel 2016a.

ment for the readmission of rejected asylum-seekers. It referred to the German contributions to "Afghanistan's development and civilian reconstruction effort including the establishment of a high-quality education system, and water and energy supply" and emphasised Germany's "significant support for Afghanistan to build up its military and police force." The declaration reiterated the commitment to the protection of asylum seekers and to refugee rights, stipulating that humanitarian conditions and individual threats to possible returnees would be taken into account, and it also specified that voluntary return should be preferred to deportations. In addition, the practicalities of the re-entry of Afghans were specified, including the documents required and the personnel involved.[13] According to the journal *Der Spiegel*, the German government had threatened to suspend its development aid of several hundred million euros per year if the Afghan government did not sign the agreement (Spiegel 2016b). Similarly, the EU threatened to make its aid to Afghanistan "migration sensitive" by "linking it to the [Afghan] Government's policy on migration and return and possibly to the implementation of the 'Joint Way Forward'", as was revealed through a leaked EU "Non-Paper" on EU-Afghan cooperation (European Commission 2016; see also The Guardian 2016).

Two months later, on 14 December 2016, the first *Sammelabschiebung* ("collective deportation") took place: 34 Afghans were put on a special flight from Frankfurt to Kabul. Originally, the deportation of 50 persons had been planned, but the deportation of some was prevented by emergency appeals to the courts (Spiegel 2016a). At the time of writing in late March 2019, 22 collective deportations have taken place, which altogether have returned 533 men to Afghanistan (Tagesspiegel 2019, Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat 2019a).

The fate of potential deportees largely depends on the federal state in which they are registered. The largest number of deportees comes from Bavaria. The hitherto most notorious deportation took off on 3 July 2018 off from Munich Airport. There were 69 Afghans on the aircraft, 51 of them from Bavaria (Spiegel 2018a). This particular deportation gained particular notoriety because it took place on the birthday of federal minister of interior Horst Seehofer, who at a press conference the next day joked about 69 Afghans being deported on his 69th birthday (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2018c). A few days later, one of the deportees committed suicide in Kabul (Spiegel 2018b). This was also the first deportation after the ministry of foreign affairs had issued a confidential new assessment of the security situation in Afghanistan. Following the devastating bombing of the German Embassy in Kabul on 31 May 2017, which killed at least 150 people and wounded more than 300 (Spiegel 2017a, Süddeutsche Zeitung 2017a), the critical debate about deportations to Afghanistan had gained momentum. A *Sammelabschiebung* that was scheduled

13 The text of the agreement has been made available online by Pro Asyl (2019b).

for take-off on the day of the bomb attack was called off – officially, however, not because of the increasing insecurity in Afghanistan but only because the German embassy was not operative (Tagesspiegel 2017). The federal government refused to issue a general ban on deportations but limited potential deportees to persons with a criminal record, potential terrorists and persons who ostensibly refused to clarify their identity (Spiegel 2017b).[14] Deportations of such persons continued. These restrictions were lifted after a new assessment in summer 2017. On 6 June that year, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared in Parliament that Afghanistan was safe enough for deportees (Spiegel 2018c), in spite of the fact that the country and especially its capital continued to be hit by deadly bomb attacks.

The WHO sees Afghanistan as "one of the most dangerous and crisis-ridden countries in the world" (WHO 2017). The Global Peace Index 2018 ranks Afghanistan at 162 out of 163 countries (Vision of Humanity 2018). According to UNAMA, the UN mission in Afghanistan, the situation in the country continues to worsen: in 2018, the number of civilian casualties reached an unprecedented height (UNAMA 2019). In summer 2018, the UNHCR published new guidelines for the protection of asylum-seekers from Afghanistan. The UN agency concluded that "given the current security, human rights and humanitarian situation in Kabul, an IFA/IRA [Internal flight or relocation alternative] is generally not available in the city" (UNHCR 2018: 114), contradicting the statements of the German government and decisions by German courts that the Afghan capital was safe enough for deportees.[15] In her very elaborate expert report on the security situation in Afghanistan, Friederike Stahlmann points out that deportees are particularly vulnerable because they mostly lack the dense family networks that are a prerequisite for both securing a livelihood and general protection in the country (Stahlmann 2018: 152, see also Stahlmann 2017). IOM reports that many returnees have lost contact with their families and those who have not lost contact are not necessarily accepted by their families when they return (IOM 2014: 24). According to research among returned migrants from Norway and from the UK, most returnees live under constant fear, even if they are not personally threatened, and many do not dare to go out (Oeppen / Majidi 2015: 3). A long-term study by Schuster and Majidi (2013), drawing on a sample of 100 returnees in Afghanistan, shows that under these conditions returnees and deportees feel forced to leave the country again as soon as possible. Because of this situation, in contrast to Bavaria and Saxony, most of those federal states whose govern-

14 The clarification of identity is particularly difficult for Afghans because there is no standard way of transcribing their names from Pashtu or Dari to German or English. Therefore names frequently differ on transcriptions and translations of Afghan identity documents. German authorities often blame the refugees for this.

15 The assessment that Afghanistan is "safe enough" rests on specific juridical constructions of danger. See Tiedemann 2016.

ments were headed by the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) continued to limit deportations to persons with a criminal record, etc. (Spiegel 2018d).

Bavaria in particular, however, vowed to further increase the pace of deportations without any restrictions. According to a press release published by the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior, only 5 of the 51 Bavarian Afghans on the deportation flight of 3 July 2018 had a criminal record. Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann emphasised that 21 of the deportees had been deported out of custody, thus applauding the detention policy. He further reported that Bavaria would continue to resort to all instruments of deportation because a strong rule of law was needed to enforce the repatriation of unsuccessful asylum applicants: "If in due process the authorities and courts arrive at the conclusion that a person does not have the right to stay in Germany, then his departure has to follow. Only in this way, with a strong rule of law which is determined to enforce the obligation to leave the country, will we safeguard the required acceptance for our system of asylum and the acceptance of those who have been accorded the right to stay and who shall be integrated well" (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Inneren 2018, translation MS).[16] On the same occasion, the minister emphasised that deportations to Afghanistan could be carried out without any restriction.

The minister's statement is a clear example of the twofold strategy to legitimise deportations. First, deserving and undeserving refugees have to be distinguished, assuming that a clear distinction between the two categories is possible, and second, those who are undeserving and therefore have no right to stay in Germany have to leave the country – if necessary, by being deported. According to this reasoning, the unrelenting enforcement of repatriation, deportations included, is the basis for the acceptance of the asylum laws in Germany. In order to mark undeserving asylum seekers, a new vocabulary has been coined that in a way replaced the earlier "bogus asylum seekers" and "economic refugees". Now the *Straftäter* ("criminals"), *Gefährder* ("potential terrorists") and the *hartnäckige Identitätsverweigerer* (persons who refuse to clarify their identity by withholding documents, or who are unsuccessful in procuring documents) exemplify those who do not deserve protection, who pose a danger to German society and who therefore have to be deported even if they may suffer serious harm in the country of deportation. According to the current logic of integration, they have refused to integrate by violating the rules of *Zusammenleben* ("living together") in Germany. They may be deported to Afghanistan even when the situation in the country is obviously unsafe. The question of whether even a criminal has the right to protection from harm

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16 "Wenn Behörden und Gerichte in einem rechtsstaatlichen Verfahren zu dem Ergebnis kommen, dass jemand kein Bleiberecht in Deutschland hat, dann muss seine Ausreise folgen. Nur so, mit einem starken Rechtsstaat, der die Pflicht zur Ausreise unbeirrt umsetzt, erhalten wir die notwendige Akzeptanz für unser Asylsystem und für jene, die hier ein Bleiberecht haben und gut integriert werden sollen."

is never asked. In this argument, safety and security are not fundamental human rights but must be earned and deserved.

According to the president of the Catholic welfare organisation Caritas, Peter Neher, the resumption of collective deportations to Afghanistan had more to do with the atmosphere in Germany and with domestic politics than with the security situation in Afghanistan (Berliner Zeitung 2017). By increasing the pacing of deportations, the government intended to placate and win back those sections of the German electorate that after 2015 turned towards the extreme right and enabled the electoral success of the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). This is particularly true for Bavaria. For decades, Bavaria has been ruled by the conservative CSU and this party in particular feared competition on the right. It attempted to avert the movement of conservative voters to the AfD by executing a determined hard-line policy towards asylum and deportation.

The CSU government's emphasis that rejected asylum-seekers who are considered non-integrated and undeserving have to leave Germany does not imply that those who are integrated are allowed to stay. On the contrary, even persons who by the criteria of the integration paradigm are "well integrated" (i.e. they have a job, go to school or take part in a professional training and have no criminal record) are often selected for deportation. In several cases, for instance, young Afghans have been arrested for deportation in their schools. One may even conclude that these "well integrated" Afghans are especially easy prey for the Bavarian deportation regime because they lead a regular, predictable life. Thus, it is much easier to apprehend them and put them on a plane than a "non-integrated" person who has no regular occupation and can easily abscond.

Antje Ellermann (2005, 2009) has argued convincingly that because deportations are controversial and have the potential to arouse affects and actions of solidarity, governments have increasingly taken efforts to deport people almost invisibly in order to prevent the resistance and suffering of deportees from becoming public. Decisions about deportation are taken by the administration, removed from local politicians who might be held responsible by their electorate. And while earlier deportations were carried out on scheduled flights, often creating public scandal, now special chartered aircraft are invariably used. In Germany in 1999, the campaign "deportation.class" scandalised the public after Aamir Ageeb, a rejected asylum-seeker from Sudan, died of suffocation because of police action on a regular Lufthansa flight.[17] Similarly, deportees are mostly apprehended at night or in the early hours, also in order to prevent public visibility. Yet the great wave of volunteer support for refugees that arose in the summer of 2015 also created a new visibility for deport-

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17 See the (not updated) website http://www.noborder.org/archive/www.deportation-class.com/lh/index.html (accessed 31 March 2019).

ations, as now many more people in Germany have close relations with refugees than ever before.

The CSU and other like-minded politicians did not take into account that the tightening of asylum and deportation policies has perhaps had less of an effect placating voters leaning towards the extreme right than estranging those on the other side of the political spectrum. This at least can be concluded from the results of the Bavarian elections of October 2018, in which the CSU lost more than ten per cent of votes (resulting in the party's loss of absolute majority in the Bavarian parliament) while the refugee-friendly "Green Party" (Die Grünen) gained almost 9 per cent (Spiegel 2018e). The Green Party in fact won around 170,000 votes from erstwhile CSU-voters (Welt 2018), a development that a few years earlier would have been unimaginable. Commentators concluded that the CSU had lost many of its liberal and Christian supporters due to its uncompromising politics of asylum (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2018d). After the so-called "refugee crisis", many German politicians feared the right-wing groups that capitalised on anti-refugee sentiments, but they failed to see that on the other hand a huge number of people in Germany continued their voluntary commitments in support of refugees and even asylum-seekers who had been rejected. Such support includes not only commitments such as voluntary language teaching or assisting refugees in their interaction with the authorities, but also efforts to avert deportations. Also in Bavaria, volunteers try to save rejected asylum-seekers from being deported not only through legal means but also by staging protests and issuing appeals to authorities and politicians.

Resisting deportation

On 31 May 2017, police entered a vocational college in Nuremberg in order to arrest Asef N., a 20-year-old Afghan, for deportation. While the young Afghan at first did not resist and entered the police car to be taken away, a group of his fellow students who realised what was going on sat down in front of the car in order to prevent its departure. More and more students joined and over the following hours, more than 300 students were protesting. Violent clashes with the police followed; the police used pepper spray and their batons and detained some of the protestors. After several hours, Asef N. was taken away while the protests continued. Protestors marched to the Nuremberg foreigner registration office. Civil society organisations and the political opposition vehemently criticised the police for detaining a person out of a classroom. A trade union condemned the "inhuman" approach of the Bavarian government (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2017b, Spiegel 2017c). Authorities had planned to put

Asef N. on the deportation flight that was later called off due to the bomb attack in Kabul. The foreigner registration office wanted to detain him pending later deportation but he was released by a court decision on the following day (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2017c).

This was probably the most spectacular case of protest against the deportation of an Afghan in Bavaria but it was by no means the only effort to prevent deportation. Refugee support organisations such as the Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat ("Bavarian Refugee Council", BFR), the Münchner Flüchtlingsrat ("Munich Refugee Council", MFR) or the Karawane München ("Munich Caravan") circulate dates of deportation flights and sometimes organise protest demonstrations. On 11 September 2018, for instance, several hundred people protested in Munich at the time when a deportation flight was scheduled for take-off to Kabul from Munich Airport. Such organisations also publish legal alerts and information for potential deportees and their supporters to prevent deportation.[18]

Over the recent years, a dense network of volunteers engaged in the support of refugees has grown across Bavaria. They are mostly based in local support organisations, many of them linked to parishes. To exchange information and advice many of them communicate via an email list established in 2015 that includes around one thousand addresses. Many of these emails refer to issues relating to Afghans, like the problem of getting a *tazkira*, an Afghan identity document that is required for many purposes and that is difficult to procure, or of gaining access to the services of the Afghan consulate general in Munich. Also information about imminent deportations, news about Afghans who have been taken into custody for deportation, calls for appeals to the government and politicians and comments on deportation politics are exchanged over the list.

On 27 September 2018, for instance, the news was circulated that another *Sammelabschiebung* was scheduled for 2 October 2018. Later that day it became known that a young Afghan called A. had been arrested for deportation from his school in Passau. Possible protest letters to members of the Bavarian government were disseminated over the email list that in particular pointed out that this arrest contradicted the government's announcements that considerations of proportionality would always be taken into account in decisions of deportation. Many volunteers sent such appeals and made this known on the list. One volunteer reported that a week earlier a CSU member of the Bavarian parliament had refused to support a petition against the arrest of Afghans from schools, arguing that such a thing would never happen anyway. I joined

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18 See, for instance Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat 2019b. While despite the draft of the new deportation law publishing deportation dates is not yet a criminal offence, the government tries to prevent such alerts. In 2018, the Bavarian government threatened to stop public funding of all organisations involved in such counselling. Not only political organisations such as the BFR were threatened in this way but also church-based organisations such as Caritas or Diakonie (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2017d, Münchner Merkur 2017).

the appeals. The next day I got a message from the government that A. had been released from custody. It was explained that A.'s efforts towards education and integration had not been known to the regional government of Lower Bavaria, which was responsible for his detention. The next day it was reported that another Afghan, Mujtaba A., had been detained earlier at the foreigner registration office, where he had gone for the renewal of his *Duldung*. According to the information circulated, he had finished school and had an offer for a workplace and further training. He too was released after appeals had been sent. It's probably no accident that in these cases, which had become known two weeks before the elections, the government took swift action and released the arrested Afghans.

On 4 October 2018, the BFR published an appeal titled "Human Dignity instead of Deportation Hysteria" directed at the electorate in Bavaria. The appeal was supported by 3,000 initiatives and advocacy organisations across Bavaria as well as individual supporters. It called for not voting for anti-refugee parties in the upcoming elections and asked voters to consider also the interests of those who, like refugees, have no right to vote (Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat 2018a).

A month later, another case was intensely discussed among volunteers and activists: on 8 November 2018, an Afghan threatened to jump out of the window when police attempted to arrest him for deportation in an accommodation centre in Bayreuth. After two hours, a lawyer intervened and took him to hospital. He was scheduled for the 18th *Sammelabschiebung* to Afghanistan that took place on 13 November 2018. After the elections, the CSU ministers in government were much less ready to reconsider deportations. The plane took off on 13 November 2018 and according to a press release of the BFR it contained persons with mental illness, students and persons who had been offered training positions but been refused permission by the authorities to take them up (Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat 2018b).[19]

In addition to such actions for the support of individual Afghans threatened by deportation, there are also actions aiming at disseminating the message that Afghanistan is unsafe for anyone. In April 2018, the BFR and Munich Caravan started a "banner action" for this purpose. Initiatives were called to print banners reading "Not Safe – We Demand No Deportations to Afghanistan" and to display them in public spaces. Photographs of these actions were published on a website (Afghanistan Not Safe 2019). This campaign gained particular momentum in summer 2018. Altogether 44 such banners were displayed by diverse initiatives and organisations at different places in Munich and many more in other cities. In July 2018, the campaign organised a conference on deportations to Afghanistan that took place in the Belle-

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19 For the example of an Afghan trainee on this flight see also Süddeutsche Zeitung 2018e.

vue di Monaco, another cultural centre that supports refugees in Munich (Afghanistan Not Safe 2018).

In recent years, a multifaceted scene of initiatives and activists opposing deportations to Afghanistan has developed in Bavaria. According to studies on voluntary commitments, such engagement for refugees has multiplied and diversified since 2015. Ulrike Haman and Serhat Karakayali (2016) point out that the "summer of migration" dramatically changed the composition of volunteers: on average, volunteers have become older and increasing numbers of people in rural areas and towns have engaged with refugees, while before such commitments had been concentrated in bigger cities. The authors interpret this as a normalisation of the movement of engaging with refugees. While before 2015 the slogan "Refugees Welcome" and campaigns against deportation were largely limited to leftist activists and some more or less spontaneous political initiatives organised by refugees themselves (Danielzik / Bendix 2017) it has now become part of a mainstream "welcome culture". Most of the new volunteers who started to engage with refugees in 2015 had in fact more a humanitarian than an explicitly political agenda. Their aim was to assist the local "integration" of the newly arrived migrants in their villages, towns and neighbourhoods, also in order to prevent friction and local conflicts. Their commitments did not challenge the political framework of the German asylum and immigration system, unlike, for instance, the activists of anti-racism networks such as Kein Mensch ist illegal ("No Human Being is Illegal") or No Border, who demand the abolition of border controls and consider the freedom of movement a universal human right. Such far-reaching political demands were much beyond the aims of the "new" volunteers. Also, the restrictions of the Asylum Packages I and II did not provoke much protest among them. According to Stephan Dünnwald of the BFR,[20] a section of the volunteers was, however, politicised in particular by the resumed collective deportations to Afghanistan: they had to watch the young Afghans, for whose "integration" – especially in terms of language learning and professional training – they had invested much time and effort, being arrested and returned to Afghanistan. And while the Bavarian government, too, tried to carry out deportations stealthily, invisibility was subordinated to "efficiency", if deemed necessary. Thus, Afghans are sometimes apprehended for deportation from schools and classrooms although this creates particular scandal. Further, while the deportations themselves are mostly carried out covertly, their results have to be announced publicly in press conferences with the intention of placating right-wing voters.

The obvious contradiction between the government's integration rhetoric and the actual practice of deportation triggered protest and action in support

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20 Personal interview on 15 March 2019.

of deportees. These protests, too, do not imply any fundamental challenge to the German asylum system, as they take the distinction of deserving and non-deserving refugees for granted. But they signal a serious estrangement from a government that has been perceived as not honouring its own principles – or rather as using such principles as a smokescreen to hide a dirty practice of almost indiscriminate deportation. By protesting and appealing on behalf of Afghans who are arrested from their schools or who are taken out of their professional training and jobs, volunteers affirm the paradigm of deservingness and its concomitant logic of integration. This logic is ratified by the volunteers' emphasis that a particular Afghan who is threatened by deportation is, in fact, "well integrated" and therefore deserves to stay.

Strategically, the emphasis of an Afghan's deservingness and "integration" is the only promising approach to avert his deportation by political means. Nobody is willing to demand the right to stay of a person who is considered a criminal or potential terrorist. Not only volunteers but also employers assert the usefulness of their Afghan employees if the latter are threatened by deportation. The Bavarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce sometimes supports such Afghan employees (or rather their employers), but this happens through political backchannels and is not made public. Lobbying organisations such as the BFR use similar channels with individual politicians to save Afghans from being deported. After the Bavarian elections the CSU, having lost its majority in Parliament, had to form a coalition government with the regional party Freie Wähler ("Free Voters"). In their election manifesto the Freie Wähler had vowed to review the strict deportation programme of the Bavarian government. Being held to their word, they are now regularly approached in the case of "integrated" deportees. "If by such means we get one or two Afghans off each deportation flight, we have to consider this as a success," said Stephan Dünnwald.

Conclusion

Considering the actual number of deportations to Afghanistan – little more than 500 at the time of writing in spring 2019 since the resumption of *Sammelabschiebungen* in December 2016 – and comparing it with the number of Afghans living in Germany (around 250,000), the issue of deportations seems relatively insignificant. Yet it is not. It is the site where symbolic and actual battles over sovereignty, belonging and rights are fought. The power to determine who is allowed to live in a state's territory is seen as a significant aspect of sovereignty. In Germany, the openness of borders that allowed the influx of large numbers of refugees in 2015 was seen by some as a loss of sovereignty

and a threat to the rule of law. Today, sovereignty and the rule of law have to be restored by deporting people who have no right to stay, the federal government and the government of Bavaria insist time and again. Even if the actual number of deportations is limited, the effort signals to a refugee-critical audience that the government is taking the issue seriously – not only by deporting rejected asylum-seekers but also by creating laws and regulations that are intended to enable more deportations, even at the cost of criminalising volunteers and undermining means of legal redress. Yet, bound by manifold obligations and often contradictory considerations in a highly complex migration regime (Nieswand 2018), the government is by no means a unified sovereign actor. Sovereignty is in part challenged by the logic of integration. Originally a demand directed at labour migrants and their offspring that drew the migrants' belonging into question by insisting that they were not (yet) sufficiently integrated, the integration claim shifted to the refugee issue and is now turned on its head by volunteers who argue that a particular person is well integrated and therefore deserves the right to stay. The logic of integration indeed has become a central aspect of the German asylum regime. A few years ago, Heide Castañeda (2010) argued that in contrast to the United States, considerations of "social citizenship", i.e. a person's local social integration, did not resonate powerfully in debates about deportations in Germany. Today, as we have seen, this aspect stands at the centre of the politics of the right to stay and has perhaps surpassed humanitarian considerations related to health issues (Ticktin 2011) in this regard. "Integration" has certainly become the most important criterion of "deservingness". The logic of integration has become so entrenched that lobbying organisations have to resort to what I call a "strategic integrationism" in order to fight some deportations. They have to do so even if they are critical of the underlying notion of deservingness, and thus even at the risk of obscuring the universal human right to "Life, Liberty and Security" as enshrined in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which does not distinguish "deserving" from "non-deserving" human beings.

While the issue of deportation thus has highly symbolic significance for political debates in Germany, it is an existential matter for the Afghan refugees themselves. Even if only a few of them are actually deported, the threat of deportation looms large and creates an enduring existential situation of uncertainty and insecurity. The deportation of a few reminds all of their vulnerability. An (unintended?) consequence of this is that many Afghans leave Germany for a neighbouring country that is deemed safer. Recently, volunteers estimated that the majority of Afghans in their district had clandestinely left Bavaria for France. Thus, the relatively symbolic quantity of actual deportations has a multiplying effect. Leaving Germany "illegally", however, is considered cause for deportation in the event of a return to Bavaria. At the time

of writing, two Afghans are in confinement awaiting their deportation to Afghanistan after having been deported from France to Germany through the Dublin Regulation.

Yet the significance of deporting Afghans from Germany reaches beyond the refugee issue and points to global power relations and inequalities. We may argue that these deportations have the purpose not only of reducing the number of Afghans in Germany, but also of justifying the military intervention in Afghanistan. The government's reiteration that Afghanistan is "safe enough" for deportees is often accompanied by references to the engagement of German military and police sent to the country to bring peace, security, human rights and development. The admission that Afghanistan is not safe at all would be a devastating evaluation of these engagements. At the receiving end of interventions and at the bottom of the global hierarchy of nations, Afghanistan is not in a position to challenge international policies. Threatened by the reduction or even cancellation of international aid, the country cannot afford, for instance, to refuse the readmission of migrants, even if the conditions for their "reintegration" are unfavourable and perhaps further add to the country's difficulties. We should also recall that Afghanistan's current disastrous state of affairs is rooted in previous interventions, those by the Soviet army and by the CIA.

The inequality of lives is underlined by the travel advice issued by the German Foreign Office, which warns against visiting Afghanistan and describes the dangers in the country. Yet these warnings are not meant for deportees. The deportee has replaced the transmigrant as the epitomising figure of the global regime of mobility. In contrast with transmigrants, deportees are not autonomous but forced to move. Their fate is negotiated between the state that wants to deport them and the state that agrees to their readmission. In these negotiations, refugees and migrants have no voice and, as a consequence, no choice. Nations have been "re-bound"; people are put back in the place determined by their nationality. The deportee stands symbolically for the selectivity of borders and the global system of inequality that reserves the right to a good and safe life to a few only – at the expense of many others.

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Sattras, Magical Power and Belief Narratives in the Context of Flood and Erosion on Majuli Island

Baburam Saikia

Abstract

Majuli is an island situated mid-stream in the river Brahmaputra, in India's northeastern state of Assam. The island is bounded by the river Subansiri – a tributary of the river Brahmaputra – on the northwest, the Kherkatiasuti – a spill channel of the river Brahmaputra – in the northeast and the main Brahmaputra river to the south and southwest. The river usually brings floods every year. Inhabitants suffer badly as a consequence of widespread severe bank erosion, which causes serious damage to residential blocks, paddy fields, grazing land and open areas. More than half of the island has eroded over the last 100 years. The government's role in terms of protection measures does not seem to be effective in controlling floods and stopping erosion. With land disappearing, there is a progressive loss of the traditional means of livelihood of the island's people, leading to their displacement. During times of erosion, inhabitants offer their prayers to the river Brahmaputra to stop rapid destruction and protect them from catastrophe. A section of the population has set up a congregational worship of the river Brahmaputra, which is performed on the riverbank every year before the monsoon begins. The islanders' relationship with the river is affectionate but also filled with hatred, depending on the activity of the river. This paper analyses the beliefs and narratives of the inhabitants of Majuli associated with the river Brahmaputra.

Keywords: Belief, narratives, Brahmaputra, Majuli, river worship, magical power, erosion

Introduction

Belief is essentially a thought process that evolves within a person based on his or her social environment, education and experience. Every human being has a belief system that they utilise, and it is through this system that people individually make sense of the world around them. Belief can also refer to some-

thing as true, or true to someone. It is thus belief that shapes people's behaviour. We cannot change people's beliefs by forcing them to behave in a certain way – this rather creates conflict among people. At the same time "belief seems to be an elusive category, difficult to grasp and define if we think about it as an entity in the world of ideas. Understanding becomes easier if we look at expressions of belief in behaviour, ritual, custom, art and music in textual and other forms. These expressed beliefs can be reproduced, described, analysed and discussed" (Bowman / Valk 2014: 7–8). Beliefs appear in different forms within genres and other expressive modes. Belief could be considered as the first step for a person when it comes to accepting a faith.

Faith comes from belief and allegiance. Faith is something subjective, personal and emotional. Faith is a concept which is more understood in terms of religion even though it has other dimensions apart from religion. "Faith in a far wider sense is necessary for human life and knowledge outside religion, since it is the basic acceptance that the universe is reliable, albeit unpredictable in many respects; indeed F. R. Tennant regards faith as the volitional element in all knowledge" (Bowker 1977: 334). My intention here is to discuss the variation of beliefs within the same faith. I will also study how beliefs, within the same faith, are used, practiced and constructed in a different context and how sometimes fear is associated with the belief system.

Beliefs are often expressed in narrative form and mediated through storytelling. A belief narrative "brings together several genres that had been separated by former taxonomies, including myths, legends, and religious legends, but also urban legends, rumours, oral histories and other narratives told as true stories that contribute to transmitting and reproducing knowledge about the supernatural and mundane dimensions of the world" (Valk 2016: 27). In terms of the Indian context, belief narratives have always been taken seriously and practiced extensively by people to continue their tradition. Sometimes people feel free to include their own part in the mythic narrative to create a new meaning. This helps them to connect with a strong past of their society by adding a mythical story to their place, especially when it comes to place-lore. However, Indian mythical tradition can be traced back to the days of the Vedas and the Upanishads[1] and later could be found more profoundly during the time of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.[2] Indian folklorist and philologist A. K Ramanujan noted that "a text like Mahabharata is not a text but a tradition" (1999: 162). The flexibility of storytelling is quite evident in different narrative genres. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that oral tradition has always been part and parcel of the transformation and fabrication of mythical stories

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1   The Vedas and the Upanishads are also known as *shruti* (Skt.) scripture. *Shruti* means "what is heard". These scriptures are considered by Hindus as primordial origins realised by the ancient sages, the *rishis*.
2   The Ramayana and the Mahabharata both are known as *smriti* (Skt.) scripture. *Smriti* means "what is memorised or remembered".

(see Datta et al. 2015: 41). Sharing different mythical stories of the past bounds and connects people's feelings together and helps them to create a composite meaning. Therefore, collective memory continues to engender a situation of social bonding. However, "in order to understand how groups remember collectively, we need both cross-cultural and culturally specific concepts of collective memory" (Russell 2006: 801). In most cases, knowledge of the mythic heritage has been implemented and shared collectively by people since their childhood. It is important to look at how mythical stories, both age-old and recently created, can give deep cultural roots and amalgamation to a place or to a group of people or even to a nation. Below I would like to analyse narrative values, changes, beliefs and human-nature relations in the context of Majuli island.

Majuli island

While doing fieldwork on Majuli, an isolated river island situated in the north-eastern state of Assam, a narrative was shared with me on the origin of the island. A part of that narrative can be found in the Bhagavata-Purana (Duttabaruah 2001: 1038), but I came to know about it first from Maniram Bargayan, a senior celibate devotee at Uttar Kamalabari Sattra[3] (interview on 14 July 2017, Majuli).

> Bhismak, the king of Vidarbha,[4] was a very capable king. He had five sons and only one daughter. Daughter Rukmini was very beautiful and wise. Many wise persons such as Naradamuni used to visit the palace. Naturally, Rukmini had a chance to talk with them, and in this way, she obtained information about Krishna. Simply by hearing about Krishna, she desired to surrender at Krishna's feet and become his wife. All the relatives of king Bhismak decided that Rukmini should be given in marriage to Krishna. But her elder brother Rukmavira, despite the desire of the others, arranged his sister's marriage with his friend Sisupala, the determined enemy of Krishna. Rukmini became disappointed to know that. Therefore, she selected a qualified and truthful Brahmin called Bedanidhi as her messenger and conveyed a message to Krishna with the help of the wise Brahmin. Once Krishna got this message, he became curious to come to Kundil.[5] Finally, Krishna came and abducted Rukmini a day before her arranged marriage to Sisupal. While they were travelling on a chariot on the way back to Dwarka,[6] they saw a beautiful little island from the sky in the middle of the river Brahmaputra and stopped there for a while. Both were amazed by looking at the beauty of the river island and Krishna said: "This is going to be the second Dwarka, [the god-

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3   Sattras are a set of religious and monastic institutions that emerged as a part of the 15th century Neo-Vaishnava movement in Assam, which was led by the saint and philosopher Sankaradeva. Today, there are different variations among the groups and the sub-groups of the Sattra institutions.

4   An ancient name of a place in Upper Assam.

5   Present day Sadiya, a place in the state of Assam, was earlier known as Kundil.

6   Dwarka is a sacred Hindu place situated in the present state of Gujarat, India. It is believed to be the very beautiful ancient kingdom of Lord Krishna.

dess] Laxmi will live here with wealth." From that time the island slowly expanded and the name of the island became *Ma-jali* [Ass.]. *Ma* refers to Laxmi and *jali* means "bee-hive or house of wealth". The island came to be known as Majuli much later, which is a revised form of the earlier name.

The narrative variation between the folk and the Puranic story is very crucial to consider in this context. According to the Puranic story, by obtaining information about Krishna's glory Rukmini fell in love with Krishna. Then she sent a truthful Brahmin called Bedanidhi as her messenger, although her brother was fully prepared to give her in marriage to his close friend Sisupal. Eventually, Krishna came and abducted Rukmini from Kundil on the day before her marriage. From this point onwards, the folk version of the story comes into play, stating that both Krishna and Rukmini flew over Majuli island on their way back to Dwarka and were impressed by the beauty of the river island and therefore made a stop to delight in the natural beauty. At the end of the story, the name of the island emerged from Krishna's mouth.

The story has changed over the period of time along with the need of the people, and it is fabricated and extended to fulfil the purpose of the community. While I was doing my field work in the Barpeta district of Assam, one of my informants told me the exact same narrative relating to a place called Phulbari, by simply changing the name of the place. Most of the time this is done deliberately in order to associate a meaningful mythical record with a place. This enhances the social value of the particular place compared to other places. In this case, collective narratives have a special role to play. Dwarka, which is situated in the Indian state of Gujarat, is the ancient kingdom of Lord Krishna and one of the most crucial pilgrimage places for the Hindus. Thus, in this view, creating a new narrative in relation to the Puranic or ancient stories does not demean the original value of the story, but rather bolsters an association with the ancient past. Indeed, the informants were also honest enough to reveal the fact that only a part of the whole narrative could be found in the Puranic source.

As there are no historical records on the emergence of Majuli island in the middle of the river Brahmaputra, it is difficult to ascertain when it first appeared. The historian D. Nath has mentioned that "on the basis of certain geographical evidences and literary accounts, it may be presumed that Majuli took its island shape at least before the 13th century A.D., before Sukapha's coming to the Brahmaputra valley in the year 1228" (Nath 2009: 7).[7] Robin Bhuyan described in his book that "until the time of the Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603–1641), the island was known as Majali. For example, it could

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7   Chaolung Sukapha (1228–1268) was the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam. By crossing the Pat-kai hills, he migrated to Assam along with his army from present day China and the Myanmar region to establish a kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley (see Gait 2013: 74–75).

be found in the *Satsari Asom Buranji*[8] that, during the second half of the 16th century, Chilarai[9] … had gone and stayed in Majali" (Bhuyan 2015: 1). Another piece of evidence, as I learned from the *sattradhikar*, the head of the Benganaati Sattra, is that the Ahom king Lakshmi Singha (1769–1780) gave a land donation to the Benganaati Sattra. As proof, the king gave a copper plate where the name "Majali" was mentioned. But it is uncertain when the name Majali became the current name Majuli. However, "there is no problem to assume that the name Majuli emerged because the island has always been surrounded by water" (Mahanta 2001: 21), as *majuli* in Assamese means to be "situated in the middle".

Today's Majuli island is a combination of a cluster of islets formed in the midstream of the mighty river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. "Presumably, the human habitation on Majuli started from the period when the agrarian people were in search of conductive and fertile soil" (Nath 2013: 23). People with various ethnic and social backgrounds can be found on the island, including the Mishing, Deuri, Sonowal-Kachari, Koch, Kalita, Brahmin, Nath, Ahom, Kaivartas, etc. who have come to live there over the years. There are also Nepali, Bengali and Marwari populations that migrated to Majuli during the 20th century. Bengalis and Marwaris, in particular, came to the island to run businesses. Each community on Majuli performs its own rituals and celebrates festivals in its own way. The majority of the people on Majuli consider two festivals as their grand celebration: the Rasa-lila and the Palnam festival. Whereas the Rasa-lila is a festival devoted to the different phases of Krishna's play or dance (*lila*) with the Gopis (female devotees), the Palnam is a group chanting ritual event performed by the residents of the Auniati Sattra on a constantly rotating basis. Even though all communities on Majuli maintain their religious and cultural roots, still, it could be said that with the help of the Sattra institutions Neo-Vaishnavism plays a dominant role on the island. The total population on the Majuli island is about 170,000.[10] According to the census report of 1901, the area of Majuli was 1255 km². But by 2011 the island had gradually shrunk to 491 km² because of erosion (Sarma 2013).

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8   A history book written by the Assamese historian Surya Kumar Bhuyan (1894–1964).

9   Chilarai was a commander in chief to the Koch King Naranarayana. He was named Chilarai because he executed troop movements as fast as a "kite" (*chila*).

10   For more information see http://majulilandscape.gov.in.

Worship of the Brahmaputra

The Brahmaputra

The river Brahmaputra has always been part and parcel for the inhabitants of Majuli since the island was created by the river centuries ago. It emerges in two popular forms, creator and destroyer. By providing water it makes paddy fields fertile, and by producing fish the river provides a basis for the livelihood of the inhabitants. At the same time, it creates enormous destruction by flooding and eroding the island. Due to the continuing erosion by the river Brahmaputra and other tributaries, many inhabitants, including the Sattras – socio-cultural and religious institutions following the Ekasarana tradition of Vaishnavism – have been compelled to shift to other places. Thus, of the initial 65 Sattras only 32 have survived; the others have been forced by erosion either to move away completely from the island or to relocate elsewhere on the island. Many informants told me that since the 1950 earthquake, erosion on Majuli has taken a serious turn.

The term *Brahmaputra* means "Son of Lord Brahma". The narrative on the genesis of the river Brahmaputra was shared with me by Sarbeswar Hazarika Bayan, a 62-year-old Vaishnava devotee, as follows (interview on 19 July 2017, Majuli):

> Brahma's daughter Saraswati got married to Ashoka. One day Brahma came to visit his daughter and son-in-law, but Ashoka was not at home when Brahma arrived. When Brahma saw his daughter's beauty and grace, a desire of lust arose within him that his daughter could immediately feel. She ignored him and went inside her house. Brahma could not control himself, and as a result his semen fell in front of the house. On his return, Ashoka somehow came to know that someone else was at home in his absence and asked his wife about it. Then she replied: "It was my father, but I don't know why he came here. He looked at me with a lustful desire." Ashoka then said: "Why did you not fulfil your father's desire? He must be upset, now you go and eat that semen." Ashoka himself ate the semen, when she refused to eat it. After eating Brahma's semen Ashoka started to have sex with his wife. After a few days, a ball of flesh was born out of Saraswati's womb. To hide it from others they threw it into a deep place of the Himalayan mountain ranges. There, a huge water hole emerged, which later came to be known as Brahmakunda.[11]
> After a long time, sage Jamadagni, father of Lord Parashurama,[12] asked his wife Renuka to fetch some water from the river for his rituals. While returning from the river, Renuka saw the messengers of Indra [Skt. *Gandharvas*] flying in the sky. She became so enraptured by the beauty of the Gandharvas that hours passed, yet she did not return

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11 Brahmakunda perhaps may refer to the Angsi glacier located on the northern side of Burang country in the Himalayas in Tibet. It originates in the Manas-Sarovar lake and Yarlung Tsangpo river, which flows through the South Tibet valley down to Arunachal Pradesh, India. In Arunachal Pradesh, the river is known as Siang whereas the same river in Assam is known as the Brahmaputra and in Bangladesh, it is known as the Jamuna.

12 According to Hindu belief, Parashurama is considered as the sixth incarnation (*avatar*) of Lord Vishnu.

home and forgot her task. When she arrived home, the time of her husband's ritual was over. Renuka realised her mistake and asked her husband for mercy. Instead of mercy, angry Jamadagni ordered his five sons to cut off her head. No one was willing to do that. Eventually, son Parashurama agreed and beheaded her with his axe. Then Parashurama was unable to detach the axe from his hand. His pleased father asked Parashurama, what would he like as a reward? Parashurama asked that his mother's head be restored to life. Parashurama also asked his father what he should do to get rid of his sin and to detach the axe from his hand. Jamadagni advised him to earn *punya*[13] and go on pilgrimage. Following his advice, Parashurama started to travel to many holy places and pursued a righteous path. But he still was not able to detach the axe from his hand. At last, Parashurama decided to move towards the east. One night, he was resting near a cow-shed that belonged to a Brahmin family. Two bulls near him were discussing in the shed that they had been harassed and misused by the Brahmin family for a long time. So, the next day in the early morning they were going to run away towards Brahmakunda and jump in there to gain salvation [Skt. *mukti*] so that they could fly to the celestial abode [Skt. *Vaikuntha*]. As Parashurama was listening to their conversation, he also decided to do the same. In the morning when the two bulls started running towards the Brahmakunda, Parashurama chased after them. The bulls jumped into the Brahmakunda, which caused their death, and their souls flew to Vaikuntha.

Once Parashurama arrived there he also jumped into the Brahmakunda, and finally the axe was released from his hand. When he was about to come back from that pit (Hindi *kund*), he heard a voice issuing from the holy water, which said: "I released you from your sin, but you should also release me." "How?" asked Parashurama. The unknown voice replied, "I have been stuck here around these mountain ranges for a long time, so help me to get out." Parashurama agreed [to help] and started to release Brahmakunda by digging the mountain to bring the water down to the plain. While he was bringing the mountain holy water into the plain, Parashurama stopped at a place which later came to be known as Parashuram-Kund,[14] for his evening prayer. But the flow of water continued without getting permission from the Lord Parashurama. At that time Parashurama became angry and cursed it: "You will not be treated respectfully by the people because of your rude nature!" Then the Son of Brahma [Brahmaputra] realised his mistake and begged for mercy. Eventually, Parashurama said, "Listen Brahmaputra, I am allowing you two times in a year when people will come and pay you respect, during the Makara-Sankranti[15] and the Ashokashtami."[16] Since then the river has been known as the Brahmaputra.

Performing rituals and offering *puja* to please the river deity has become a common practice during the monsoon time among the islanders on Majuli,

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13   There is no equivalent English word to explain *punya*, which is sometimes interpreted as "merit" or "good karma". One can earn *punya* through righteous work, for example by helping the needy ones, reading holy scriptures, doing deep meditation or by choosing an ascetic life.

14   Parashuram-Kund is a very holy Hindu pilgrimage site situated in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, India.

15   Skt. *makara-sankranti* refers to the first day of the Sun's entering of the *makara* (Capricorn), constituting the end of the month with the winter solstice and the start of the longer days. It is regarded as a special time for spiritual practices and during this time, Hindus take a holy dip in rivers.

16   The legend behind Ashokashtami is this – while Lord Rama (the main character of the epic Ramayana) was fighting with king Ravana, it became very hard for Rama to kill Ravana. Then Rama got some advice from Vibhishana that he should pray to the Goddess Shakti for blessings. Lord Rama worshipped Lord Shiva and Goddess Shakti near the bank of the sea for seven long days and got the Goddess's blessings on the *ashtami*, the eighth, day. After that Rama was able to kill Ravana. From that time this day is celebrated as Ashokashtami, a grand celebration in some parts of India, particularly in the Eastern part.

especially for those whose settlement is near the riverbank. The belief among them is that the yearly worship of the river Brahmaputra, which is a daylong celebration, should be conducted during the time of Makara-Sankranti. But it may be delayed until the monsoon begins (January to May). The river worship is organised by a Sattra called Dakhinpat in order to celebrate congregational ritual by offering *bhog*,[17] chanting mantras, playing devotional music, etc. The main purpose of the river worship is to establish a good spiritual relationship with the river and to save islanders from floods and erosion. Other Sattras like Bhogpur and Benganaati also arrange a ritual event separately dedicated to the mighty river Brahmaputra during the monsoon time. This is because all Sattras have their own sect-orientated ideology and devotees. They do it for the sake of their own belief and followers in order to keep to the path based on their own religious principles. All three Sattras mentioned here are located very close to the riverbank. For all of them, the *bhog* offering to the river Brahmaputra is a crucial ritual, because devotees believe that feeding a spiritual meal fulfils the desire of the river and shows the devotee's respect for the river deity.

A notable concern here is that by telling me the origin story of the river Brahmaputra, my informant Sarbeswar Hazarika Bayan, who is a Vaishnava celibate devotee of about 62 years of age, revealed his fear that the younger generation seems to be reluctant to learn the place-lore and the river-lore on Majuli. In a way, this hints at the lack of interest among the coming generation in their own mythical roots. According to some members of the younger generation on the island, the whole origin story of the Brahmaputra is not mentioned in scriptures; therefore, it has no truth. However, in this case these youth seem to be failing to acknowledge the multiplicity of truth, which is also constructed by society. The main point here is to think about how these stories serve the people's belief, rendering it meaningful, rather than to spend time contemplating whether they are factual or not.

Unlike other deities, the Brahmaputra does not seem to be worshipped by the islanders at their homes as a deity. People have started worshipping the river Brahmaputra out of fear of its destructive power. During an interview a Mishing couple, Prasanna and Anjana Payeng, who had lost their land due to erosion and started living on the embankment, told me (interview on 2 July 2018, Majuli):

> I had lost my house and five *bighas*[18] of my land two years ago. We prayed a lot to the Brahmaputra Baba[19] to save our house and land, but the Baba did not listen to us. Now we live here on the embankment. My wife and I have to go every day to someone's

17 Ass. *bhog* is an offering which is cooked with rice, milk and sugar, cardamom, saffron and other spices. It resembles Indian rice pudding or *kheer*.

18 The size of a *bigha* varies from one place to another. According to the international system of units, five *bighas* would be equivalent to five acres.

19 Ass. *Baba* ("ascetic") is used by local people as a prefix and suffix of the Brahmaputra.

house to find work. If we don't find work, then we have no food to eat. We have two children and they are getting some help from local people to study at school. I am still hoping that we will get help from the government.

This led me to ask them, why did they think that the Brahmaputra Baba did not listen to them? Anjana Payeng replied:

> Baba had appeared in my dream and asked me to offer a *bhog*. But the next morning I forgot about it. I only realised it [again] when all this disaster happened to us. This river has many *avatars* [incarnations]. It is calm now, but if you come here a month from now then it will resemble an angry river, washing away animals, houses, land, trees, etc.

Prasanna and Anjana Payeng belong to the Mishing[20] community, which has a very close relationship with the Brahmaputra river in terms of their livelihood. The couple, along with some of their Mishing neighbours, are very much influenced by the Neo-Vaishnava ideology promoted by the different Sattras on the island and thus have also adopted their river worship habit. They told me that there are two reasons to follow the Sattras' practices, such as offering *bhog* to the river: first, to get rid of the fear of natural devastation caused by the river from time to time. And secondly, as the Sattra institutions play a very dominant role in terms of religious and cultural activities, they felt bound to follow them, thus joining the mainstream religious and cultural practices of the islanders.

Neo-Vaishnavism and the Sattras of Majuli

The Sattra order was conceptualised by Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449–1568) and introduced by his chief disciple Madhavadeva (1489–1596) during the 16th century in Assam. It emerged as a result of a religious movement known as *eka-sarana-nama-dharma* (Ass.), a religion devoted to one God and supreme personality, i.e. Krishna or Vishnu. This Neo-Vaishnavism had a mild connection with the *bhakti* movement, which originated in eight-century South India. Neo-Vaishnavism started to flow in Assam under the tutelage of saint Sankaradeva. It stood against the sacrificial rituals that were more prominent in the *shakta* tradition. In the beginning, image worship[21] (Ass. *murti-puja*) was not supposed to be part of the Neo-Vaishnava faith. The principal focus of the Neo-Vaishnava movement was to introduce an ideology of an egalitarian society based on fraternity, humanism and equality. It firmly questioned

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20 The Mishing are an indigenous group of people in India's northeastern states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. They follow a religion called Donyi Polo, worshipping the Sun and the Moon. Already during the 15th century Mishings in Assam came under the influence of Neo-Vaishnavism, and later a part of them converted to Christianity.

21 In this context image worship means the denial of the anthropomorphic association with the imagery. In Neo-Vaishnavism, image worship could be explained and understood as an anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic duality according to its context.

Brahmanical orthodoxy and conservatism. As time passed, the Neo-Vaishnava faith witnessed a schism and spread into four sects (Ass. *sanghati*). In the later period of the power politics of religious leaders, discrimination based on caste had become a crucial practice among Neo-Vaishnava followers. It was little in tune with the pan-Indian *bhakti* movement that had started to spread all over India. The disintegration of Sankaradeva's order after his death had a fertilising effect on the culture of the Sattras, as the difference of opinion amongst the followers, particularly between the high-caste *brahmins* and the lower-caste *shudras* arose. That led to the establishment of new Sattras (Barua 1960: 101). Over time some Sattras began to lose the rigour of injunction of their faith against image worship (*murti-puja*) and as a result, some Sattras established by *brahmin* leaders introduced idol worship by placing images of Krishna and Vasudeva (Vishnu) in the prayer hall. Indeed, at the same time, some others still abstained from image worship. Neo-Vaishnava faith in its institutional order had witnessed social hierarchy, and also accommodated tantric[22] rituals by worshiping imagery, which seems in contrast to Sankaradeva's view. Even though devotees of the "clean sect" (Ass. *nika-sanghati*) claim to be non-idolatry believers, still image worship takes place in their practice in a muted manner.

At a place called Dhuahatbeloguri on Majuli, Madhavadeva met Sankaradeva for the first time to debate his *shakta* belief against the Neo-Vaishnava ideology and faith preached by Sankaradeva. After a long debate Sankaradeva won by expressing the idea that if you water the roots of a tree, this also supplies water to the branches, but if you water the branches of a tree it does not help the tree as a whole. Likewise, Lord Vishnu is the main source of all creation including other gods and goddesses. Thus, the choice is up to you whether you water the tree's roots or its branches. Eventually Madhavadeva became initiated and gradually turned himself into a chief and a dedicated devotee of Sankaradeva's doctrine (Neog 1962: 46–47). The meeting moment of these two saints is popularly known as *manikanchan-sangjog*[23] and has since become an important place of pilgrimage in Assam. This place was eroded by the river Brahmaputra and turned into one of the main channels of the river, but still Majuli remains an important pilgrimage site for Neo-Vaishnava followers.

As the Dakhinpat Sattra,[24] too, has been going through many difficulties due to floods and erosion, the managing head, Basudeva Goswami, set up a river worship ritual about seventy to eighty years ago to please the Baba Brahmaputra. Since then the river worship ritual has been followed by the devotees

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22 "Tantricism" can be understood differently according to its sectarian association. But in this context, "tantric" means refusing the idea of image worship and sacrificial rituals.

23 A combination of two Assamese words which means an auspicious union.

24 Dakhinpat Sattra is an ancient monastery-like Neo-Vaishnava institution situated on Majuli island. It was established by Vamshigopaldeva in 1584 under the patronage of the Ahom king Jayadhvaj Singha.

of the Dakhinpat Sattra. It is considered a very auspicious occasion, therefore many islanders come to participate. It is believed that the Brahmaputra does not erode the island if the Dakhinpat Sattra offers the worship (Ass. *puja*) accordingly on behalf of the islanders. However, the river worship ritual is particularly followed by those whose settlements are very close to the riverbank. Villagers in the Dakhinpat area of the island additionally offer milk once or twice a month to the river, and organise a collective offering from the village community once a year in April, in addition to the Sattra's river worship ritual.

In February 2018, the Dakhinpat Sattra organised a huge Brahmaputra *puja* on the riverbank, where about 30,000 devotees participated in the ritual ceremony. The main river worship rituals were preached by four *sattradhikars*, who represented the Dakhinpat Sattra, Auniati Sattra, Garmur Sattra and Aua Sattra. The organisers had built a temporary platform to be able to make a prayer-hall and a stage where devotees performed dances and sang songs. It was a day-long programme that included a long procession from the Dakhinpat Sattra to the riverbank, congregational prayer (Ass. *nam-prasanga*), Brahmaputra worship (Ass. *Brahmaputra-pujan*), the offering of *bhog* to the river Brahmaputra (Ass. *bhog-archan*), having a meal together (Ass. *samuhik-bhojan*), etc. According to the believers, the Brahmaputra gets angry if this ritual is not performed accordingly at the proper time. The same belief also prevails among the devotees of Bhogpur Sattra. Once the *sattradhikar* of Bhogpur Sattra did not organise this ritual on time and the Brahmaputra Baba appeared in his dream to warn him (interview with Sri Duttadev Goswami, 27 July 2017, Majuli):

> I had a dream yesterday, the Brahmaputra Baba appeared in my dream and asked me, "Why are you afraid of me?" Then I replied, "Baba, you are destroying our land and crops, you have brought real danger into our lives and that's why I am afraid of you." Then Baba said to me that the people had stopped offering him *bhog*. "I am hungry. If I don't get *bhog* by tomorrow, then I will bring more damage to people's lives. I am here to warn you." Then he disappeared.

On the next day the *sattradhikar* arranged a ritual ceremony that included the offering of *bhog* and the recitation of the Bhagavad Gita on the banks of the Brahmaputra with the presence of many of his followers to please the river. As a result of this, he told me, the Brahmaputra has since slowly reduced his dangerous erosion and floods. The *sattradhikar* stressed how the annual river worship continues to make the river deity happy and avoids future destruction.

The *sattradhikar's* magical power

A *sattradhikar*, the priest and managing head of a Sattra, holds a very important position among the Sattra's followers. Even though the *sattradhikars* are bound by some traditional customs set up by the Sattra community, they have

the power to decide which rituals to conduct and which to leave aside. *Sattradhikars* are expected to give advice under any circumstances to their followers; in most Sattras only a Brahmin is permitted to hold this position. Thus, the ethos of Brahmanical dominance is still rooted in the Sattra organisations, and caste differentiation and social hierarchy are still common among the Sattra devotees. In some Sattras there is an executive committee that has the supreme power to take decisions even against the head of the Sattra, whereas in some others, the *sattradhikar* is the one to decide in all cases. Sometimes so-called upper caste Kayasthas[25] are also allowed to hold the position of Sattradhikar. Depending on the sect variation, there are some unparalleled traditional customs even within the Sattra system when it comes to beliefs and rituals. This becomes especially obvious when we look at the river worship and at its connection to the Brahmaputra.

While I investigated the Brahmaputra narratives on Majuli, I discovered that only a few Sattras (such as Dakhinpat, Bhogpur and Benganaati) consider the river as the deity to whom they offer worship during the time of monsoon. Their settlements are on the bank of the river; therefore, they feel the need to worship the river to save them from danger. In this context the devotees of Dakhinpat, Bhogpur and Benganaati Sattra compromise with their belief system, because, according to their monotheistic principle, they should not worship other deities except from Lord Vishnu and his incarnations. The remaining Sattras, whose settlements are a bit further from the riverbank and who are thus not living in constant threat by the river, are not interested in worshipping the river; worshipping deities other than Vishnu and his incarnations is not part of their religious belief. Another contrast can also be found among the Sattras in terms of belief: some Brahmin *sattradhikars* are involved in tantric practices, whereas some of them are not.

In an interview I (BS) conducted on the effect of flood and erosion, my interviewee, the *sattradhikar* (SA) of Punia Sattra, revealed some information that shows his involvement with tantric practices.

BS: How long has this Sattra been here, at this place?

SA: Originally this Sattra [the Punia Sattra] was at a place called Chinatoli. Because of erosion we had to shift to this place. It happened before 1951, we were not even born then.

BS: How often does erosion happen on Majuli?

SA: The place of our earlier inhabitance now lies in the middle of the Brahmaputra, which is about 700 meters away from the bank of the river. Once, when I was young, my friends and I wanted to watch the erosion that was taking place in an area called Meragarh. We were so afraid while watching the devastation that took place there. All the people were crying because of the damage and displacement caused by the river. It was the worst situation [I have ever experienced]. Since then I don't go to watch ero-

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25   A Kayastha is a group of people consisting of several sub-groups or castes.

sion. Erosion takes place on Majuli quite often, even now you can go to the riverbank and see it.

BS: Can you tell me something about the ritual of the Dakhinpat Sattra offering *bhog* to the Brahmaputra river?

SA: Usually, they offer *bhog* every year during February–April. Mostly they organise this ritual close to the ferry port. Sometimes near a place where erosion takes place. First, the Sattra devotees select a place by putting the branch of a tree in the riverbank. Then the next day it is inspected and found to be cleaned automatically by the river itself. When devotees are done with their rituals and offerings, the water of the river comes to the ritual place after an hour or so to take away the *bhog* offerings.

BS: What do you worship, what rituals do you have to practice on a daily basis?

SA: We worship *salegram*,[26] [and] the image of Gopal [Ass. *Gopal murti*]. Whatever *salegram* that we have, we need to wash and worship them every day. If we don't continue this daily ritual, then they will displace themselves from their original position. Some [many] days ago, we had a problem because of a mistake made by a devotee. The devotee did not perform properly his required ritual while giving offerings. Because of that, snakes started coming into the altar continuously for six months on a daily basis. I even stepped on them several times, but they did not bite me. In 1998 we had a big flood here on Majuli. As our house was full of water, we had to sleep at night in our storehouse, which was situated in a high place. A snake climbed on my body in the middle of the night, but it did not bite me at all.

BS: Why do snakes have such a sympathy for you?

SA: I worship Lord Shiva and the Goddess [Ass. *Goshani*]. If a child is possessed and their hair becomes matted [Ass. *jota*[27]] then I will release them with my power. If someone has been suffering from pox, I will cure them soon with my power. My power comes from them [Shiva and Goshani]. Sometime Ma Bhagawati, Parvati and Ai appear in my dream to give me some ritual instruction, as I don't worship them every day. When both of my eyes stopped working then I started doing meditation [Ass. *dhyan*] at my worship place. After performing *dhyan*, I used to tell them that you put me in such a condition, so give me a way to live my life. How can I survive without my eyes? Then Shiva gave me a power. Since then snakes started moving here and there at my place.

BS: Do people still believe in the Sattra's sacred power like before?

SA: Okay, let me tell you a recent story. There was a natural beehive in Sotai Sattra. A boy had planned to take it away at night from there without informing the authorities. When the boy was about to move from the house to accomplish his plan, he fell down suddenly on the floor and started vomiting blood. All family members of the boy were so shocked and preparing to take him to the doctor. But, the boy said, if you take me to the doctor then I will die. Better you take me to the Sotai Sattra from where I wanted to steel the beehive. Only the *sattradhikar* will be able to cure me. Then everyone, who was present there knew that he had committed a sin. So, he was taken to the Sattra. The boy revealed his secret unfortunate plan in front of the *sattradhikar*. Eventually, the *sattradhikar* cured him with the help of his shamanic skill and said that he must not do it ever again. If you think of taking away the Sattra's property, then you will have to pay the price.

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26 *Salegram* (Ass.) is a piece of stone that is considered as living and sacred.
27 If someone's hair becomes matted, then it is believed that she or he is possessed by Lord Shiva.

The interview reveals that floods and erosion have been a constant threat for the islanders, because of which several villages along with Sattras have had to move from one place to another for resettlement. Indeed, the situation gets worse when it turns into a natural disaster. In such cases some of the local people thus evaluate their own belief system to measure the furious role of the mighty river. However, during my interview, I noticed the multiplicity of the ritual practices within Sattras and the flexibility of their beliefs. When it comes to image worship, in some Sattras they don't believe in image worship or *murti-puja* (such as the Kamalabari school), whereas some others worship idols in an intense form (such as Auniati Sattra, Benganaati Sattra, Dakhinpat Sattra), etc. Even though Neo-Vaishnava doctrine is based on monotheistic principles, still some Sattras don't stick to that. I observed that even though some devotees are found to be committed to their faith, still they allow young ones to participate in different rituals of other Hindu beliefs on different occasions. For example, Sattra devotees worship the river Brahmaputra during the time of flood and erosion. They commemorate the day of the Goddess Saraswati (*Saraswati puja*) especially at school, for pupils to have good luck in education. At the same time devotees who are involved in business celebrate the day of Biswakarma (Ass. *Biswakarma-puja*) to have luck in business. In ancient times, many Brahmins were recruited in Hindu temples to conduct the ritualistic system of the faith. Later they received a priestly position in society. To be able to maintain their traditional practices, *sattradhikars* still continue some of their own Brahmanic rituals secretly even though it does not fit in the Neo-Vaishnava order according to their ideological principles. The tension and fear among some followers and critics arises from the fact that Sattra followers have not been able to maintain their traditions homogeneously. Even though all Sattras could be put beneath the umbrella of the Neo-Vaishnava order, traditional rituals and practices seem to be different because of the schism that emerged after the demise of Sankaradeva. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that the Sattra culture in Assam has very deep traditional roots and remains lively.

Apart from that, the last part of the above-mentioned interview with the *sattradhikar* of Punia Sattra suggests that some priests take the liberty of expressing and continuing their magical practices without considering the concerns of present-day dynamics. While interviewing some educated youths of Majuli, I learned that the presentation of the hierarchy through the expression of the *sattradhikar*'s belief and ritual practice does not seem to include all segments of people in the society. Only a particular, marginalised section continues to follow this path of belief. The intention of some priests to present themselves as divine-like figures does not have relevance among the educated youth. Rather, this separates the educated youth from the Sattra tradition. According to them, no one should demean someone else's belief narrative, but narrating a belief for one's own sake can lead people to doubt a belief system.

From several interviews I discovered that members of the young generation are a bit sceptical of giving space to the magical parts of the *sattradhikar*'s belief narrative to fit in their own understanding of the world.

Beyond worship – ongoing erosion and governmental response

There are several natural disasters that the Majuli islanders have experienced over the past years. The fear of flood and erosion always remains in the minds of the people all through the year and they get prepared for it. Almost every family has its own boat to help it survive during the flood season. The river Brahmaputra swells every monsoon. In the monsoon season, every time it rains, people start praying to the river not to bring floods in order to save their land from erosion. Those whose land has been lost have been living on the embankment for years. There are many families on the embankment who need resettlement, several villages that need to be shifted because of erosion every two to three years. This causes enormous harm to their lives. As there are no good and sufficient medical facilities people have to go to another place for quality medical treatment. Sometimes seriously ill patients die on the ferry while they are being referred to another medical facility for better treatment outside Majuli. It takes about 1.5–2 hours, depending on the water level of the river Brahmaputra, to cross it by ferry. Indeed, this indicates the complexity of the transport system for islanders with the mainland. However, some Sattras have shifted their campus to other parts of the state and some others have their alternative campus outside Majuli. Likewise, many families who are able have purchased land outside Majuli for alternative arrangements. Unfortunately, Majuli has shrunk from 1255 square kilometres to one-third of its original size because of its constant erosion. Local people have also taken some practical protective initiatives together with government representatives to reduce river erosion. Sometimes these help, sometimes they do not.

The Brahmaputra Board[28] was established under an act of Parliament known as the "Brahmaputra Board Act" in 1980 by the Ministry of Irrigation (later renamed the Ministry of Water Resources) of the government of India for the management of floods and bank erosion, drainage congestion and development, and the utilisation of the water resources of the Brahmaputra valley. In terms of flood and erosion on Majuli, the board's protective measures have not been enough to date (2018) to protect the island from erosion. On the other hand, however, the Assam government has introduced a river worship trend in the form of a huge festival to be able to inculcate a religious na-

28 For more information, see http://brahmaputraboard.gov.in.

tionalistic idea among the Assamese people. This seems to be an effort to place more emphasis on the pan-Indian nationalistic religious ideology being highlighted by the RSS[29] rather than an attempt to promote local beliefs on river worship. In April 2017, the government of Assam organised a huge festival in 21 districts of Assam to worship the river Brahmaputra by naming the festival "Namami Brahmaputra". The present BJP Government spent large sums of public money to celebrate the festival without representing the riverine communities.[30] Priests were specially invited from Varanasi to lead the main ritual. It was clear to the public that the RSS force was playing a vital role to homologate the local culture in their form of religious reform. A *sattradhikar* who belongs to the clean sect (*nika-sanghati*) also took part in the river worship even though according to their faith they should not pray to deities other than Vishnu or Krishna. This provides a clue to think more about how local culture is being forced to merge with the mainstream narrative of nationalistic propaganda. The government has seemed more interested in promoting Hindutva ideology rather than addressing the real problems of the local population. And this has been a big fear and concern for the public in today's context. Indeed, those *sattradhikars* who have accepted the Hindutva idea of the RSS have been diluting the egalitarian essence of Sankaradeva's doctrine, which is also a big fear for some socially concerned people. Apart from that, the practice of nature-worship by the riverine community, for whatever reasons, suggests that the non-dualistic aspect of nature v culture is very much part of the local belief system on Majuli, allowing the establishment of a human relationship with nature without considering it as "other". However, recently the river worship has been misused by nationalistic forces and is being forcibly placed under the umbrella of Hindutva.

Concluding remarks

It is crucial to mention that traditional roots and faith matter to every community to preserve and continue their own identity. In the process of the continuation of tradition, some elements are included, and some are excluded, of course. As its traditional roots are very lively and strong, Majuli could be called the main centre of Sattra culture in Assam. Indeed, cultural assimilation is not a new phenomenon in the context of Assam, as it accommodates people from different backgrounds and localities. Likewise, cultural heterogeneity cannot be denied among the people of Majuli. The island shelters people from

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29 The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a nationalistic Hindu organisation established in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889–1940). It advocates a Hindu patriotic agenda under the banner of *Hindutva* or "Hindu-ness".

30 See https://www.sentinelassam.com/news/namami-brahmaputra/.

different religious backgrounds, such as Hindu believers including Thakur Anukulacharya followers, Krishna-Radha followers of the Marwari community, as well as Christians and Muslims. Apart from that, indigenous beliefs in the form of worshipping trees, the Sun and Moon, etc., have always been a part of the indigenous community's life on Majuli. However, as Majuli is surrounded by the river Brahmaputra, the river has always been part and parcel of the lives of all of these heterogeneous populations. People express their respects in various ways to the river Brahmaputra, as it has a strong relationship with the livelihood of the communities. I observed that the fear of destruction is associated with the river worship even though devotion is an essential part of it.

The river worship also suggests the fact that some Sattra followers do not specifically limit themselves to one particular monotheistic belief. They cross religious affiliation when it is needed and try to survive according to the circumstances of nature. This shows that nature and the demands of time play an important role in shaping their lives. I came to know from the devotees of Dakhinpat and Bhogpur Sattra that nature holds enormous power rather than being simply the cultural construct of social belief. Therefore, it needs to be worshipped by crossing the religious limits of their faith, if necessary. River worship is a new adaptation of some Sattras and recently it has become a part of the political agenda for some people attempting to promote a nationalistic idea based on religion. Moreover, I observed that it is not only the island that is being eroded, but the traditional knowledge of the people as well. The position of the Sattras as carriers of knowledge and centres of power has changed. Knowledge is kept in a small circle among the *sattradhikars* and devotees who practice secret rituals. However, this knowledge is there to assist the people. Arranging rituals to appease the river is certainly a psychological help and source of hope. The huge festival of the BJP in contrast, a very public one, obviously remains a bit alien for a section of locals and fails to offer any help. Finally, the question is: where are the responsible authorities to control and solve the problems of flood and erosion? The *sattradhikars* have set up rituals to worship the river Brahmaputra, but the responsible authorities have so far failed to install protective measures to control floods and stop the erosion of the island of Majuli.

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Territorialising Chinese Inner Asia: The Neo-Developmentalist State and Minority Unrest

Research Note

Sören Köpke

Abstract

Despite the Chinese Communist Party's claim to inter-ethnic harmony, the human rights situation of some of the PRC's 55 official minorities is problematic. The article discusses minority unrest in relation to the ongoing transformation of the country's Inner Asian frontier regions. Taking the three autonomous regions of Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia as case studies, it examines the long-running but recently accelerated processes of modernisation and ethno-political conflict. It argues that minority policy is driven by nationalist / neo-developmentalist motives aimed at both the expansion and intensification of Chinese power, and that this process can be termed state-led territorialisation. Programmes such as the Great Western Development and the Belt and Road Initiative are viewed through the lens of neo-developmentalist territorialisation, which is aimed at entrenching the Communist Party's control of China's frontier regions. This perspective provides explanations for conflict that cover several dimensions, from political, economic and cultural causes to ethno-political strife.

Keywords: Neo-developmentalism, minorities, ethnic conflict, territorialisation, China, Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia

1. Introduction

The Chinese historical / action movie "Dragon Blade" (2015), starring Jackie Chan and John Cusack, presents a vision of an ancient (and upcoming?) *pax sinica* along the Silk Road. When greed for power is overcome, different cultures and peoples can live together in peace and harmony; this is the moral

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standpoint of the film, reflecting the official Chinese ideological line. The film emphasises the prospects for peace not only between East and West, but also between the different ethnic groups of the Silk Road borderlands, portrayed as proto-Uighurs, proto-Mongols or proto-Kazakhs as well as Han Chinese.

In reality, the relationship of the Han majority in the People's Republic of China (PRC) with at least some of the ethnic minorities (*minzu*) is fragile and historically tense. Despite official rhetoric of "ethnic harmony", ethnic minorities tend to be economically marginalised, subject to cultural and linguistic assimilation, and in danger of being accused as political dissidents. Major non-Han ethnic groups live in the vast fringe areas of the periphery of the PRC, which have not prospered as much from economic development as the core areas in the coastal east (Zang 2015, Dillon 2018). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the relationship between the Han-dominated Party state and some of the national ethnic minorities has deteriorated further in several instances, as will be shown.

I argue that minority policy in the Inner Asian frontier is driven by nationalist / neo-developmentalist motifs aimed at both the expansion and intensification of Chinese power, and that this process can be termed a "state-led territorialisation". Three short case studies will support my argument, namely from the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR) and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. It will be shown that the ethnicised struggles over modernisation and assimilation that plague ethnic minorities are intimately connected to overarching development policies and programmes.

Territorialisation is a spatial and cultural projection of power, often state power, within and across geographical territories. By ordering, delineating, constructing and policing territory, powerful actors entrench control over these spaces and the (human and non-human) populations inhabiting them. In this sense, territorialisation is a process of boundary-making; an attempt at homogenising the institutions that govern spaces within a certain polity; and the practice of creating and reinforcing sovereignty over a territory and its inhabitants. Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) have introduced the term to political geography, using it as an analytical lens to describe the exploitation of state forests in Thailand. Since then, it has been applied to manifold contexts, such as national parks (Bassett / Gautier 2014), the reconfiguration of property (Bromley 2017), or pastoral areas in African drylands (Korf et al. 2015). Corson (2011) argues that under certain conditions, non-state actors, such as international conservation NGOs, might play a decisive role in initiating territorialisation processes, for example of protected areas. Hence, I speak here of state-led territorialisation to underline which agent – in the cases discussed here – I see as the driving force of territorialisation, namely the (Chinese) state.

Critical thinking about nation states and territoriality has a long tradition in Asian Studies; among the most important authors in this field of research are, without doubt, Benedict Anderson (2006) and James C. Scott (1998, 2009). Departing from materialist, Marxian-influenced thought, these scholars have scrutinised the social forces and historical developments impacting the social construction of states, nationhood and national territory. Along these lines, the paper investigates the diametrically opposed desire of minorities to uphold their distinct lifestyles and the programme of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to expand and engrain its vision of modernity in the peripheral regions of the PRC. The analysis is necessarily informed by history, as the processes described here are rooted in historic developments, and history is also an important resource and justification for both minority identity and the Chinese state.

The three selected cases represent three of the largest second-tier (i.e. province-level) administrative units and are also part and parcel to the Great Western Development (*xibu da kaifa*) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). I do not mean to imply that other regions within China inhabited by minorities, such as Yunnan or Qinghai, are not important. But the three above-mentioned peripheral regions, which are also the three largest "autonomous" administrative units within China (there are also autonomous prefectures and counties), are observed in the current situation to be the most notable for both discontent and rapid development. The three fringe regions are formerly part of frontier China, borderlands that were incorporated into Chinese reign during the Qing dynasty (Liu 2010: 3–9). They are frequently defined as belonging to "Inner Asia", in contrast to the East Asian Chinese heartland (Lattimore 1940, Bulag 2005). As Chinese concepts of territoriality have shifted from an imperial hegemony of "all under heaven", the outer borders of China have solidified and now, since at least 1959, formally encompass the frontier regions. Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Tibet have all been, and still are, destinations of significant in-migration of Han Chinese. Inner Mongolia was the earliest and most massively affected, a process dating back to the Qing, while the large-scale settlement of Han in Tibet and Xinjiang is far more recent. According to the 2010 census, in IMAR, more than 19.5 million of the roughly 24 million inhabitants were Han and only about 4.2 million were ethnic Mongols (Guo 2017: 324–325); in Xinjiang, of the 21.8 million inhabitants, 10 million were Uighurs, 1.4 million Kazakhs and 8.8 million were Han (Guo 2017: 352–352); while of TAR's rather small population of 3 million people, 2.7 million were ethnic Tibetans and about 245,000 were Han (Guo 2017: 350–352).

The three regions are not only destinations for Han out-migration from central and coastal China, but they are also resource frontiers. The accelerated exploitation of natural resources drives much of Han migration, and has

led to a large-scale and ongoing transformation of frontier spaces. Protests connected with these changes, which often bring environmental degradation and pollution, tend to be quelled by the state. Of importance to the overall treatment of China's frontier region is the declared aim to battle the "three evil forces" of terrorism, separatism and religious fanaticism (Liu 2018). This is the central justification for repressive measures against members of minority groups in the three regions.

2. The development state and the Western regions

Modern Chinese statehood cannot be disassociated from its economic conditions. Since the beginning of the Open Door Policy under Deng in the late 1970s, the Communist Party has transformed the country from a rural-based Third World country to the world's second largest, and rapidly growing, economy (Zhang et al. 2016: v). The post-opening People's Republic is characterised by rapid social transformations that have created winners and losers, with an increasingly affluent middle class and masses of working poor, bound together by the rule of the CCP.

The current Chinese state can be described as following a neo-developmentalist model (Köpke 2018: 320): a hybrid of a developmentalist state, with a high modernist (Scott 1998: 4–6) mission to better the lot of its citizens through grand technologies and state interventions, and a capitalist society striving to create wealth through the pursuit of self-interest. The "new developmentalism" gives more room to private enterprise than the older *dirigisme*, but the nation state retains a strong role as investor, constructor of infrastructure, and planner and creator of public and private wealth. It is primarily an alternative model to the neo-liberal "Washington Consensus" (Ban 2012). This neo-developmentalist vision, it must be acknowledged, retains its dedication to technological progress, nationalist grandness and the creation of wealth – in other words, to all values attached to "development". Hence, when talking about neo-developmentalism, one might like to ponder the meaning of development. In the political and economic sense used today, the term came to prominence after World War II; in the scope of modernisation theory, it signified adapting a social, technological and economic pathway leading in stages towards the "developed", industrialised nations of the West (Menzel 2010: 77–97). In post-colonial thought and in Marxist-influenced dependency theory, "development" has been denounced as a Trojan Horse of neo-colonialism, as a tool to continue the dominance of the periphery by the core by other means (Escobar 2012). Yet post-opening China has wholeheartedly embraced development, and with it modernist concepts of technological

and social progress. Chinese concepts of development are a melange of Marxist teleology (Wang 1998: 13) and ancient concepts of China as "the middle kingdom", a great civilization surrounded barbarian homelands, creating "alternative modernities" (Hartnett 2017: 103). This particular concept of modernity and progress has deeply influenced the Chinese neo-developmentalist model.

The PRC is not the only emerging economy to merge a capitalist, export-oriented economy containing more than just traces of neo-liberalism with a strong, interventionist state. Yet the special character of the Chinese neo-developmentalist model – sometimes simply called "the China model" (Zhao 2010) – lies in its authoritarianism and its increasing nationalism. Especially this nationalism, interpreted as expansionism by Western pundits (Holslag 2015, Miller 2017), has created anxieties among neighbours and regional powers. What is important here is how the nationalist, authoritarian neo-developmentalist state works within its borders.

Earlier observers saw a strong contradiction inherent in the drive for prosperity and modernity, one between the aspirations towards civil liberties found in Western capitalist nations and the promises of socialism-cum-market economy (Menzel 1990). Yet during the last four decades, it has become increasingly clear that a growth-driven capitalist development model oriented towards the world market, but strongly led by the Party state, had become highly successful. The high growth rates enjoyed by China since the early 1980s seemed to confirm the validity of its development model – not only to the world, but, as importantly, to its citizens. However – and this seems to be an issue here – not all of China's citizens profit from the economic boom in the same manner. Indeed, national minorities in the fringe area of the Chinese state are disproportionately poor and "underdeveloped". This has been addressed since 2000 by China's Great Western Development Strategy. The "West" here comprises the provinces and autonomous regions of Gansu, Guizhou, Ningxia, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Tibet, Xinjiang and Yunnan, and also Chongqing Municipality; yet IMAR and Guangxi, although not technically "western", are also included in the programme (China.org.cn). In the scope of the Great Western Development Strategy, between 2000 and 2016 China had invested 6.35 trillion yuan (USD 914 billion) in the resource-rich regions of the West. Among the infrastructure constructed in the scope of the programme were highways and railway lines, including the Qinghai-Tibet railway, which rendered the Tibetan Plateau much more accessible. Furthermore, grand hydraulic schemes were implemented in the context of the strategy. In the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020), the Chinese government now intends to merge the ongoing Western Development Strategy with the Belt and Road Initiative, linking the Western regions to their neighbours in Central and West Asia, as well as Southeast and South Asia (Xinhua 2016). This is an ob-

vious decision, as both the Great Western Development Strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative are primarily concerned with infrastructure development as a means to uphold economic growth. The 13th Five-Year-Plan promises the region "an additional 8,751 kilometres of highways, 3,219 km of new high-speed railroads and 187 gigawatts of power capacity" (Wang 2018). In the case studies, we will try to observe how minority unrest, government responses and development issues are tied together.

3. Case Studies

3.1. Tibetan Autonomous Region

Tibet represents probably the most prominent case of ethnic turmoil in the People's Republic, a case that has been shaped by history, by outsiders romanticising Tibetan Buddhism, by the fervent nationalist policies of the Chinese government and, more recently, by concerted development efforts. Although culturally Tibet encompasses more than the TAR, namely also parts of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan (Crowe 2013: 1100), this case study is confined to the autonomous region. Tibet and China have shared a complex history. Once an independent kingdom, Tibet had to accept the Chinese emperors as suzerains from the medieval Yuan dynasty on, but it had always been autonomous to a large degree. After the downfall of the Qing, Tibet formally declared independence, a status never accepted by China, which sees Tibet as a centuries-old integral part of its territory. The Communist People's Republic annexed Tibet in 1951 and quashed a major uprising in 1959 (Goldstein 1997). This led to the Indian exile of the Tibetan government and the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. These events established the political status quo, in which China effectively rules over Tibet as part of its national territory.

Since then, the Tibetan independence movement had been a constant thorn in the side of the CCP leadership. Through the international popularity of the Dalai Lama, the Tibet independence movement has managed to garner remarkable support. Western perception of the Tibetan conflict has often been driven by romanticism and a quest for spirituality surrounding Tibetan Buddhism (Dodin / Räther 2001, Lopez 1999), as well as by the demonisation of the Chinese as invaders. The CCP in turn tends to portray the historical conflict in Tibet as a battle against feudalism and theocracy supported by Western imperialism (Information Office 2013). The Dalai Lama is described as "a political exile who has attempted to split Tibet from China under the cloak of religion" (Xinhua 2017).

The year 2008 saw a surge of Tibetan protests against Chinese policies in the Autonomous Region. This unrest was apparently long planned to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, as the independence movement seized the opportunity to shed a light on the Tibet question (Tethong 2018). An – albeit highly biased – report put together by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA 2010), as the Tibetan government-in-exile (unrecognised by China) chooses to call itself, details the unfolding of the unrest. According to the report, mass protests began on 10 March 2008, the 49th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising. They started with a peaceful protest by over 300 monks in Lhasa that was broken up by the People's Armed Police (PAP). Subsequently protests by Buddhist clergy and laypeople spread across TAR and the neighbouring provinces Qinghai, Sichuan and Gansu, where Tibetans make up considerable parts of the population. Police retaliation was severe, including the use of firearms and curfews. Protests continued throughout March, and, to a lesser extent over the following two months, finally ebbing after June (TBA 2010: 167), as the government deployed more troops to Tibet and thousands of protesters were arrested. Altogether, there were 153 Tibetans confirmed killed (not only in the TAR, but all over the country), most of them shot dead (TBA 2010: 168–169).

Since the 2008 wave of unrest, self-immolation has become the chosen method of protest among ethnic Tibetans. There have supposedly been up to 150 cases of self-immolation in Tibet, according to Western advocacy groups, and some of the protesters are mere teenagers (Free Tibet Campaign 2018). The motives of the monks, nuns and laypeople choosing to set themselves on fire are not entirely clear; according to Barnett (2012), the two conflicting theories are that this method of protest is either promoted by outside forces, namely exiled Tibetans – a stance taken by the Chinese government and Chinese scholars – or that it represents a rational if desperate form of protest against the socio-economic and political situation in the region. There are some indications that a major source of grievance lies in the harsh measures against Tibetan Buddhism, including the denunciation of the Dalai Lama as an "agent of imperialism" and the raiding of monasteries.

The fear of separatism, identified with "religious extremism", looms large within the Communist Party, so that tightening control over TAR through development is seen as a high priority policy measure. As quoted by Wu Yingjie, Communist Party Secretary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, President Xi Jiping has said: "To govern the nation, one must govern the borders; to govern the borders, we must first stabilize Tibet" (Reuters 2017). Here the direction for the Chinese government's handling of the Tibetan question becomes apparent: Tibet plays a crucial role in Chinese geopolitical thinking.

Tibet is to be part of a "Himalaya Economic Rim" project with neighbouring India, Bhutan and Nepal (Tibet.cn 2015), which is meant to connect to the

Belt and Road Initiative; however, the latest military tensions in the Himalayan region between India and China make a rapid expansion of this particular project unlikely. It has also been asserted that the integration of TAR into the BRI is mostly the ambition of the local government in the Autonomous Region, and that Tibet does not play a significant role in the plans for the BRI (Bhutia 2016); hence the potential of the BRI to boost economic growth has been seen as overrated. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Tibet is experiencing rapid economic development.

The Qinghai-Tibet railway has made TAR more accessible and has thus drawn it closer to the Chinese core, which is only one sign of the increasing integration of the region into China's national economy. This integration has a rationale, since the Tibetan Autonomous Region is rich in natural resources and has an abundance of exploitable hydropower potential (Shapiro 2016: 118–123). As energy is a prerequisite for China's economic growth, the government constantly seeks to access new sources of energy. Energy generated in hydroelectric plants on the mountainous Tibetan plateau is to be sent eastwards through the West-East Power Transmission project. It is estimated that TAR has a capacity of 140 gigawatts, about 25% of the total potential national capacity (Chen 2016). Hydroelectricity is important for China to be able to reach its renewable energy goals.

TAR has benefited from direct budget subsidies from the Chinese government for decades (Fischer 2014: 2–3) in order to be able to develop, underlining the priority the Chinese leadership has assigned to the region. However, Andrew Martin Fischer (2014) argues that the development of Tibet is a top-down process in which all major decisions are taken by the CCP; ethnic Tibetans are not fully agents of their fate but are time and again subjected to development strategies planned out elsewhere. Ben Hillman (2016) argues that failure on the side of the TAR regional government to effectively pre-empt public unrest through "conflict-sensitive policies" (Hillman 2016: 20) can be found in the way the CCP trains and grooms its cadres, in practices of patronage and career-seeking amongst these cadres and in the neglect of cultural concerns among those populations affected by development.

Apart from the religious matters discussed above, among the major grievances of Tibetans seem to be environmental degradation and other pressures on traditional rural livelihoods. Lhasa, TAR's capital, is rapidly expanding its urban areas and receives a lot of Han in-migration; ethnic relations in the city appear to be extraordinarily tense (Fischer 2014). Another prominent example is the semi-forced sedentarisation and resettlement of pastoralists on the Tibetan Plateau through state officials, a process that began in Tibet (Yeh 2005, Human Rights Watch 2013) but would later be extended to other regions, such as Inner Mongolia, as discussed below. The Tibetan regional government has made "ecological protection" one of its official policy priorities

and says it has spent 10 billion yuan on ecological construction projects in 2018, emphasising reforestation as one central measure. In an article published in the *China Daily* (Nyima / Daqiong 2019), relocation of Tibetan nomads is portrayed as voluntary and beneficial to the relocated. Yeh (2009) criticises the Party's own framing of western development as "greening", which she views as a form of territorialisation, of imposing government control over the large spaces of the Tibetan Plateau.

Given that the CCP invests the Tibetan Autonomous Region with the highest geopolitical importance, as discussed above (matched only by the Taiwan question), and taking into consideration the rapid, state-controlled economic development of the region, I would like to emphasise that TAR is subject to territorialisation. This includes the "zoning" of development, a state-sanctioned planning that delineates whether spaces are set aside for nature protection or resource exploitation. The facilitation of easier access to Han in-migrants and the fervent policing of political dissent reinforces the impression that Tibet is to be incorporated into "China proper" at considerable cost.

3.2. Inner Mongolia

Ethnic tensions in Inner Mongolia are far less prominently debated in international media than in the cases of Xinjiang and Tibet. Inner Mongolia appears to be more firmly controlled by the CCP than the other two regions, perhaps due to its proximity to Beijing, or to the high ratio of Han to ethnic minorities. Like other Inner Asian regions, Mongolia was acquired by the Qing dynasty, which divided it into Inner and Outer Mongolia (which later became the independent Republic of Mongolia). From 1902, a wave began of what Bulag (2004: 85–86) calls the colonisation of Inner Mongolia, not unlike that of the American West. The Qing set up a new Bureau of Cultivation that was given the task of developing the frontier territories. Pastureland was transformed for agricultural use, and hundred of thousands of Han Chinese immigrated to the newly opened steppe lands. This turned the tables on the population ratio in the areas of today's IMAR; 2.2 million immigrants were recorded in 1912, while there were only 877,000 Mongols, a population declining due to wide-spread male celibacy, poor medical conditions and overall harsh living conditions (Burjgin / Bilik 2003: 55–56). By 1947, the Han had become the uncontested majority population, outnumbering ethnic Mongols in a ratio of more than four to one (Banister 2001: 272).

In 1939, parts of Inner Mongolia where occupied by Japanese forces. After the Second World War, Mongolians allied themselves with the CCP in exchange for promises of widespread cultural autonomy, and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was founded in 1947, even two years before the

PRC. Yet the Cultural Revolution laid open the stark contradiction between radicalised Maoist (Han) students and party youth and the ethnic identities represented by the ethnic Mongols. Furthermore, communist Mongolian cadres were accused of conspiring with the Soviets and the People's Republic of Mongolia (PRM) in order to establish a "re-unified" Mongolia. Allegedly, a clandestine new Inner Mongolian Party (*neirendang*) was in existence among CCP cadres in Mongolia (Han 2013: 92).

The Mongolian language was temporarily banned to quench ethnic nationalism. The revolutionary zeal of the Red Guards took a heavy toll on IMAR and its ethnic Mongols (Brown 2007: 183–185), as the region descended increasingly into chaos and violence. More than twenty thousand Mongols were killed and over three hundred thousand injured in the 1967–1969 period of the Cultural Revolution (Bulag 2004: 93). The Maoist Red Guards, predominantly Han, targeted Buddhist lamas and members of the former pre-revolutionary Mongol elite. Monasteries were ransacked and any expression of traditional Mongolian culture or Buddhist religion became dangerous. The confusion and terror of the Cultural Revolution led to a discontinuation of Mongolian cultural and religious practices and a stark increase in ethnic tensions (Sneath 1994). Inner Mongolia experienced a student movement of ethnic Mongolian youth in 1981 and a subsequent crackdown by the Chinese state (Jankowiak 1988); thereafter, however, the region was calm for decades.

The first instance of unrest in a long time appeared in 2011, when an ethnic Mongol herder was deliberately run over and killed by a Han truck driver (Jacobs 2011). The pastoralist had tried to block the truck from access to his grassland. The event sparked protests across IMAR, including the autonomous region's capital, Hohhot. Police soon clamped down on the movement, declaring martial law in Hohhot, Tongliao and Chifeng and imposing curfews (Yu Zhou 2011). Since the initial protest wave in 2011, demonstrations of mostly pastoralist Mongolians have frequently occurred in Inner Mongolia, mostly centred on questions of land rights, environmental degradation and cultural rights. The above-mentioned resettlement programmes are also among the grievances of the protesters. Protest banners have sported slogans such as "Protect Our Grassland", highlighting the strong connection of herders to their environment (Wu 2011).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Inner Mongolia has rapidly been turned into a resource frontier. It is among the largest coal-producing regions of the PRC and hosts numerous sites for the extraction of rare earth elements (China Daily 2013). The industrial transformation of the Autonomous Region has direly impacted the environment, including water resources and the grassland ecosystem of the steppe, adding to the desertification already underway. This poses a problem for herders belonging to the Mongolian ethnicity, as environmental degradation adversely impacts their animals and endangers

their livelihoods. Despite a remarkable turn towards renewable energies, China's economy is still highly reliant on fossil fuels to power its industries, hence domestic coal consumption remains high and Inner Mongolia an important location for the Chinese coal mining industry.

As mentioned above, the autonomous region contains important deposits of rare earth elements, valuable minerals needed for a large number of high-tech products, from wind turbines and batteries for electric cars to high-resolution screens (The Economist 2009). The mining and processing of rare earths is associated with considerable ecological costs (Bontron 2012, Kaiman 2014), and the villagers and especially Mongol pastoralists in the vicinity of rare earths mines appear to be bearing the largest burden of this environmental degradation. They protest the contamination of water and land, yet reportedly to no avail (Engel 2015).

Inner Mongolia is going through a process of territorialisation that has been ongoing for more than a century (Banister 2001, Bulag 2004, Han 2011). After the Cultural Revolution, which spelled disaster for Han-Mongol relations (Brown 2007), the territorialisation of Inner Mongolia was marked not so much by violent repression (which still occurred) but by economic development, further intensifying and accelerating by the turn of the 21st century. The exploitation of natural resources was the main driver of this economic development. But culturally, the rapid economic modernisation of IMAR is accompanied by absurd phenomena such as "ghost cities" (Woodworth / Wallace 2017) – uninhabited wastelands of unsustainable housing and urbanisation policies – or the commodification of Mongol traditional culture as a tourist spectacle (Buckley et al. 2008). Territorialisation in Inner Mongolia remains an intense process that is met by decisive, yet peaceful local resistance (Köpke 2018: 167–192); the Chinese state tends to criminalise Mongol protests. However, the territorialisation here is less overtly violent and more structured by resource extraction than in the other two cases. Perhaps the Chinese party state perceives the danger of armed separatism here to be much lower than in Tibet or Xinjiang.

3.3. Xinjiang

Like Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang has long been a resource frontier. After the foundation of the PRC, the region functioned not only as a site for nuclear bomb tests, but also as a region of oil exploration and later drilling. This economic activity mainly motivated Han in-migration into the region inhabited principally by Turkic ethnicities, namely Uighurs and Kazakhs (Cliff 2016). Besides Tibet, Xinjiang appears to be the frontier that is culturally and economically least integrated into the Chinese state, something that the Party

hopes to ameliorate. While the Belt and Road Initiative serves these purposes, the transformation of Xinjiang is not only economic, but also accompanied by strong political pressure.

The Chinese government's campaign in Xinjiang has only lately, in 2018, begun to make headlines again. Under the label "Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism", China has allegedly begun to set up numerous re-education camps designed to detain and "transform" Muslim Uighurs. The closed facilities supposedly use methods such as writing self-criticism essays, long lectures and singing songs in praise of the Party as means of indoctrination (Buckley 2018). These measures are aimed at severing inmates' cultural and emotional ties to Islam.

It appears that the system of interment camps also, at least in part, contains elements of what could be described as forced labour (Feng 2018). This is reminiscent of the *laojiao* system, officially abolished in 2013, characterised as "re-education through labour". Official sources point to the success of Xinjiang's "anti-terrorism" measures, claiming the centres are "vocational education and training centres" that help in "promoting social development". They point to the economic development in the region and paint the image of an overall peaceful and secure life for Xinjiang's population (Liu 2018). Over the last months, evidence has mounted that state activities in Xinjiang go far beyond anti-terrorist measures. Modern surveillance technology, including face-recognition software and smartphone tracking, appears to be increasingly ubiquitous (Cockerell 2019). Worshippers who take part in Islamic ceremonies are monitored and pressured to demonstrate their loyalty to the Communist state. According to research published by Western news media, a number of mosques have been torn down since 2016 (Kuo 2019).

The background to the detainment and cultural suppression campaign can be found in inter-ethnic conflict and insurgency. Data from UCDP, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2018), suggest that terrorism and counter-insurgency in Xinjiang, as well as related ethnic conflicts between Uighurs and Han Chinese, make up the deadliest armed conflicts within China's borders in the 21st century. Interethnic strife peaked in July 2009, when a demonstration in the autonomous region's capital Urumqi escalated into anti-Han riots, which were in turn met by Han retaliation against Uighurs. UCDP counts 187 confirmed deaths connected to this event.

Another related conflict is rooted in the insurgent activities of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). ETIM, an allegedly al-Qaeda affiliated group of Jihadi Muslims of Uighur origin, attacked a police station and other facilities in 2008, initiating an armed conflict. The conflict is apparently strongly framed within the context of the "Global War on Terrorism" popularised by US President George W. Bush (2001). This narrative is clearly used in the policing of political discontent in Xinjiang. At the same time, it allows

China to accuse Western governments of applying double standards (Ai 2018): How can the United States and its Western allies criticise the rather "benign" activities of the Chinese government when the US itself is carrying out targeted killings against suspected jihadi terrorists through drone warfare?

Clarke (2007) argues that the Chinese government has itself contributed to the insecurity of the region's non-Han ethnicities by promoting a discourse of a "triumvirate of radical Islam, underdevelopment and international 'terrorism'" (p. 324) haunting Xinjiang and compromising Chinese national unity. By securitising the issue of national identity, the Chinese government has contributed to the emergence of Sunni Muslim militancy. In another instance, Clarke (2015) deplores the "palestinization" of Xinjiang, an analogy that appears to be mostly inaccurate, yet suggests an atmosphere of military occupation and popular resistance.

Unlike Tibet, Xinjiang is indeed an essential part of the Belt and Road Initiative as it contains the most important corridor to reach the Central Asian nations and then further expand the proposed Belt towards Europe. The enormous political resources spent on the securitisation or stabilisation of the region can and must be partly explained by the centrality of Xinjiang in the BRI. Vice versa, the BRI explains the pivot to the West and the intensification of attempts to "pacify" the Xinjiang hinterland, which has suddenly become central to Chinese infrastructure policy. Mass surveillance, detainment camps, interventions in religious life and the construction of transport infrastructure are all signs of a massive drive to territorialise Xinjiang as part of the Chinese border spaces.

4. Territorialisation through development in Chinese Inner Asia

The Belt and Road Initiative has emerged as the central spatial vision of the current Chinese leadership under Xi Jinping. It aims to tie together China's core and periphery with trade partners in South, Southeast and Central Asia, on the African continent and in Europe. China's infrastructure drive can be seen, in the words of Marxist geographer David Harvey (2001), as a "spatial fix", a measure to counter the economic crisis caused by over-accumulation through the geographic expansion and restructuring of capital, and this approach has indeed been applied (Zhang 2017). It arises in the context of the "new normal" in which China has downscaled its expectations of economic growth, slowing to single-digit values between 6 and 7 per cent (Zhou / Xin 2019).

Xi Jinping's speech on 18 December 2018 commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Open Door Policy (China Daily 2018) highlights the dedication of the country's leadership to a number of core principles, including the ongoing struggle to improve the prosperity of the people, the unquestioned rule of the CCP and the course of "socialism with Chinese characteristics". Development and stability are presented as the overarching goals of Chinese policy. The era of Xi Jinping has been perceived as a turn towards an expansionist, more authoritarian, more aggressively nationalistic policy set (Holslag 2015, Ross / Bekkevold 2016, Ringen 2016, Khan 2018). Yet to the minority populations of Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, there is more continuity than change; while all three regions may have recently experienced more severe clampdowns on dissent, authoritarian policies were also a major feature of the previous leadership strategy. They are part of an overarching "carrot and stick" policy.

The situation in the autonomous regions of Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet is characterised by their frontier aspect. The latter two, in particular, are extreme cases, as anyone would acknowledge (Zang 2015: 135–164), and one cannot generalise state policies towards minorities from the measures directed at Uighurs and Tibetans. The national minority cultures tend to be the subject of a slightly condescending, folkloristic curiosity (Baranovitch 2001), while their actual lifestyles are under pressure to modernise and adapt to majority culture (Gladney 2004, Ludwig 2009). Yet nowhere else does state territorialisation appear to be as urgent, as violent and as tied to political economy as in the three cases discussed above. So the central question appears to be: Are the causes of conflicts between the Chinese state and the minorities discussed in the three case studies cultural, economic or geopolitical? The answer I would advocate for is: all of the above. The concept of territorialisation is attractive because it includes both cultural and material aspects while resolutely retaining a spatial perspective. To put it in plain words: the conflicts are over land and resources as much as over people and people's beliefs, and all of these factors are intertwined and inseparable.

I argue that the opening up of regions in the scope of the Great Western Development, and the planning and implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, not only serve the production of economic growth, but are also processes of state territorialisation in the sense elaborated by Vandergeest and Peluso. The emphasis on the social production of space in the scope of state-led territorialisation emphasises the projection of political power over notions of "ethnic strife". As Dru Gladney (2004: 51–64) reminds us, the idea of "Han-ness", of a majority Chinese identity, is itself a social construct. Some important anthropological works (Pasternak / Salaff 2018, Cliff 2016) have carefully laid out the very heterogeneous, localised experiences of the Han people in spaces like Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, experiences of identity

reaffirmation, but also of cultural adaptation. The analytical turn towards a spatial perspective avoids the trap of an ethnic essentialism, while providing a clear view of the power asymmetries that accompany and promote state territorialisation. I see the development of the Western regions more as an instrument of state power over territories inhabited by non-Han people, rather than as a sign of expansionism aimed at neighbouring peoples. In this sense, these intertwined development programmes are driven by geopolitics, but within China, not necessarily as some kind of "Great Game" in Asia. There is evidence that the Communist Party understands the dangers of "imperial overstretch" (Blumenthal 2017) and takes every measure to consolidate its power within the country, including countering any kind of activity that reeks faintly of separatism or regime change. This is a consistent rationality of the Chinese leadership and probably a historical lesson from the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The very raison d'être – and hence greatest source of legitimacy – of the Communist Party is development, and the unfettered belief in progress and improvement of the nation's welfare drives its politics. Therefore it should come as no surprise that in the current situation it would direct its development efforts at the fringe regions that appear to be underdeveloped, unstable and not properly integrated into the whole of the Chinese nation. However, repressive policies may backfire, engendering new identity politics and ethno-nationalist claims for new generations to come. State territorialisation is an unfinished and unstable process that creates its own contradictions.

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Making Memory by Dissociating the Past from the Present: Narratives of Movement Intellectuals of the Post-Fukushima Protest Cycle in Japan

Research Note

Anna Wiemann

Abstract

The impact of collective memory on mobilisation processes is an emerging research field in social movement studies. Adopting the perspective of "memory in activism", which tackles the question of how memories of previous struggles shape present social movements (as proposed by Ann Rigney), this research note provides a first idea of the effect of the collective memory of the violent 1960s "New Left" protest cycle in Japan on the most recent protest cycle triggered by the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011. At their peak, these protests drew up to 200,000 participants during the summer of 2012 – a fact often downplayed in Western media coverage. As an access point to the study of the memory work pursued by and within the movement, this research note analyses written narratives of two activist intellectuals of the post-Fukushima protest cycle. The analysis shows a clear dissociation from the violent legacy of the 1960s that emphasises the distinctively peaceful character of the present protests and claims for them an equally important status in history.

Keywords: Japan, Fukushima, collective memory, social movements, protest cycle, 1960s

> At first sight memory and activism may seem poles apart, with the former oriented towards the past and the latter towards the future. At second sight, however, they are deeply entangled. (Rigney 2018: 371)

Demonstrations are no spontaneous phenomena. They are constituents of a social movement's action profile embedded within larger protest cycles. The concept of protest cycles visualises the intensity of public protest over time and space – rising and falling in waves of mobilisation and demobilisation phases. A protest cycle is usually triggered by a political opportunity per-

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ceived by movement actors, which they use to push for social and/or political change by entering "sequences of intensified information flow and interactions" with the authorities (Tarrow 2011: 199). The connectedness of different protest cycles over time has been stressed in the structural (e.g. organisations, networks, abeyance) as well as in the cultural research approach to social movements (e.g. framing). An emerging research field in the cultural perspective in the past few years is the role of collective memory[1] in and for social movements, as collective memory can be either a constraint or a driver of mobilisation (Della Porta et al. 2018, Doerr 2014, Kubal / Becerra 2014, Rigney 2018, Zamponi 2013).

Following the earthquake, tsunami and the subsequent nuclear meltdowns in three of four reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant on 11 March 2011, Japan experienced a wave of public expression of political discontent – a fact largely neglected in the international media coverage on the social and political impact of the triple disaster. Anger about the government's mismanagement of the crisis, especially the lack of information concerning radiation levels and the related risks,[2] sparked street demonstrations in the summer of 2012 with up to 200,000 participants in front of the Japanese parliament in Tokyo, which spread from the capital all over the country (see Brown 2018, Chiavacci / Obinger 2018, Redwolf 2013, Wiemann 2018). This anti-nuclear protest wave which peaked in summer 2012 and which was followed by several spin-off movements[3] in the following years (e.g. anti-racism (2013/14), anti-security legislation (2013/14), pro-democracy (2015)), marked the end of a 40-year absence of major public protest in Japan.

Many scholars explain the long time span without significant public protest action in Japan with the public memory of the protest cycle of the 1960s and 70s, which was characterised by violent clashes between protesters and authorities. The perceived "senseless violence" of this period produced a negative protest image, which effectively constrained people from participating in social movements for many years.[4] A major actor in shaping the negative pro-

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1   Collective memory can be broadly defined as "the set of symbols and practices referring to the past which are shared by a community of people" (Zamponi 2013: 225). However, memory is intrinsically plural, as individuals can belong to different communities sharing different collective memories. Therefore, scholars differentiate between "*collective memory* [...] as the memory shared by a community or group, *social memory* as the memory spread across the entire society, and *public memory* as that part of the latter which refers to the public sphere" (ibid.: 225).

2   A concrete trigger for the demonstrations in summer 2012 was the planned recommissioning of the Ōi nuclear power plant units No. 3 and 4 in the Kansai region (western Japan), which had been temporarily taken offline after March 2011 for safety checks. The – in the eyes of many – careless procedure contributed to turning anger into action. Summer 2012 was the peak of the anti-nuclear demonstrations; however, the movement is active until today (with fewer participants, of course).

3   Spin-off movements draw their impetus from initiator movements which stand at the beginning of a new protest cycle; see McAdam 2013.

4   Major issues triggering the protests of the 1960s protest cycle were the revision of the Japan-US security treaty or Anzen Hoshō Jōyaku in Japanese (Ampo in short) (1960), the Vietnam War (around 1965), the studies and living conditions of university students (late 1960s) and the reaffirmation of the Ampo treaty in 1970. While the student-dominated protests in the early and late 1960s to early 1970s were characterised

test image was the Japanese mainstream media, which produced and reproduced "iconic images" of the United Red Army (Rengō Sekigun) incident (also Asama Sansō incident or siege). In winter 1972, a splinter group of the United Red Army fled to a mountain resort, took a civilian hostage, and was arrested by the police. The final assault, which cost the lives of two police officers, was broadcast live on TV. After the siege ended, it became known that the group "had carried out a terrible internal purge in which a dozen members of their own group had been tortured and killed". This retrospective interpretation of the "New Left" protest cycle in terms of "a sequence of senseless violence […] discredited all protest activity" that was to follow (Steinhoff 2018: 38–39).

With this research note, I intend to draw attention to the field of collective memory and its impact on contemporary social movements in Japan. While the collective memory of the violent 1960s protest cycle often serves as an explanation for the long period without major protest action in Japan, thus far no systematic empirical research has been done on the question of how movement actors today deal with the 1960s legacy or why despite this legacy movement actors were able to mobilise high numbers of participants during the protest cycle triggered by the events in 2011. In the following, I briefly summarise the field of collective memory and social movements and outline, based on the works of Ann Rigney, possible research questions in this realm for the case of Japan after 2011. I then single out the case of the Kantei-mae protests in Tokyo, which reached a peak in summer 2012, and discuss challenges concerning the methodological approach to studying collective memory in contemporary movements. As a result, and as an access point to the field of interest, I suggest analysing narratives of social movement intellectuals, who can be considered producers or makers of narratives forming a collective memory of a series of movement events. To provide a first idea of collective memory narratives of the 2012 protests, I look at the works of two memory makers – Noma Yasumichi and Oguma Eiji – and I draw a careful conclusion pointing to further fields of investigation.

Collective memory and social movements

Ann Rigney, a professor at Utrecht University, and since January 2019 the leader of an ERC Advanced Grant research project with the title "Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe (REACT)", characterises

by violent clashes with authorities, the Anti-Vietnam-War movement in 1965 remained peaceful in its tactics. As the focus of this research note is the question of how today's activists deal with the collective memory of the violent 1960s protest cycle, in the following, I concentrate on references to the Ampo protests. For more background information on the 1960s protest cycle as a whole see, for example, Derichs (1998) or Avenell (2010).

the "memory-activism nexus" as "a complex one, a vortex of recycling, recollection and political action that can be summed up as 'civic memory'". Within the memory-activism nexus she distinguishes three interplaying research fields: the first concerns the question of "how actors struggle to produce cultural memory or to steer future remembrance" of their actions (memory activism). The second one deals with the question of "how earlier struggles for a better world are culturally recollected" (memory of activism) and the third one covers the question of "how the cultural memory of earlier struggles informs new movements in the present" (memory in activism) (Rigney 2018: 372).

Rigney points out correctly that these research fields interplay. However, they differ from each other in their point of view. The two fields of "memory in activism" and "memory activism" intertwine more closely in the sense that they share a focus on the role of a collective memory of one (or more) social movement(s). In contrast, the field of "memory of activism", as Rigney characterises it, rather refers to the more general social memory of a broad public sphere.

Against this background, and in the context of post-3.11 Japan, two interesting research fields open up. The first one touches upon the question of the role of "memory in activism" and may be framed as such: How did movement actors of the 2011 protest cycle deal with the memory of the previous protest cycle of the 1960s, which – supposedly because of its image of "senseless violence" – functions as a major constraint for participation in social movements in Japan? What did actors do in order to lower perceived risks and costs for potential "new" participants in demonstrations?

The second research field concerns the "memory activism" of the 2011 movement actors, drawing attention to the question: How do actors want their protests to be remembered in the future and what is their strategy to be remembered in a certain way? The research field of "memory of activism" in this context plays a role when thinking about the public memory of the 1960s as "violent", which according to Steinhoff and others constrained protest in the past (see above). A second interesting aspect arising from this research field is the question of whether the movements after 2011 were successful in reframing the image of protest in the broader public and/or how the 2011 protests are remembered in the broader society today, eight years later.

According to the outlined objective of this research note, the following exploration adopts the perspective of "memory in activism". This approach serves as an access point for developing a comprehensive research agenda on collective memory and the 2011 protest cycle in Japan.

The Kantei-mae protests in Japan after 2011

In the aftermath of March 2011, many anti-nuclear demonstrations took place all over Japan, most of them in the capital Tokyo. These demonstrations (as one form of protest from a whole range of possible protest actions, see e.g. Della Porta 2013), were organised by different, albeit in parts overlapping networks of social movement organisations (Wiemann 2018). Among others,[5] a network of civil groups, the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes (MCAN or Shutōen Hangenpatsu Rengō),[6] emerged and organised the so-called Kantei-mae (in front of the Prime Minister's Office) or Friday demonstrations, as they take place in the form of standing demonstrations every Friday evening from 6 to 8 pm in front of the Prime Minister's office.[7] These protests started at the end of March 2012 with 300 participants and experienced a peak in June and July 2012 when about 200,000 people participated in the weekly rallies (Redwolf 2013: 19). MCAN's Friday demonstrations are in addition to those of the trade union-led Sayōnara Genpatsu (Goodbye Nuclear Power) demonstrations, which are widely known and have gained considerable attention from the scholarly world (e.g. Brown 2018, Cassegard 2018, Machimura / Satoh 2016, Manabe 2015, Tamura 2015). Furthermore, MCAN was successful in the sense that on 22 August 2012 they were allowed to meet with then-Prime Minster Noda Yoshihiko – an occasion at which they could take their claims directly into the political arena (Oguma 2013c: 243). Just as any social movement, the actors of the Kantei-mae action aim at building a unitary interpretation or a consistent narrative of the period of events in which they are involved, in order to build a strong collective identity and to form a competitive collective memory narrative in the public sphere, which may serve as a basis for future mobilisations.

Methodological approach

A consistent narrative connecting a series of events forms a collective memory within a group, which is deeply connected to a group's collective identity. Collective memory has, in this sense, as Zamponi (2018: 15) points out, "a regulatory function: it defines, through its mechanisms of selection and removal,

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5   For example, the Genpatsu Yamero! (Stop Nuclear!), the Genpatsu Yamero Hiroba (No Nukes Plaza) or the Sayōnara Genpatsu (Goodbye Nuclear Power) demonstrations, to name just a few. For a more comprehensive account please see Wiemann 2018 and Brown 2018.

6   In 2015, MCAN merged from a network of organisations to a single organisation. One reason for this is that members were unable to maintain the activities of the network and their former individual organisations at the same time (Shutōen Hangenpatsu Rengō 2015).

7   In cooperation with other groups and networks, MCAN also participated in marching demonstrations.

the boundaries of a group's membership and the plausibility and relevance criteria for the group identity". While a consistent collective memory on the one hand fosters a group's identity, it also has an impact in the public sphere. There, various collective memory narratives of different groups collide and compete against each other, aiming at dominating one another. While this impact of collective identity seems logical, it is a challenge to approach the study of the "slippery phenomenon" of collective memory methodologically.

As a solution to this, Kansteiner (2002: 179) calls for applying methods of media and communication studies, specifically those of media reception, ranging from "traditional historiography to poststructural approaches". He conceptualises collective memory as "the result of the interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts to their own interests" (Kansteiner 2002: 180). Collective memory, although it is a distinctly collective phenomenon, thus "only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals […and it] is as much a result of conscious manipulation as unconscious absorption and it is always mediated" (Kansteiner 2002: 180).

To get an impression of the production side of collective memory of the Kantei-mae protests and their framings, especially those dealing with the meaning of previous protest cycles for the present, I look at the writings of memory makers of this series of events. Memory makers can be broadly defined as those who make meaning, interpret series of events and tie them together to form a story. Such memory makers use media to reach their audience – be it monuments, pictures, videos, books, weblogs and other digital and social media (Neiger et al. 2011). In this sense, movement intellectuals in particular qualify as memory makers as they often provide an overall framing and a first consistent interpretive story connecting events scattered over time and space using media to disseminate their ideas. Social movement actors usually make use of the entire range of media platforms to form their stories; however, the media that provide a most consistent story are books, articles or video documentaries, as these media types require the author to provide an overall framing and common theme throughout the text/storyboard. In my attempt to map and demarcate a first impression of such narratives, I concentrate on two books written by movement intellectuals, thus on narratives making and shaping memory from within the movement. However, further research in this field naturally requires including other media types produced by a variety of actors as well.

Movement memory makers

Several left-leaning intellectuals supported the Kantei-mae protests in Tokyo. Two of them attracted my attention during fieldwork for my dissertation from 2013 to 2014 (Wiemann 2018): the historical sociologist Oguma Eiji and the freelance publisher Noma Yasumichi, both of whom wrote and published books already in late 2012 and 2013 about the protests during summer 2012 (Noma 2012, Oguma 2013a). Noma, born in 1966, was on the staff of the so-called "twitter demonstrations" organised by a network group called TwitNo-Nukes, which started in April 2011 and took place once a month in Shibuya (a very popular district of Tokyo, especially among young people). Noma later became a member of the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes (MCAN), the main organiser of the protests of 2012. When the most intensive anti-nuclear demonstrations subsided and, as a spin-off movement, the issue of hate crimes – especially against Koreans residing in Japan – gained momentum, he became involved in the anti-racism movement, a topic about which he also wrote and published several books. Noma is thus an experienced intellectual movement activist engaged in several issue fields.

Oguma, born in 1962, is a professor at Keiō University in Tokyo and was active with the Kantei-mae protesters to the extent that he was part of the delegation of protesters who in August 2012 met then-Prime Minister Noda. Oguma is known not only in Japan but also internationally for his research on the construction of "Japaneseness" (see Askew 2001) as well as for his research on the 1960s protests in Japan (cited for example extensively by Knaudt 2016). Both are thus no newcomers to social movements nor to writing, editing and publishing.

Naturally, for further research, a comprehensive exploration of the discursive field is necessary. The two books I concentrate on here provide but a first insight into the issue. My analysis serves to awaken interest in engaging in further research in this field and to provide some first ideas as to where this research may lead.

Two related narratives

The two books *The Friday Protest in Front of the Prime Minister's Office: The Voice of a Demonstration Changes Politics* (Noma 2012) and *The People Who Stop Nuclear Power: From 3.11 to the Prime Minister's Office* (Oguma 2013a) are related to one another: Noma's book from 2012 comes with a book wrapper (which is quite common in Japan) with a blurb by Oguma saying:

> A valuable record from a witness. It will remain in modern history as a book written
> from the inside of a movement, which accounts for the first civil movement in Japan

since the 1960s Ampo protests, which appeared internationally at the same time as the "Arab spring" and "Occupy Wallstreet" movements.[8]

With this statement – as promotional as it is – Oguma ties Noma's book to the narrative he constructs in his own book, which was published about nine months later. The master frame Oguma refers to in his book is built around the importance of documenting events from the point of view of a movement, the meaning of such "live" records for the making and writing of history and for emphasising the historical importance of the 2012 events by relating them to the 1960s movements in Japan and more recent movements taking place in different parts of the world. In the introduction to his book, Oguma writes (2013b: 4):

> After the Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear accident on 11 March 2011, many things happened. In this book, I intend to recount these. I research modern Japanese history from a sociological point of view, and what I often feel are the limits of missing records from the time of the happening of events. Especially when it comes to civic experiences or social movements, oftentimes we only find police records or mass media articles. That is why history is written based only on such sources. Of course, there are also publications of accounts of participants. However, if these are written down many years later, because of the passage of time, memories deviate remarkably. Beyond this, activists tend to write down their opinions and points of view. Of course, this is not bad, but it cannot be used as a record or database. Within my field of research for example, the accounts of participants in the 1960s Ampo struggle did not remain in an unfiltered way. We do not find much besides police records, newspaper articles, publications of political parties and trade unions, or the memoirs of intellectuals or leaders of student groups.

It is thus the concept of Oguma's book to document the voices of movement actors as unfiltered and as close in time to the actual events as possible. Oguma is the editor of the book and provides the introduction (cited above) as well as a history and analysis of the movement after 3.11 in part four. The first part is a group interview with some prominent movement actors (spokespersons). Part three is an interview with Kan Naoto, who was Prime Minister at the time of the Fukushima disaster. Part one and three sort of frame part two, which gives "various testimonies", for which Oguma asked 50 people engaged in various activities related to the Fukushima disaster to report about how they experienced what happened and about the activities they have been involved in since then. The book closes with a part written by the political scientist Kinoshita Chigaya about the development of the anti-nuclear demonstrations and an appendix providing a list of anti-nuclear demonstrations. Considering Oguma's blurb for Noma's book, Oguma thus establishes a connection between Noma's story and the "various testimonies" from Kantei-mae and other related accounts he compiles in his own book.

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8   All citations translated by the author.

Noma's book portrays in six chapters his experience of the civil activities from the first stirrings to the "big" demonstrations and internal problems of the protest organisers during summer 2012. This is followed by an account of the direct exchange with the political arena. The book closes with Noma's thoughts on what the movement has achieved so far. The appendix provides several short statements from different participants in the demonstrations as well a list of demonstrations in front of the Kantei. Thus, for Noma too, it seems important to document the many voices of individuals at the demonstrations as well.

Two shared themes

In the following, I systematically interpret the two books' text passages referring to the Ampo protests in the 1960s, which were the largest at the time and which are mostly associated with a violent image even today. Looking at such text sections, it appears that the two books share two common themes. The first common theme is, as pointed out above, the reason for writing the books, which is to provide eyewitness accounts from the inside of the movement. While Noma intends to document what happened from his personal perspective, Oguma develops this thought further to the necessity of timely eyewitness records to assign the movement its proper place in history. Oguma thus more explicitly connects the recent movement to previous ones and does not shy away from drawing comparisons to other protests in Japan (the Ampo protest period included) and the world.

However, the second common theme of the two works may be framed in terms of a clear dissociation of the Kantei-mae from the 1960s Ampo movement. Noma refers to the Ampo movement almost exclusively when he reports about media content that discusses and/or compares Kantei-mae to the period of the 1960s or other movements in the world. He states for example (p. 17):

> I, who was a middle-aged late-comer activist, carry a vague romanticism [based on images of protests in the Philippines in 1986, Tiananmen Square in 1989 in China, the occupation of Tahrir square in Egypt in 2011, and the 2003 sound demos in Japan against the war in Iraq] about civil movements in my heart, but this completely rolls past the MCAN activists. Nobody ever spoke of such romantic feelings, neither in the meetings after the weekly demonstrations nor in other everyday conversations. I think that even listening to TV newscasters getting excited about "this [kind of mobilisation] [has not been seen] since the 60s Ampo [protests]", nobody really felt affected by it. The staffers are rather unconscious about the difference between the 60s and 70s Ampo [protests], or between Zenkyōto and Zengakuren,[9] or the relationship of radical sects to the movement, and they also took no interest in it.

Interestingly, the passage following this citation, in which Noma states that even after the largest demonstrations, the only subject of conversations among

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9   The two major student organisations involved in the 1960s and late 60s to 70s movements.

the activists concerned the safety of the demonstrators or communication strategies with the police, is also cited by Oguma (p. 239). In addition to this, regarding the peaceful character of the protests, Noma also dissociates the Kantei-mae protests from Okinawa's peace movement, Gandhi's radical non-violent movement and others. He strongly stresses the specific character and peaceful strategy of the Kantei-mae protests solely adapted to the present social and political conditions in Japan (p. 136):

> The style of the Kantei-mae protests was [exclusively] decided based on the actual [social] and political situation in Japan. In a situation of social movement phobia, political apathy, and the extreme attitude of avoidance of violence in the 21st century, the most effective way [to address] people who vaguely think "demos are scary" or "people going to demos are strange" is to show them that this is not the case.

When reflecting on the image of the Kantei-mae protests' claim that it is a style allowing "normal" people to participate in – an image Noma is opposed to (because of its discriminating undertone) – he cites the political commentator Magosaki Ukeru, who characterises the difference between Ampo and Kantei-mae based on their organisational structure. For the Ampo mobilisation, strong leaders and group membership played a significant role. For the Kantei-mae mobilisation, on the other hand, individuals mobilised based on their own and individual reflections. Therefore, people from all ages and social classes participate (p. 250).[10]

Oguma, who in the analytical part four of his book undertakes a thorough examination of the societal background of the 1960s and the 2012 protests, joins in on this argument. He characterises the Kantei-mae protests by the absence of hierarchical structures and charismatic leaders while the Ampo protests were strongly typified by these. The reason for this, according to Oguma, is the different social structures of the time. The modularised and networked (civil) society today stands here in contrast to the civil society of the 1960s, which was mainly structured by groups such as trade unions, neighbourhood associations or business circles. Without the (legitimating) presence of these groups, social movement demonstrations would never have been taken seriously. By representing such social groups, movements are perceived to express the opinion of more people than might be seen on the street; if people come as individuals, this is not the case (pp. 252–253). Oguma also points out that the Ampo protests were interpreted as an expression of a "people's will to

10 In this research note, I concentrate on references to the Ampo protests. However, for the more knowledgeable reader of Japanese social movements, here is a short comment on references to the Anti-Vietnam-War movement (Beheiren in short in Japanese, see footnote 4): Noma refers to this peaceful movement when pointing out that tactics for restricting a movement to a single issue (as the Kantei-mae does) is not a new phenomenon, as the Beheiren movement, the World Peace Now campaign against the Iraq war in 2003 and the Free Tibet movement in 2008 did so as well (pp. 164–165). In Oguma's book, references to Beheiren can be found in some of the "various testimonies". Here, one author points out that the Kantei-mae atmosphere resembles the past Beheiren protests while others point to this period as the background to their childhoods (pp. 41, 76, 157). The memory of the Beheiren movement is a point for a follow-up with more comprehensive research in the future.

build a new society by themselves"; consequently, the Kantei-mae protests would have to be understood as an expression of "social responsibility of individual citizens" (p. 234). One more important characterisation of the Kantei-mae protests noted by Oguma is their sustainability and durability compared to other protests for example in Paris in 1968 (2 months), in Korea 1987 (1 month) or in Egypt 2011 (20 days) (p. 245); MCAN has continued organising Kantei-mae protests up until today.

Conclusion and outlook

In a nutshell, it can be said that these two movement intellectuals do not directly consider the legacy of the 1960s to be a constraint to the mobilisations after 2011, nor do they refer to the 1960s in any negative way. One reason for this could be that a considerable number of movement participants in summer 2012 had an activist background in the 1960s (see for example testimonies in Oguma 2013a: 41, 79 and Noma 2012: Appendix). But the authors apparently feel a strong need to distinguish themselves from the past protest cycle and to emphasise the exceptional nature of the recent protests and their organisational features and peacefulness, which have been exclusively adjusted to the social and political context of today's Japan. The authors thus use the examination of the past to point out the distinct characteristics of today, which they want to be remembered in the future (giving the movement its correct place in history). The analysis of the books of these two memory makers thus confirms the deep entanglement of "memory in activism" and "memory activism" within a social movement (see Rigney 2018).

However, this first analysis of memory makers' accounts only provides a small glimpse of a much larger research field concerning the memory of past protest cycles and their meaning for the memory of present protest cycles. In the "memory in activism" and "memory activism" fields, first, there is a need to prove whether the interpretation of the past and the present as framed by Noma and Oguma resonates within the broader movement; that is, the reception of this narrative needs to be studied. Further, competing narratives within the movement need to be investigated and the most influential narratives need to be singled out. In a second step, in the "memory of activism" field, perceptions and interpretations of the broader public of summer 2012 and the resonance of the narratives provided by movement actors should find their way into the research. Looking at the issue of activism and memory from a transnational perspective may also further the general understanding concerning the engagement of present movement actors with the legacies of past movement cycles, examined in different social and cultural contexts.

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Book Reviews

R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Jesus in Asia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. 311 pages, $29.95. ISBN 978-0199553440

In nine chapters, R. S. Sugirtharajah, a prodigious Sri Lankan writer on biblical and postcolonial topics who enjoyed a career on the theological faculty of the University of Birmingham, retrieves from relative obscurity eleven figures, some Christian, others not, to highlight what they might contribute to a more multifaceted, less Eurocentric understanding of the "historical" figure known as Jesus. From the first page – where the author frames his approach in terms of the quest for the Jesus of history associated with Albert Schweitzer and legions of others down to the present – to the last, where he waxes pessimistic about the entire enterprise and declares "a meaningful, straightforward history of Jesus in the modern era" to be an "impossibility" (p. 265), Sugirtharajah's intention is to break the monopoly on the debate over Jesus by means of a more inclusive "quest for the historical Jesus beyond the narrow confines of the Western world" (p. 1). Readers may be excused for wondering how fair it is of the author to impose this kind of analysis upon his eleven subjects, only a few of whom actually evince an interest in the question, although, to be sure, the canon of scholarship, especially in the theological academy, stands in need of recognising the existence – not to mention the relevance – of extra-European Jesuses.

Of the many subjects who could be included, Sugirtharajah singles out Tang Dynasty Christians (7th–9th centuries); a Jesuit at the court of Akbar in the 1600s (Jerome Xavier); Hong Xiuquan (self-professed "Younger Brother of Jesus" and leader of the Taiping rebellion in mid 19th-century China); a cosmopolitan fin de siècle Tamil Hindu (Ponnabalam Ramanathan, after Vivekananda one of the first guru figures popular abroad); two Hindus, Chandra Varma and Dhirendranath Chowdhuri (the one of the Arya Samaj, the other of the Brahmo Samaj); a Tamil Christian, Francis Kingsbury, whose controversial views on the historicity of Jesus earned him notoriety in the Indian church; Manilal Parekh, a Gujarati Anglican from a mixed Hindu-Jain background; Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the renowned Oxford philosopher; a relatively understudied twentieth-century Korean Minjung theologian, Ahn Byung Mu; and, lastly, Endō Shusaku, the globally-famous Japanese Catholic novelist whose primary work of non-fiction, *A Life of Jesus* (1978), rounds off Sugirtharajah's heterogenous sample of Asian voices from whom readers might gain new insights into Jesus's historicity.

Employing a predominantly text-based approach (even when the "text" is a Tang Dynasty inscription), Sugirtharajah does precious little to situate the texts he discusses within their time frame and context. Chapter one, for instance, toggles between the oddly-paired Tang Dynasty "Jesus Sutras" in Taoist-inflected Chinese and Jerome Xavier's Persian-language *Mirror of Holiness (Mirat al-Quds)*, adduced by Sugirtharajah as contrastive types of inculturation, the former a model to emulate and the latter a model to eschew. Here at the book's beginning, two symptomatic issues arise. First, for sinologists and other Asian studies scholars, Sugirtharajah seems unmindful of the risk involved in relying on the loose "translations" of the Jesus Sutras by Martin Palmer. At the least, Sugirtharajah could have footnoted the rudimentary state of scholarship on this body of texts as discussed in volume one of Nicholas Standaert's *Handbook of Christianity in China* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). And as for Xavier's *Mirror of Holiness*, much is known about the reception of the text at Jahangir's court where (nearly) verbatim records were made of the royal soirées at which it was discussed (on this, see Gulfishan Khan, "Contestations of Catholic Christianity at the Mughal Court", in Chad M. Bauman / Richard Fox Young (eds), *Constructing Indian Christianities*, Delhi: Routledge, 2014, pp. 61–85). Instead, Sugirtharajah offers his own pronouncements, which, though informed and informative, are purely speculative.

While one can learn a great deal *about* Jesus in Asia from Sugirtharajah, it is difficult to escape the impression that the author himself has actually found very little worth learning *from* his Asian interlocutors, ancient or contemporary, that would enrich and enliven his own quest for the historical Jesus – or, for that matter, the Western academy. In part, that impression stems from the fact that Sugirtharajah declines, rightly perhaps, to pretend that he has no professional views of his own on Jesus's historicity. Throughout the book, starting with the author's discussion of Hong, the Christian Taiping rebel, variations on phrases such as "unlike Jesus in the Gospels […]" (p. 55) become a refrain symptomatic of the author's normative baseline, from which his subjects (almost) invariably deviate, sometimes egregiously, including individuals to whom he warms the most. Of Kingsbury, like the author Jaffna Tamil, Sugirtharajah tells us that his Jesus was "distant", "detached", and – evidently for him, the cardinal sin – "dull" (p. 141); the portrait of Jesus he finds in Parekh, the Gujarati Anglican, turns out to be "clichéd" and "lackluster" (p. 165); Ahn, the Korean Minjung theologian, he finds "too addicted to Bultmann", reducing the "purchase" of his scholarship today (pp. 220–221, *passim*); and, for an author so demanding, it should perhaps seem unsurprising that Endō's Jesus also falls short, being "deeply rooted in a Japanese middle-class milieu" and "hardly the type who would be found in the bars and slums of Tokyo" (p. 247). Already, halfway through the book, Sugirtharajah begins to voice his own dissatisfaction with the Asian Jesuses his endeavours

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

Richard Fox Young

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conrad Schetter

Hajo Frölich, *Des Kaisers neue Schulen. Bildungsreformen und der Staat in Südchina. 1901–1911.* Berlin / Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018. 433 pages, €69.95. ISBN 978-3-11-055617-9

In his tale *The Emperor's New Clothes*, Danish author Hans Christian Andersen uses the figure of the naked, deceived emperor to show how vanity, when combined with gullibility and insecurity, can lead to disaster. Hajo Frölich, in this comprehensive archival study, asks whether the emperor's new schools in early 20th century southern China were likewise a web of lies, woven by alleged experts, but failing to deliver what they set out to promise. What kind of reality lies behind the aspirations of the educational reformers who intended to create both new schools and new, modern people who would identify as loyal citizens of an emerging nation state? At the beginning of the 20th century, China was to be transformed fundamentally. The new schools, Frölich argues, were to play a "pioneering role in intensifying state control and permeating society" (p. 12; this and all further quotes translated from German by the reviewer).

The study seeks to answer two questions: firstly, to what extent were certain actors able to build a modern education system – in a region far from the capital of a weak nation state; secondly, in which ways were modern technologies of administration – surveys, statistics, curricula, organisation charts, photographs and architecture – effective in implementing educational reform. Frölich's study is novel: not only does it contribute new insights as to how central reforms were implemented, or failed to become implemented, locally; it also directs attention to a hitherto little researched aspect of modern state-building – the use of new administrative technologies to assess and govern the Chinese populace in a scientific, professionalised way. As Frölich emphasises, these new methods did not merely constitute minor bureaucratic changes but can be understood as internal civilising missions, which at times also used physical force.

The Emperor's New Schools focuses on Guangdong province, a fascinating region. For many contemporaries – particularly those near Beijing – Guangdong symbolised the uncivilised periphery; at the same time, its port cities and the ensuing international trade exposed the region to Western modernity in particularly intensive ways. The study focuses on three cities in eastern Guangdong province (Jiaying, Chaozhou and Shantou) and is based primarily on material from the municipal archive of Shantou; the First Historical Archives in Beijing; the provincial library of Guangdong; local newspapers and official gazettes; local chronicles; various compendiums, laws and educational regulations; as well as the journal published by the Educational Association of China.

Following the introduction, which illuminates the interrelationship of school, state and nation in China primarily from the perspective of govern-

ance theory, Chapter 2 provides an excellent overview of the development of Chinese education prior to 1900. Chapters 3 and 4 can be regarded as the study's core parts: Chapter 3 investigates the state's new technologies of administration and governance by education; while Chapter 4 focuses on the extent to which the state was present and effective in every-day school practices.

Frölich investigates the new technologies by looking at four different dimensions: educational statistics, school inspection, training of educational personnel and the "Bureaus for Promoting Education". These technologies contributed to professionalising the local administration, but they also hierarchised the relationships between centre and periphery, and between state and society (the latter represented by the local gentry).

The first dimension – the introduction and professionalisation of educational statistics – showcases how the history of the modern Chinese nation can also be understood as the history of emerging, modern Chinese statistics, which extended well into the bodies of individual students. In fascinating detail, Frölich reveals the problems when doing statistics: overburdened personnel, lack of infrastructure and training, overlapping responsibilities and the lack of standardisation with regard to both the data to be gathered and its method of collection. Street-level bureaucrats at the level of the school needed to be trained in these technologies. Hence, these new ways of administration resulted both in a transformed perspective on the subjects to be governed (citizens and institutions) and in a re-education of the educational agents themselves. Statistics, it is shown further, served also as a demonstration of state control and expertise. On the flip side, the lack or incompleteness of statistical data also revealed to the public the limits of state agency and competence.

School inspection, modelled after its Japanese equivalent, served as an instrument of micro-management, which was not implemented comprehensively, however. On the one hand, school inspectors became increasingly independent of local county officials; on the other hand, they would encounter considerable resistance from both local elites and the students. In contrast, the training of educational personnel to acquire skills in modern administration was generally welcomed: the increasing professionalisation of educational administration was associated with new, prestigious career opportunities for those who were aspiring to become civil servants. The new Bureaus for Promoting Education were to establish and inspect primary schools; they were often run by representatives from the local community – however less as a form of self-governance and more as locally extended governance by the central state.

As Chapter 4 summarises, to establish and run schools was a state enterprise; however, this enterprise was heavily dependent on the local population's sense of community. The Chinese state had simply too few resources for implementing educational reform. Instead, the state would use "governance by

education" (p. 194) and thereby urge the gentry to financially support state reforms. While the great bulk of previous research has focused on intended curricula and hence the ideals of educational reforms, Frölich concentrates on local deviations and appropriations resulting from cultural, ethnic and linguistic differences; the lack of teachers, students and resources; and also on the actors' different collective and individual experiences and values. Nonetheless, Frölich concludes, schools largely attempted to follow state directives.

The primarily descriptive account of the various local deviations would have benefitted from a comparative analysis as well as from a more thorough conceptualisation. That is, firstly: to what extent do the three cities on which the study is based – and whose differing points of departure are emphasised by Frölich – really constitute different examples of the practical implementation of educational reform? Is the observed variation in the end due only to idiosyncratic differences across the individual schools and actors, or can we see structural patterns? And secondly: how can the various deviations and appropriations as shown in the empirical analysis be used to contribute to a better theoretical understanding of how reforms were implemented, and translated, locally? Here, a more systematic differentiation of the school as a representative object (e.g. architecture, school exhibitions) and the school as everyday practice would have been helpful. Moreover, a more systematic consideration of the type of historical material could provide more insight. Historical material does not merely serve as a source of information; rather, it possesses its own voice, and represents particular interests and agendas. (Only with regard to school photographs is this aspect taken into consideration.)

Finally, as a last critical question to this otherwise extensive and informative study: Can we clearly assess whether educational reform failed or whether it was successful? Frölich's study provides ambivalent answers to this question. When the "fiction" of a "global model of the modern state" (p. 350) becomes an aspiration – does this already qualify as a success? Again, one may wonder whether the three selected cities constitute cases of sufficient variation: Were there specific structures and constellations that proved particularly conducive or detrimental to successful implementation? To what extent was the state capable of forming desirable agents of education, and to what extent were these agents instead able to push the state? More case variation might have provided more precise answers than the three selected cities in eastern Guangdong province were able to offer.

As the educationist Zhu Qile said in the 1920s in his endeavour to promulgate an empiricist approach to education: it is insufficient "to watch the flowers only from the back of a horse" (Zhu Qile: Yanjiu xiangcun jiaoyu de tujing yu fangfa ["Paths and Methods of Research on Agrarian Education"], *Jiaoyu Zazhi* 15(9), 1923, pp. 6–15, here p. 9). With Frölich's study, we descend from the horse twice. On the one hand, we learn about empirical variation when

central reforms were implemented locally; on the other, we become witness to how the educational agents of the early 20th century exchanged the horse for the journey by foot – and how they did this in very different ways: cooperatively and reluctantly, with more or less coordination, and as both professionals and laymen. *The Emperor's New Schools* lets the reader participate in this journey.

Barbara Schulte

Assa Doron / Robin Jeffrey, *Waste of a Nation. Garbage and Growth in India.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018. 416 pages, 4 maps, €27.00. ISBN 978-0-6749-8060-0

Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey have set themselves the ambitious goal of delving into the many facets of India's waste issue. *Waste of a Nation* is the result of their tireless exploration, spanning an impressive range of spaces, practices and streams of waste across the subcontinent. The book presents a mosaic of outlooks on waste and its handling that carefully unfolds the complex challenges that India faces in its "encounter with the detritus of consumer capitalism" (p. 12). In doing so, it comprehensively portrays the extent of the problem, reflecting on both its magnitude and the variety of relations it involves, which are in several aspects particular to India.

The journey across India's waste material landscapes invites us to consider the formidable expansion of consumer goods that is eroding the country's traditions of frugality, taking us down manholes with sewer divers and along value chains as diverse as ship breaking and hair recovery. Emblematic trades of the informal economy of waste such as plastics and electronics are also described in detail. The authors discuss multiple aspects of India's waste and sanitary infrastructure, from the deadlocks in meeting the abysmal sewage challenges and the current government's struggles to end open defecation, to the recently built plants which attempt to deal with solid waste in accordance with the new legal frameworks. Actors and institutions are also subject to scrutiny. The historical, political and cultural difficulties of local governments are thrown into the balance, before the book concludes with an examination of the lifeworlds and narratives of various groups of actors involved in waste: first, its professionals – the engineers and managers entrusted by public administrations; second, the vast number of its handlers, toiling at the very bot-

tom; third, the networks of recyclers, bringing new life to waste; and finally, the NGOs and associations battling for waste handlers' dignity and showcasing practicable decentralised arrangements.

Whereas many of the challenges presented are not unique to India, Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey methodically bring our attention back and forth between the situation in the rest of the world and the issues specific to India, which considerably complicate matters for the country. On the one hand, India faces unprecedented levels of human and material density exacerbated by urban and capitalist growth. On the other hand, the practices and ideas related to caste associate the moral pollution of waste with those who handle it, turning it into the preserve of distinct low-status groups, thereby removing it from everyone else's concern. But the authors embrace an optimistic outlook and seek to acquaint us with the distinct assets India has at its disposal to cope with the unprecedented situation confronting it: a legacy of practices of thrift, large pools of labour with the capacity to process waste in ways unachievable elsewhere and a vibrant civil society.

Waste of a Nation is a remarkable contribution thanks to the scope of its coverage and its synoptic outlook on waste relations, blending history, ethnography and technical concerns. To assemble this narration of the messy worlds of Indian waste, countless vignettes gathered across the subcontinent are compiled with a vast array of secondary sources to produce a rich text that is enjoyable to read and efficiently sums up the extent of our knowledge on the issue. Surveying such a panorama of experiences, the ambition of the book is understandably not a theoretical one. The most significant contributions of the recent literature do appear in the text but usually to provide additional evidence rather than build a theoretical discussion. If the reader may at time regret the lack of a deeper engagement with such themes, the authors' choice is amply justified by their empirical focus, and coherently maintained throughout the manuscript. One of the main strengths of the book is probably its success in bringing together different waste types and relations that are otherwise increasingly discussed separately in the literature on South Asia. While sewage and infrastructure dealing with human waste – the form deemed the most polluting – are usually debated in the context of the relations between caste and sanitation, scholars' examinations of garbage tend to range from the governance of institutionalised categories of solid waste to the material economies flourishing on its margins. *Waste of a Nation* is salutary in reminding us that this divide is somewhat artificial and needs to be overcome should one attempt to understand the distinctively Indian overtones of waste issues.

However, if the authors rightly point at cultural practices and ideas as major stumbling blocks that create apathy and lasting stigma, we can regret that they reluctantly enter into their political significance. Mostly, caste here appears as a cultural oddity and would probably gain from being more thor-

oughly analysed as a contested political construct. In addition, the book's attempt to realise an exhaustive coverage favours variety over depth, with the result of obscuring the intense politicisation of several areas of waste practice. For example, little is said about the politics of conservancy workers, and the political aspects of technology are rapidly glossed over. The authors' willingness to latch on to optimistic stories, especially in the last chapters, produces a stimulating account that is justly aware of the sector's dire need for fresh energy, role models and replicable examples. But interrogating darker spots, and considering the intricate ways in which waste is hijacked for all manner of political agendas may also bring its share of valuable lessons on the path toward sounder waste management. *Waste of a Nation* nevertheless gains a place of choice in the waste literature and deserves the attention of academics, practitioners and anyone else interested in the pressing environmental challenges faced by India today.

Olivia Calleja

Malvika Maheshwari, *Art Attacks. Violence and Offence-Taking in India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019. 376 pages, $60.00. ISBN 978-0-1994-8884-1

When the "incendiary" film "Fire" – a story of same-sex love directed by Deepa Mehta – hit India's cinemas in 1998, I happened to watch it in the conservative holy city and pilgrimage centre of Varanasi. I was told I was lucky that I did not understand the local slang that accompanied the screening as background noise. Fortunately, that was all I experienced. Elsewhere, as Malvika Maheshwari discusses in her new book *Art Attacks. Violence and Offence-Taking in India*, the movie "Fire" had triggered destruction at the hand of Hindu right-wing groups in several cities in the country. However, attacks against art are highly contingent on many factors and hence do not automatically translate into uniform reactions to the same cultural product throughout India. In fact, there might be no attack at all.

The events such as those surrounding the film "Fire" are at the heart of *Art Attacks*. In this book, Maheshwari argues that, since the end of the 1980s, artists have been routinely attacked, artworks damaged and exhibitions disrupted by self-styled groups hailing from across the political spectrum. Disruption of public spaces, destruction of property and assaults on artists have yielded visibility, glory and success to the attackers while at the same time providing publicity for the very art whose circulation they aimed to halt.

Maheshwari weaves a powerful thread across well-known attacks against figures and organisations such as Safdar Hashmi, Sahmat, Salman Rushdie, Anand Patwardhan and M.F. Husain. The author retells these cases with the aid of multiple interviews with assailants (a heterogeneous sample, including artists at times), victims, art world professionals and journalists, among many others. This approach allows her to push for an inquiry into the nature of this particular violence and its perpetrators. Maheshwari asks where, in the landscape of violence in India, should we place such attacks on art and artists: are they akin to riots or other forms of violence? Equally important, the author contends that violence perpetrated by an array of groups of different political and religious persuasion signals a modus operandi intrinsic to democracy, rather than its "negation". Attacks on artists point to violence as the very condition of Indian democracy – a condition that is moulded and constrained by its very mechanisms, a situation the author says prevents a free-for-all rampage.

Art Attacks is a very well-researched book and the author displays a sophisticated knowledge of the political and of the significant shifts experienced in the world of politics, state institutions and their actors over recent decades. By the 1980s and 1990s, Maheshwari notes, the state had gradually begun ceding power to groups who sought to exercise the state's prerogative to repress citizens and whose claims of "hurt sentiments" became the reasoning to justify their oppressive means. The author completes this picture by including the crucial trends of the criminalisation of politics and the liberalisation of the Indian economy as well as the novel media landscapes that enable the assailants' desire for "performance". Whether the above high-profile attacks are symptoms of the involution of democracy or its actual and fatal consequences is uncertain. But that is not all: Maheshwari constructs these shifts through a conceptualisation of the ultimate object of the book, free speech, starting with the debates in the Constituent Assembly of India. The resulting narrative illustrates the fate of the interaction of elite cultural producers with a composite collection of art forms ranging from the visual arts, cinema and literature to theatre. Choosing diverse art forms is a strategy the author deploys to let the assailants designate something as "art" as the focus of their attack. On the other hand, while Maheshwari persuasively argues that the Hindu Right (or others) turn into self-appointed censors, these art forms are differently regulated, if at all. For example, while films are subject to the Central Board of Film Certification regulations, there exists no formal body that vets art exhibitions. Thus, the conditions for the release and circulation of art in India are rather different, and for example, many visual artists in India today continue to produce and show challenging works in ways in which free speech would seem to be regularly upheld.

Importantly, Maheshwari argues that attacks against artists are a new and unique practice and differ from existing modalities of demonstration and from forms of extreme violence such as riots and genocide. Towards the end of the book, the author contends that "artists are an embodiment of both the magnificence and the violence of the times they live in" (p. 339). The book discusses attacks that have targeted the artistic production of the elites, whose status has shaped both the attacks and their outcomes (these range from murder to banning but also to the granting of the right to screen a film). However, what takes place outside the realm of Indian society's upper echelons? While the book sheds light on the unknown and often unidentified assailants, the relation between free speech and those lesser-known artists residing in smaller cities, who have been attacked without generating any momentum, as the author mentions, have not found space in the book's analysis. Thinking comparatively, it is certainly true that elite artists (and other high-profile members of the cultural world) are subject to a climate of intimidation and potential censorship and violence – and the books demonstrates this very effectively; however, the routine and lethal violence experienced by minorities, Dalits and indigenous persons, as well as the gender violence that occurs as a matter of fact, actually point to the overall freedom of expression of elite cultural producers and their ability to fight cases in court.

Art Attacks deserves to be read widely as it offers much food for thought on the shifting texture of Indian society, the limits of democracy, but also the role of "containment" by those who consider themselves arbiters not only of visual and material worlds but of the very nature of culture.

Manuela Ciotti

Corinna R. Unger, *Entwicklungspfade in Indien. Eine internationale Geschichte 1947–1980*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015. 319 pages, €34.90. ISBN 978-3-8353-1754-3

In her book, Corinna R. Unger, Professor of Global and Colonial History at the European University Institute in Florence, gives a profound and detailed overview of the different developmental approaches in postcolonial India. While outlining the different theories underlying development policy in India, she ties the actual development work to the international conditions at the time. This overview not only conveys the circumstances affecting Indian international politics in general but also illustrates how strongly global development work rests upon strategic and political calculations that go beyond altruistic and social motives. The book demonstrates through many examples that

development policy in postcolonial India cannot be regarded as an isolated sphere but rather as a multifaceted product of colonial history, domestic and foreign policy, the Cold War, geographic location and many other factors. Furthermore, postcolonial India is partly depicted as a kind of experimental laboratory in which the different developmental approaches were tested, optimised and discarded over time – from support for cooperatives and low-threshold community development to universal and technical solutions that resulted in major industrial projects.

The publication is divided into two main parts, examining rural development on the one hand and industrialisation and urbanisation on the other hand. In the first part the author illustrates how assistance with self-help approaches competed with technical solutions, revealing the motives behind the shifts and the main actors involved. In the 1950s the dominant approach was Community Development, which was seen as a tool for nation building and strived not only for economic but also for social development and resulted in the Etawah Project in Uttar Pradesh. Using examples like this, Unger provides an in-depth look at the different motives, challenges, players and successes in postcolonial development policy in India. In detail she describes the achievements but also obstacles and criticised aspects of Community Development, which ultimately resulted in the switch to a different strategy, namely the Green Revolution, which promoted technology-based agricultural intensification.

The second chapter provides insight into different industrialisation projects and urban development strategies. Unger points out how the Rourkela steel mill, which was a major industrialisation project executed by West Germany, was intertwined with economic interests, infrastructural barriers and political issues. Moreover, the example demonstrates the attempts of the industrialised countries to re-educate the Indians with a so-called Protestant work ethic (p. 153). In contrast to the low-threshold approaches, the actions in Rourkela were not aimed at the social structure of the Indian population. The author manages to describe the project in sufficient detail so as to demonstrate its presentation in the Indian and German media at the time as well as the feelings of superiority and insensitivity it aroused among a wide range of Germans. Lastly, Unger deals with urban development in India using the examples of Rourkela, Chandigarh and Kolkata. By describing the different actions that were undertaken to build or develop these cities, she enables the reader unfamiliar with urban design to obtain an idea of the variety of different urban development approaches, concepts and goals – ranging from representative purposes to the improvement of living conditions in slums – and of the importance of a functioning city administration.

The author concludes with a summary of three different categories of knowledge in the field of development aid: theoretical knowledge, popular

knowledge and functional aggregated knowledge (pp. 280ff). Although those forms of knowledge are briefly described, it would have been beneficial to elaborate further on the conclusions and the implications that can be drawn from this categorisation for future development activity. In comparison to the sharply analysed case studies this overview unfortunately remains shallow. However, Unger further elaborates on the discrepancies between theory and practice and outlines the importance of learning from the executive actors rather than simply examining expert opinions (p. 285). This multidimensional actor-centred view used in the book demonstrates the large number of players and interlinkages between the private and public spheres in development policy. Finally, the author concludes that development must be seen as a concept that changes in line with contemporary interests, problems and socio-economic contexts.

Overall, the author provides deep insight into the chosen examples and reflects upon the measures from various perspectives. The clear structure of the book, as well as the many interim results, summaries and conclusions make it easy to follow the main themes. Unger uses matching examples that also emphasise the heterogeneity of Indian culture, society and history. The focus on practical implementation enables the reader to acknowledge that Western models and theories cannot be copied as they stand but need to be adapted to the cultural framework on site. The author manages to show the emergence as well as the practical implementation of various concepts and the conclusions that can be drawn from them. In so doing, she demonstrates her wide knowledge of the subcontinent and its diverse culture. Although the examples are suitable for underlining the history of development in India, it would have been interesting to gain an insight into the developmental actions or inactions in conflict areas such as Kashmir or the Northeast. Nevertheless, the historical-epistemological analysis is a vivid and also entertaining way to reconstruct the history of Indian development, in which politics and knowledge reciprocally evolve. Sadly, the analysis ends in the 1980s. The book sparks an interest in following up the development policies that have continued since that time.

Julia Sophie Schmidt

Anna L. Dallapiccola / Anila Verghese (eds), *India and Southeast Asia: Cultural Discourses*. Mumbai: K. R. Kama Oriental Institute, 2017. 503 pages, $110.00. ISBN 978-93-81324-12-7

The volume under review emerged from a conference convened at Mumbai in 2015, the original title of which, "Cultural Dialogues between India and Southeast Asia", probably represents the contents of the volume better than its chosen title "Cultural Discourses". A small number of scholars from Southeast Asia attended the meeting, redressing the frequently observed predominance of European and, as in this case, Indian scholars. At the heart of the conference was the question of the "Indianisation" of Southeast Asia, which has kept scholars busy for decades but still offers new finds and aspects that require a re-assessment of received wisdom.

The first section of the volume contains three articles that address more general and theoretical points. Pierre-Yves Manguin demands what he calls a "necessary re-assessment" of the Indianisation within a revised time-scale (until 1500 CE), using recent theoretical approaches, which operate with concepts such as "decadence" and "convergence" or engage with Pollock's model of the Sanskrit cosmopolis. The latter is criticised by Robert Brown for both its lack of synchronicity of historical developments in South and Southeast Asia and its focus on India as the sole point of reference for these developments. This aspect is also emphasised by John Whitmore, who compares the "Indianisation" of Vietnam to the Chinese influence upon the country. He concludes that the actual Indianisation between ca. 300 and 1200 CE was sandwiched between two periods of much more dominant Chinese influence.

The second section consists of six contributions revolving around topics of syncretism and religious influence. Ang Choulean chooses megaliths and lingams to show how Indian culture was adopted in Cambodia, and Siyonn Sopearith refers to cows and buffaloes to describe two cults unknown in Cambodia before its contacts with India. Another paper on Cambodia questions the juxtaposition of Indisation vs. Indigenisation in a more fundamental manner. Ashley Thompson argues that candleholders used in a ritual of ancestor veneration (*babil*) no longer allow a distinction between external or internal origins.

Hiram Woodward explores the sources from which the artists of Pagan (Burma, 11th–13th centuries) drew their artistic inspiration by comparing various monuments and artefacts with Indian textual sources. Including Sri Lanka and Lower Myanmar, he highlights Northeast India and the "composite culture" of Lower Myanmar as the two most important sources of inspiration. Philip Friedrich also looks at Sri Lanka in a careful re-assessment of the sources that inspired the monk Sri Sattha, who introduced a Sinhalese-Buddhist ordination lineage at Sukhothai (Thailand) in the mid-14th century.

The third section continues with the themes of urban planning and architecture. Im Sokrithy asks whether Indian concepts of urban planning can be discovered in Cambodian settlements, and Swapna Kothari offers a comparative analysis of differing notions of heritage management and conservation in India and Southeast Asia. Swati Chemburkar singles out the concept of the *mandala* for the ground plan of stupas (and especially the Borobudur), which she illustrates with examples from India and Tibet. Finally, Olivier Cunin provides further evidence that some of the sculptures on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art originally came from the Banteay Srei temple in the vicinity of Angkor. Though only loosely connected to the overriding theme of Indianisation (or other cultural discourses), his article is nevertheless one of the more substantial contributions to the volume for the straightforward and persuasive argument it presents.

The subsequent group of essays is focused on aspects of iconography and sculpture. With the help of Indian texts, Vasudha Narayanan interprets a statue of Vishnu from the Musée Guimet as a *vishaka* pillar, which represents the four hidden incarnations of Vishnu (Samkarshana, Vasudeva, Pradyumna and Aniruddha). Nicolas Revire concentrates on the iconography of Buddha images sitting cross-legged (*bhadrasana*), comparing examples from a broad geographic spectrum ranging from Gandhara to Java. The paper by R. Mahalakshmi investigates the artistic exchanges, notably of Brahmanic statues, between South India and Sri Lanka. Despite the proximity of the two regions, regional varieties can easily be discerned. Again closer to the theme of the volume is the essay of Natasha Reichle, who studies Durga statues from Indonesia, where these are known as Rangda. Suchandra Ghosh refers to recent finds from Mogalmari (Bengal) to explore the spread and utilisation of Buddhist clay (or votive) tablets, to claim that depictions of Buddhas with the gesture of preaching (*dharmacakra-mudra*) are rather exceptional.

The final section covers the areas of literature and performing arts. It contains three papers on Indonesia, which deal with the *gamelan* orchestra (Jaclyn Wappel), shadow play (Ilicia Sprey) and symbols of political power (Helen Jessup). In addition, there is an article on the (early) coinage in Southeast Asia (S. B. Majumdar), for which again an Indian origin is suggested. It is clear that Indian production of coins preceded that in Southeast Asia by several centuries; but the perhaps more important question – why Southeast coinage is by and large limited to the realm of Pyu-period Myanmar (which also deflates the perception that the minting of coins was a pan-Southeast Asian phenomenon) – is unfortunately left out. This section starts with an article by Kenneth Hall, who investigates Javanese *kakawin* – poetical literature with a spiritual undercurrent – and its relation to Pollock's model of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, as well as the role it played in the formation of a Javanese-Islamic nation. Carefully assessing the usefulness of Pollock's concept, Hall ac-

knowledges that Sanskrit helped stimulate a local literary tradition, but was readily replaced with writings in the vernacular when the king and court elites could draw cultural and political power from the latter.

Two contributions on a less prominent element of the cultural exchange between South and Southeast Asia, viz. textiles and their printing patterns, conclude the volume. Alexandra Green demonstrates that textiles found in the wall paintings of Burmese temples can be referred back to Indian templates. Gujarat appears to have been a place of origin in addition to Bengal and South India. Radhika Seshan complements this finding with a concise survey of the textile trade from Bengal during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Edited volumes such as the one under review here are often hard to assess, as the individual contributions may vary considerably in terms of length, focus or substance and do not necessarily add up to a coherent whole. Moreover, conferences can provide the temptation for scholars to draw from and summarise their own past research without offering many new insights. This tendency occasionally becomes apparent in the current volume, too, even though it must be admitted that a good number of its contributions do enrich the debate about the Indianisation of Southeast Asia with helpful, theory-based considerations. It should also be noted that practically all contributions provide some connection to this general theme, though without always specifically highlighting where their argument fits in with it. If there is a major point to criticise, it would perhaps be that several illustrations have been scanned with insufficient resolution, making them appear pixelated in print. This is all the more regrettable since glossy paper has been used for the printing, which could have allowed for high-quality reproduction of all illustrations. This minor issue apart, the volume offers thoughtful contributions and adds more facets to the cultural connections between South and Southeast Asia in the pre-modern period.

Tilman Frasch

Rainer Werning / Jörg Schwieger (eds), *Handbuch Philippinen. Gesellschaft, Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur.* Berlin: regiospectra Verlag, 2019. 496 pages, €24.90. ISBN 978-3-9477-2906-7

The 12th most populated country in the world – with currently 106.5 million inhabitants – still appears only marginally in the news and if it does, mostly in the context of kidnapping, catastrophes, violent conflicts, etc. Thus most politicians and journalists have little understanding of the Philippines, or even

South East Asia as a whole, and are unable to acknowledge the country in its complexity and its relevance. To overcome this deficit *Handbook Philippines: Society, Politics, Economy, Culture*, originally published in 2006, has now been issued in a sixth, substantially revised and updated edition. It is unique not only in German, but would also be very useful in an English translation, i.e. for a much larger readership. In English only these two, rather out-dated books are available at the moment: *Philippines: A Global Studies Handbook* by Damon L. Woods (2006, ABC-CLIO) and *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance*, edited by Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Rosskamm Shalom (1987, South End Press).

For the readers of the IQAS it is interesting to note that an altogether very positive book review of the fourth edition of the *Handbook Philippines* appeared in the IQAS's predecessor *Internationales Asienforum* (2013, Vol. 44/1–2, pp. 177–179). The author, Ralf Leonhard, remarked that this handbook had been very quickly promoted to become a "standard" within the field. He is himself also a contributor to the new revised volume of the handbook. His reasonable recommendation – for any edited volume – to include an index was unfortunately not yet followed by the editors.

Concerning the editorship, Jörg Schwieger has replaced Niklas Reese, and as publisher regiospectra has followed Horlemann. Both editors are well known in the field, and have regularly spent time in the country. Rainer Werning has been a German social scientist and specialist on South and North East Asia for many decades. He has published widely on Cambodia, both Koreas, and the Philippines, and is now teaching on the subject at the universities of Bonn and Osnabrück, as well as at the Academy for International Cooperation/AIZ in Bonn-Röttgen. He is also a regular commentator on the region for the magazines *Freitag*, *Junge Welt* and *Wochenzeitung*. Jörg Schwieger, educated as a Protestant theologian in German literature, was general secretary of the Action Group Philippines from 1982 to 1986, and of the Philippines Office in Cologne from 1987 to 1991. Afterwards he worked for the Protestant Development Service in Bonn in different management functions.

In addition to the new editorship and publisher, many changes have occurred since the former editions, which make it worth presenting this book anew to a wide readership. For example, the dramatic political changes, especially with the election of Rodrigo Duterte as president in 2016, had to be considered. Rainer Werning calls this phenomenon "Dutertismo", and forecasts a long life for it – as well as for the Marcos clan (pp. 315–326). Johannes Icking's chapter "Desolat: Die Menschenrechtslage unter Duterte" (Desperate: The Human Rights Situation under Duterte) picks up a very critical aspect of the new regime (pp. 281–292). (Unfortunately, similar changes can be seen globally, which I call "social nationalism; see my article "Sozialnationalis-

mus? Anmerkungen zu Wolfgang Streecks 'Gekaufte Zeit. Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus'", *Sozialwissenschaftliche Literatur Rundschau*, 2013 / 67, pp. 39–46). The book would have gained from the inclusion of an international comparison for the better understanding of the embeddedness of the developments in the Philippines. Currently, the Philippines ranks 101 among 179 nations in regard to democracy – considered an "electoral autocracy" – and is estimated to be at high risk of further autocratisation (*Democracy Facing Global Challenges. V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019*. Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg, 2019, p. 28, 55).

The new handbook is – as before – reasonably divided into eight chapters: general data and history, life, people, countryside and ecology, politics and the economy, culture, religion, and "Östliches–Westliches" (East-West) as well as an appendix. The chapters each have six to fourteen entries, with altogether 80 entries by 35 authors. Their selection demonstrates again a good mix of German and Philippine contributors, with an admirable interdisciplinarity. The well-written, compact articles are complemented by information boxes and pictures. That the latter are only in black and white is surely a concession to the low price of the book.

Quite a number of articles have been replaced, and it is more than welcome that the trade unions and the workers' movements have been given more space (pp. 95–100). Of the new articles the following are especially recommendable: "Du bist der Stau" (You Are the Traffic Jam) by Niklas Reese; "Nachhaltige Abhängigkeit" (Sustainable Dependence) by Hannah Wolf; and "Katastrophenkapitalismus" (Catastrophe Capitalism), "Fanal des Widerstands" (Signal of Resistance) and "Tod im Reisfeld" (Death in the Rice Paddy) by Rainer Werning. Other worthwhile new contributions can be found within the chapters on culture and religion. All remaining articles have been revised and updated.

Very positive is the new inclusion of the authors within the table of contents – a former deficit that has now been remedied. Finally, a helpful table of the history of the Philippines has also been added. A very pleasant feature is the relatively low price, for a book with so many narrowly printed pages. It is therefore also accessible for students. In sum the new version of *Handbuch Philippinen* can be recommended without any reservations to anyone with an interest in this country, as it offers an excellent overview on a huge range of topics.

György Széll

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