



**Sandra Kurfürst, Stefanie Wehner (eds.)**

# **Southeast Asian Transformations**

**Urban and Rural Developments  
in the 21st Century**

**[transcript]** Global Studies

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Southeast Asian Transformations

**Global Studies**

*For Rüdiger – our teacher, colleague, and friend*

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## Preface

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We both began to work with Rüdiger in 2005/6 starting as early career-researchers at the Chair of Southeast Asian Studies in Passau, where Rüdiger had been a full professor since 2004. During the following years, our lives were strongly affected and inspired by both – Southeast Asia and Rüdiger Korff, our PhD-supervisor and mentor, whose network of friends and colleagues spread all over Germany, Southeast Asia, and beyond. Within this edited volume, we tried to bring together many of the scholars who worked together with Rüdiger over the past decades. Accordingly, this volume comprises contributions from Rüdiger's friends and colleagues from Germany, Southeast Asia and India; from the early beginnings of Rüdiger's own academic career to the most recent collaborations, displaying the whole range of his interests and research topics.

Throughout his academic life, Rüdiger has actively shaped and advanced the discipline of Southeast Asian Studies. A rather marginal field in Germany, and thence occupying a marginal position in German academia, area studies in general, and Southeast Asian Studies in particular, have often been criticised for appropriating and constructing certain areas, which are not perceived as such by those living in these regions. Rüdiger Korff contributed to overcoming such container-like thinking by propagating an emic approach to Southeast Asia. Combining critical theory (from the Global North) with emic reconstructions of meaning, while closely cooperating with academics from Southeast Asia and beyond, Rüdiger Korff succeeded in establishing the field of contemporary Southeast Asian Studies as theoretically informed and empirically based discipline. Being a sociologist of development and urban sociologist with a focus on Thailand, Rüdiger has always shown great interest in the interface of urbanism and globalisation, analysing local encounters with global developments.

This collection of essays in honour of Rüdiger Korff reflects his multiple fields of expertise. The first two introductory chapters outline the book's theme of rural and urban transformations in particular (Padmanabhan), while discussing the development, merits and shortcomings of the academic field of the sociology of development in general (Neubert).

A great body of Rüdiger's publications deals with questions of the urban, focusing on social creativity and locality (chapter by Kurfürst), public spheres (chapter by Satur), and people's self-organization (chapter by Vogel and Rothfuß). Always taking in-

to account that the rural and the urban are deeply interconnected, his academic vita also comprises explorations into the highlands of Mainland Southeast Asia (MMSEA-Region). In the BMBF LILAC project, Rüdiger combined his research focus on ethnicity with studies in agricultural development and biodiversity (chapter by Wehner). Later, he extended his interest in urbanism to include small and medium-sized towns (chapters by Le and Warnk), a field still constituting a research gap in urban studies. His long-term experience in field work in Thailand has deepened Rüdiger's knowledge of Thai development and politics (chapters by Sasiwonsaroj, Husa, Wohlschlägl and Nelson). In recent years, he developed an interest in media and communication (chapter by Hahn and Munkler), particularly inspired by the work of Manuel Castells. Having been a visiting professor to the National University Malaysia (UKM), Rüdiger collaborated closely with colleagues from UKM on questions of ethnicity and nation-building in Malaysia (chapter by Shamsul). Extending his research area well beyond Southeast Asia, Rüdiger established collaborations with scholars from India within the scope of the Urban Self Project (chapters by Sumathi and Pandiaraj). While his research has always been concerned with contemporary developments, Rüdiger invariably added a historical dimension to his analyses. The last section of the edited volume therefore assembles chapters on the history of Southeast Asia with a focus on Myanmar and Cambodia (chapters by Hellmann, Thant, and Kolnberger).

We would like to express our thanks for his guidance, his always keeping his office doors wide open and his support whenever we struggled. As he once put it, you cannot accomplish a PhD without some sort of suffering. Luckily, we found an inspiring and motivating environment at the Chair of Southeast Asian Studies, enabling us to overcome any obstacles in the process of acquiring a PhD. Always up for new ideas, Rüdiger supported us greatly in shaping our scientific and analytic minds as well as learning to ask adequate questions, while advising us to continuously query the recent state of affairs.

Together with the Chair's soul, secretary Christa Gottinger, he succeeded in creating an environment of friendly exchange and collaboration within an international and gender diverse team. For his retirement, we wish him happiness, good readings and good rhythms – as Rüdiger is also an admirer of good music. Thank you, Rüdiger, for your kindness, support, and academic inspiration!

# Navigating the urban rural frontier in Yogyakarta

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*Martina Padmanabhan (Passau)*

The rural–urban dichotomy seems a quintessential feature of modernity and ongoing processes of modernisation. While at the first glance, the characteristics of rural and urban areas appear to be clear-cut and mutually exclusive, further empirical probing calls into question this black-and-white, woodcut-like representation.

This essay is a musing on experiences of navigating the fringes of the city of Yogyakarta on Java on a motor scooter during a 10 month period of residency in Indonesia. The dialectical analytical approach is inspired by the conversations during the ride to school with my 9 year old son Jacob<sup>1</sup>. The daily trips from our rented house through the suburban traffic allowed us to observe, discuss and analyse the rapid changes we could see taking place along the route. The topic of rural–urban relations and signifiers frequently came up in our discussions. Jacob's commentaries drew on his life-worldly connotations and experiences of rurality and urbanity acquired in Lower Saxony and lower Bavaria in Germany. My perspective on the fluid land- and cityscapes we encountered along our way was informed by Lefebvre's theory of urbanisation and Tanja Mölders' critical reflections on the links between gender, place and nature.

In what follows I first briefly outline these two conceptual frameworks and provide some background information on the history and culture of Yogyakarta. I then trace our journey in chronological and spatial order, starting from our house and ending at Jacob's school. At each of the places described along the way, I reflect on what they reveal about societal relations to nature in this rapidly growing metropolis.

## **The constitutive emergence and decay of urbanity and rurality**

Urbanisation and globalisation are central drivers of changing patterns of life-worldly sense-making (Schmid, 2005). Rapidly changing configurations of space and time, linked to particular places, demand theoretical conceptualisation from a social science perspective. Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space (1974) constitutes a powerful tool for describing and analysing processes and phenomena of urbanisation, and their

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1 All names have been changed.

effects on society at different scales (from the private sphere, via the city, to the global scale) (Elden, 2002). Lefebvre was trained as a philosopher before turning to sociology. His reflections on the rapid spread of cities and the loss of life-worldly qualities that this entails led him to conceptualise the all-encompassing influence of industrialisation as a process of deruralisation (*dépaysanisation* or *Entländlichung*).

For Lefebvre (1991), urbanisation affects both the city and the rural, following a process along a space-time line that leads through a sequence of stages from the rural to the modern industrial city. His central thesis is that in an urbanised world neither 'the urban' nor 'the rural' exist, but rather different urban configurations. His perspective is a dialectical one, emphasising large-scale processes of change arising through the interplay of opposing forces, but without neglecting the entanglements that are encountered along the way. His reasoning draws on the historical example of the urban development in Europe, a topic that is closely interlinked to the Enlightenment and modernity, as well as with their dark underbelly, colonialism. He predicts the dominance of urban social fabric over rural existence, reducing villages to the status of folklore and tourist attractions. At the same time the proliferation of holiday homes and associated infrastructure and consumerism converts the rural into a part of this urban fabric. His image of all-encompassing urbanity in space and time, nevertheless leaves pockets of rurality (*ruralité*) within the urban mesh, where seasonality and, in his diction, "nature" survive (Lefebvre, 1971). In Lefebvre's conceptualisation, the *political city* is the starting point of urbanisation. The expropriation and accumulation of surplus value produced in rural societies provides the material basis for the concentration of administrative and military power in urban areas, as well as for the flourishing of art and culture. The divide between the urban and the rural thus reflects a division of labour in both material and intellectual spheres. This vision of a privileged centre surrounded by periphery that is increasingly marginalised and under its control displays striking similarities with the governance pattern of mandala states in Southeast Asia (Dahm, 1999: 174).

The *commercial city* emerges out of the political city, as trade in commodities increasingly dominates city life and moulds the configuration of urban space. Instead of political meeting places, markets dominate the city centre, as a meeting place for the exchange of goods. Land tenure becomes less important as a source of power than the control of money. In rural areas, instead of producing for the landlord, people produce for the market. The rural loses the last vestiges of its autonomy and turns into the 'environment' surrounding the city.

In a final step, Lefebvre sees the *industrial city* emerging in a more or less evolutionary manner from the commercial city. The transition from manufacturing to industrial production breaks open the historical city and creates an agglomeration of social spaces moulded by corporative power and reflecting the associated division of labour. Compared to the commercial city, the industrial city has a less purely 'urban' character: the monstrous spread of urban areas leads to the dissolution of the historical city and the emergence of a rural-urban duality, in which the distinction between rural and urban becomes blurred. Lefebvre (1991) goes so far as to describe the industrial city as 'anti-urban'. From a Marxist perspective, he postulates a shift away from conflicts defined by the categories place and time towards a more fundamental conflict embracing the whole of society.

To what extent is this Eurocentric, historically grounded understanding of urban development relevant to the situation of cities in non-European countries, such as the ‘royal city’ of Yogyakarta, in the 21st century? Lefebvre’s concept of the dialectical neutralisation of the antagonism of the rural and the urban will be familiar to anyone living through the rapid changes that are taking place in Indonesia and across the developing world. Lefebvre pictures the urban as exploding and spreading over the whole country. This is not the idea of a synthesis of both elements, but rather a violent process of rupture, in which urbanisation not only destroys the rural but also dissolves the ‘urban’ as this term was historically understood.

Equally relevant for residents of modern cities like Yogyakarta is the concept of urbanisation as a phenomenon encompassing the whole of society; one that not only affects every location, be it rural or urban, but is also part and parcel of every societal transition, influencing ideas, actions and lifestyles. As Schmid (2005: 26) points out, Lefebvre implicitly postulates a dialectical relation between epistemological development and societal change.

Lefebvre is of course aware that the singular chronology he proposes based on the historical case of Europe is an ideal representation of a complex, uneven process. Different places and times become settings for ‘negotiation’ between rurality and urbanity, which —for the time being— continue to coexist. This give rise to what Lefebvre calls societal space-time configurations, in which rural, industrial and urban formations or ‘continents’ overlap. These overlaps are critical phases and zones, transitional spheres of abrupt and, for those involved, often painful change. In this essay I postulate that the fringes of modern-day Yogyakarta exemplify one such virulent interface. I apply Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of urbanisation to gain insights into the changes —observed from the top of a scooter— taking place over space and time.

## The questionable nature of rurality

While Lefebvre focuses on urbanisation, Tanja Mölders (2017, 2018) is interested in the “nature of rurality”. Building on insights from social-ecological research, she reflects on the spatial dimension of the societal relations through the lens of the dialectical concept of societal relations to nature (Hummel et al., 2017). She notes that, in contemporary discourse, ‘nature’ as a category is most often a material and symbolic expression of agrarian production and conservation areas. The term ‘rurality’ appears difficult to define, since it is a hybrid concept that contains elements of the urban as well as the rural. Nevertheless, both categories immediately connect to notions of space and place. She argues that enriching this discourse with the central social notion of gender is a productive move that allows linkages, both epistemological and ontological, to be drawn between the categories gender, place and nature.

Mölders (2017) postulates rurality as a material-symbolic relation that penetrates the urban-rural continuum. From this perspective, rurality is seen as the product of dynamic processes, in which practices, trajectories and their interaction give rise to changing configurations of place and space. This vision rejects the compartmentalisation of rurality into materialised matter and cultural-symbolism. When the material

and the social are thus merged and conceptualised as a single space, not only human-nature relations, but also power and gender relations emerge as analytical categories for understanding the hybrid nature of rurality.

Rurality is thus an imagined space; it emerges through diverse performative practices, which together co-create the urban-rural difference (Mölders, 2017). Mölders identifies three other performative practices that question this construction of rurality: “Doing gender” engages with gender as both a socially constructed and an operational category. Dominant heteronormativity is not reduced to symbolic-discursive attribution; rather, the focus is on the material conditions shaping gender relations. “Doing nature” participates in the societal construction of nature and resists the idea of nature as being opposed to or existing outside of society. This insight helps to unravel naïve assumptions about women being ‘closer to nature’. It shows how the ‘naturalising’ of women serves to disguise gender based power relations. Finally “doing rurality” interrogates gender relations in the countryside, revealing ‘pastoral’ images as being intimately bound up with the continuity of patriarchal structures, giving rise to constructed images of rural masculinity and femininity.

Mölders’ emphasis on performance brings Lefebvre’s sweeping historical overview down to earth and grounds the life-wordly activities of the actors taking part in the changes he describes. Her focus on interactions is a reminder that changes occurring in one sphere cannot be understood in isolation: the material cannot be divorced from the symbolic; nor the urban fabric understood in isolation from the social fabric and, in particular, gender relations. These insights inspired me to follow the connections leading from the sights and sounds of daily life in Yogyakarta to explore the wider, often momentous changes affecting the urban social fabric, and their impacts on material conditions in far-away places.

## **Yogyakarta: between the mountain and the sea**

The royal city of Yogyakarta lies on the Indonesian island of Java between the mountain and the sea. The city has evolved around the Sultan’s palace, the Keraton, located half-way between the volcano Mount Merapi to the north and the Indian Ocean to the south. The Sultan is not only the governor of this Special Province, the only city in Indonesia still ruled by a monarchy, but also the spiritual leader of the people of Central Java (Dahm, 1999: 174). As Sultan and ruler, his sphere of influence is located at the intersection of the worldly and the spiritual world and guarantees the link between them. This is symbolised in close relationship between the male spirits on the volcano, Mount Merapi and female spirits of the sea, ruled over by Njai Roro Kidul, the Queen of the Southern Seas (i.e. the Indian Ocean). According to legend this powerful goddess of the ocean married the founder of the Mataram kingdom in the 17th century (Schlehe, 2008) and continues to watch over the Sultan, his state, and his people (Selosoemardjan, 1962: 18).

Culture and religion thus provide not only social order, but also constitute a symbolic being-in-the-world. As myth they explain both human relations and the interaction of humans with transcendent beings and nature. The individual, society, nature and

cosmos are all connected and, ideally, in harmony with each other (Magnis-Suseno, 1981). Outbreaks of the active Volcano Merapi, earthquakes (Widiyantoro et. al., 2018) and accidents at sea are considered to be messages directed at the political elite from the spiritual world to warn against decline of morals, exploitation of nature, or failure to offer ritual sacrifices. Thus the Sultan depends on nature and the cosmos for legitimation of his traditional status of political and spiritual leader.

Traditional Javanese society was homogenous; political life revolved around the court and displays of loyalty to the Sultan. The late Dutch colonial period initiated a period of rapid change. The emergence of a bureaucratic class shaped by formal education led to a decline in the status of the nobility, while the intelligentsia functioned as the liaison between the European rulers and their Javanese subjects (Selo Soemardjan, 1962: 144). Later, the city of Yogyakarta played a prominent role in the struggle for independence and from 1946 to 1948 was briefly the capital of the new Republic of Indonesia (Vickers, 2003). Modern Yogyakarta is renowned as a centre of arts, culture and higher education. Notwithstanding this ongoing process of modernisation, popular loyalty to the Sultan remains high and continues to play an important role in maintaining social stability.

The Sultan's special status is embodied in the layout of the city of Yogyakarta. The Keraton occupies a preeminent position at the centre of the town. Two large squares (*alun-alun*) located at the north and the south end of the palace compound are connected by Malioboro Street, a 'royal road' that forms a cosmological north-south axis. (Keilbart, 2018). The modern city can be roughly divided into the parts south and north of the Keraton. The south is a flourishing centre of the arts, especially traditional art forms such as *wayang*, *batik* and dance. The north is shaped by the presence of institutions of higher education and also of luxury hotels (Hyatt, Ambarukmo, Sheraton, Marriot), malls (Ambarukmo, Hartono, Jogja City, Sleman City) apartments, and gated perumahan, which are still growing in number. Higher education has actually declined in comparison. It houses the campus of Gadjha Mada Universitas, Indonesia's most prestigious university, and many other private academic organisations. The northern city is home to large numbers of students, academics and professionals, as well as growing numbers of working class families making a living from the informal economy.

## Methodological approach: transecting the city

Between August 2017 and June 2018 I spent a sabbatical year at the private catholic university, Atma Jaya Universitas Yogyakarta, where I coordinated a joint research project ([www.uni-passau.de/en/indorganic/](http://www.uni-passau.de/en/indorganic/)) and engaged in my own research. I was accompanied by my son Jacob, who had his 9th birthday during our stay. Our home during this period was in the municipality of Sleman. Although Sleman, whose official name is Sleman Regency, extends to the summit of Merapi, it is now effectively an extensive northern suburb of Yogyakarta. While I was at my office in the north-east of Yogyakarta, just inside the ring road that encloses the historical city, Jacob attended an international school further out towards Merapi, close to the northward extension of Palagan Street. Throughout our stay, we travelled almost daily back on forth between our home in Con-

tong Catur, close to the bus terminal, an ironically calm place surrounded by ever-increasing private traffic. I came to consider this routine of shuttling the boy helicopter-like to school as a repeated transect. I became aware of how what we saw and heard on our regular ride through the rapidly changing urban-rural landscape was telling different stories of place. This is similar to what Gibbs (2014: 211) calls site-work, when walks through contested places and meetings with informants form the stimuli for responses to place. Gibbs talks of such walks as “experiences in belonging” (2014: 214), through attachment to place and becoming enmeshed in stories that are told about it by people met along the way. Thus our daily journey became an opportunity to engage in a mode of investigation that was new to me, from which new insights emerged, informed by my ongoing research into organic farming (Schreer and Padmanabhan 2019) and Jacob’s encounters in school and in the neighbourhood.

From the very beginning we knew that, for us, Yogyakarta was a place to pass through, as our period of stay was finite and fixed in advance. The notion ‘passing through place’ encapsulates our way of belonging the city, one not based on fixity or longevity, not permanent, but vital nonetheless. Our rides back and forth to our temporary home provided a lens through which we could view relationships between places, people and the more-than-human world (Gibbs, 2014: 216). The interactions with neighbours, shopkeepers, services and participants in traffic were motivated by our need for sense- and place-making, and these interactions dominated our conversations along the road. Interestingly, rurality and urbanity were the central topic of our conversations from the very beginning. In what follows I trace our outward journey in chronological and spatial order, starting from our house and ending at Jacob’s school. At each of the places described along the way, I reflect on what they reveal about the different dimensions of spatial, societal, and economic relations to nature.

## Mixing different people: Townhouse

Our rented town house sits in the middle of a little compound, comprising of 10 similar single-story concrete buildings, to create a small block. Each house is surrounded by a tiny garden, sporting decorative flowering frangipani trees, smaller than the front yards typically used to park cars or the scooters that are the most popular means of transportation among the middle class. The alleys between houses are neatly paved with cobblestones, installed by the investor who built the compound. In the rainy season, the little street between the houses turns into a river, carrying along quantities of plastic garbage. Much of this plastic will end up in River Eloprogo, classified as one of the twenty most polluted rivers in the world (Asean Post, 2019) Our immediate neighbours are families, either Javanese or Peranakans of Chinese descent. The latter typically lead a secluded life, a legacy of the long history discrimination against them, both under colonial rule and since independence. Their well-guarded houses speak of caution in the face of continuing prejudice. By contrast the activities of the Javanese families often spill out onto the street. Many families also rent out rooms to members of the huge student population in the area. Our days start when we are woken by the sound of the Morning Prayer, the first of five daily prayer times, coming from the local mosque

close by. Immediately afterwards, regular as clockwork, the *jamu* lady arrives on her motor scooter to deliver one her herbal concoctions (*jamu*) to the Javanese lady next door. The *jamu* lady is knowledgeable in Javanese healing traditions (Beers, 2001) and supplies freshly prepared herbal mixtures to her regular customers, selecting those that are appropriate to treat their ailments from her many bottles on the rack of her motor scooter.

The townhouses are part of a larger residential area, whose diversity in class finds tangible expression in the layout of the housing. The townhouses provide secure housing in the city to wealthier families, as well as some more affluent students, whose presence reflects the proximity of the academic higher education institutions. The townhouse area is not gated off; it is a busy thoroughfare for local people passing through the neighbourhood. Despite this, it still feels somewhat like an island, surrounded by the neighbouring *kampong*, where working class families live in brick bungalows, interspersed with a few traditional Javanese houses constructed of intricately designed wooden panels. A few owners of these bungalows have plans to add an upper floor, (revealed by the concrete reinforcing rods sticking up out the roof), but most of these remain 'under construction' for a long time.

Many people in the *kampong* find employment in the informal services sector. For young men without education, the online service provider Gojek (Ford and Honan, 2017: 276), whose rapid expansion across Southeast Asia recalls the success of Uber, provides access to unregulated and highly competitive employment. Little shops and service agencies like laundries are also a common sight and in most cases are evidence of the industriousness of the women of the house – every housewife in the *kampong* dreams of running a small business. We take our clothes to one of the laundries to be washed. They can be seen hanging out to dry on the streets of the *kampong* — where, on one special day, they witness the marriage of our laundry woman. Next to the mosque and under its charge are a kindergarten and a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), which cater for the children of working class families in the *kampong*. The children of our townhouse neighbours commute, like Jacob, to other schools further afield.

## The cultivation of wild beauty

When opening my own locked gate to roll out the motor scooter in the morning, I meet the Javanese lady Nani, who has already watered the street and her plants, enjoyed her *jamu* drink and chatted with the *jamu* lady – all activities I unintentionally and unconsciously witness through the street noises and interspersed with the sound of her singing coming through the open windows. Later the day her *pembantu* (servant) will sweep the street and hang up the washing in a quiet corner of the paved alley way. When I was looking for somewhere to live, my first encounter with this pastoral sight of fresh laundry hanging in the public space of the street was the decisive moment that convinced me to opt for this particular neighbourhood. While the garden of our townhouse turned out to be of concrete covered up with a thin layer of earth —we found out when trying to plant bananas— our neighbour Nani's front yard is covered in all kinds of lush greenery. While almost all Javanese households —be they rich or poor,

at the motorway or in the kampong— decorate their homes with potted plants, hers are exceptional. She specialises in growing orchids, which she also sells and are held in high regard. During the 10 months we spent in the neighbourhood, I could observe her little front garden and the orchids hanging from wire trellises. During this period, the ultimate status symbol of the middle class, the car, was sold—to finance a medical emergency in the family—but thereby making space in front of the house for a reception area for the customers who came to buy these rare plants with their beautiful flowers, as her business of trading in orchids expanded. Her husband used to work in Coca-Cola bottling plant, but when we arrived had recently joined the fast expanding textile industry in Yogyakarta as a clerk.

While a home garden of potted plants, if possible combined with a little pond, is an essential part of the ideal Javanese home, it also reveals much about contemporary human-nature relations. Nature is tamed (by being potted) and cared for. Women and men alike tend the plants after long days in the office and keep them watered and fertilised. Poor people recycle tins and pots to grow decorative plants around their homes. The orchids propagated and meticulously cared for by Nani around her townhouse originate from the forests of Kalimantan or Borneo. Traders deliver the plants to her doorstep, the bounty of plant hunting expeditions undertaken in forests of Kalimantan<sup>2</sup>, an hour's flight away. These highly appreciated, aesthetic plants, each different species requiring different humidity and handling to mimic its natural habitat, have to be imported from one of the so-called *Nusantara* or outer islands. For a long time Indonesia has been identified with Java by the independence movement, and especially under Suharto. Java is considered the centre, and other islands the periphery. In this vision, Yogyakarta functions as the cultural centre of Central Java. However, to maintain the performance and display of harmonious human-nature relations in the space of the Javanese home, central items of appreciation must be imported from Kalimantan. The beauty of rare and exotic orchids adds to the enjoyment of the person who looks after them and enhances his or her status, as a visible display of harmonious relations to nature at the front door. However, this phenomenon can be read as a sign of crisis of societal relations to nature. The wilderness of Kalimantan and its presumed rurality must be tamed and brought into the urbanity of the townhouse to re-enact the balance between the individual, the community, nature and cosmos. This veneration of adorable nature is made possible by a commodification of exotic flowers uprooted from the wild to meet consumer demand from an affluent middle class, as a means of mitigating their overwhelming material urbanity through possession of a culturally appropriate and fashionable expression of rurality.

The different modes of employment of this husband and wife give an insight into the contradictory drivers middle class families are dealing with. On the one hand, the food-industry exemplified in Coca-Cola, the husband's previous employer, is reshaping eating habits and the provisioning of food, catering to a consumer society that enthusiastically embraces malls and convenience products. The textile industry, his current employer, exemplifies the export sector, which since the Asian Crisis of 1997 has been

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2 The Indonesian part of Borneo, the largest island in the Indonesian archipelago.

seen as the key to achieving continuous economic growth and guaranteeing the economic well-being of consumers. On the other hand, the Javanese longing for a harmonious relationship to nature and cosmos leads to the import of wild orchids from the outer islands, while the island of Java suffers from vanishing forests, traffic congestion and increased pollution.

## Constructing and reconstructing life worlds of Nusantara

Putting on our helmets and, if it is pouring with rain, tent-like gold and silver ponchos, we start our two-wheeler and drive to the end of our crisply paved alley to face the bungalow of our landlord and landlady across the street. They bought our townhouse to rent it out, and keep an eye on us, their tenants, on their regular walks to and from the mosque. Ibu Mar is a retired secretary, who used to work for the accounting department of a mining company. Her husband is still employed and has a fly-in-fly-out job as a technician at an open-cast lignite mine in Kalimantan. Two of their sons are already settled in Jakarta, while their youngest son still lives with them at home. Like women in the *kampung*, and my neighbour Nani, our industrious landlady Mar has her own business, which she is eager to expand, selling premium ice-cream of a Singaporean brand on the door step to passing school children (and exhausted working mums). Using my down payment of the whole year's rent for the house as is customary, busy construction work started at their house soon after we moved in. Walls are being torn down, doors moved, and the house remodelled to accommodate both the necessary car and the expanding ice-cream business (although while we were there we always went to the back door to get our cold lump of sweetened fat). During our stay, more of our rent money and their time were invested in marrying off the last son, and laying on a splendid reception attended by more than 1000 guests.

Facing our landlord's house, we may either turn left or right. If we turn right, we pass bungalows and small residential estates. The street is lined with trees and full of animals: hens looking after their chicks, beautiful cocks showing off, cats moving stealthily about and occasionally a pure bred dog. Javanese ladies in informal batik dresses with their hair uncovered feed the animals. Alongside well-kept gardens and fenced verandas, some plots lie fallow, covered with dense undergrowth and wild banana trees. Jacob calls these semi-wild areas 'chicken forests' as these animals can be seen dashing in and out as we pass by, slowed down by the 'sleeping policemen' that cross the street. Chicken are an important part of the local diet and kept for consumption of their flesh, with chicken feet considered a special delicacy. Cocks are cherished as pets to be admired or as fighting cocks. The fowl run in and out between the well-kept town houses and the neighbouring chicken forest. These patches of semi-wild greenery help maintain a pocket-sized social-ecological system that is a remnant of home gardens in rural areas in times gone by. In addition to the poultry, young men like to keep racing pigeons or songbirds, which are fed and catered for with utmost attention and presented at shows and races at weekends. The young men can often be seen on motor scooters with the birds in cloth-covered birdcages worn like rucksacks, a sight that encapsulates the love

of nature in Javanese culture, as an aesthetic object to be tamed, cultivated and cared for.

If we turn left, we go down a narrow street, lined by larger, multi storey houses, interspersed with smaller, older dwellings. Here a bamboo *pendopo* hut has been erected as accommodation for the community members or paid guards who take turns to watch over the neighbourhood at night. The *pendopo* is equipped with mats to sit on and chat, and a *kentongan* slit drum made of wood to call for reinforcements in case of trouble. Decorations and small personal items help turn it into a convivial meeting place for male members of the community. At present they are watching over the construction site of a new mosque opposite. With three stories planned, the building is going to more than the usual tiled prayer room, and a placard outside the building site proudly proclaims the construction of rooms for meetings and classes. Financed by generous donations from Saudi Arabia and local benefactors, this building under construction displays the growing influence of wahhabi Islam in Indonesia. With its investments in educational institutions, and orthodox interpretation of the Koran, wahhabi Islam challenges the Javanese tradition of syncretism, in which Islam is combined with local beliefs as well as Buddhist and Hinduist influences. As the density of mosques increases, affluent urban women display their commitment to orthodox notions of Islam by wearing the hijab, stockings and gloves. This is a break with tradition, since Javanese women used to go uncovered, and often still do in the vicinity of their houses and home gardens.

### Hot and coal, ice and cold

After the daily decision to either watch the animals or the progress on the construction site, we re-enter the main street, which takes us meandering up the constant slope past a brickyard. Under the roof of corrugated iron and palm leaves, men mix lorry loads of finest volcano sand mined further up the slopes of Merapi with cement, moulding bricks, gutters, grids and other products to meet demand from the booming construction industry. The sun hardens the products quickly and they are stacked up in piles, from where they are sold off as fast as they can be made. Trucks deliver loads of volcanic ash, mined from accumulations deposited higher up the mountain after the last major eruption of Merapi in 2010 (Widiyantoro: 2018). This eruption killed the royal guardian living on the slopes and altered the course of several rivers. Merapi is the constant source of worry, but also provides airborne fertilisation. Throughout the year the volcano can be seen puffing out ash, and this constant low-level activity is interrupted now and again by lava bursts and minor earthquakes. The citizens of Yogyakarta deal with this immanent danger and source of prosperity on their doorstep by mythologising human-nature relationships and developing seismographic early warning systems. The never-sleeping builders obtain concessions via dubious channels to harvest the volcanic sands wherever they can be found, to feed the city's insatiable hunger for housing and desire for urbanity, which is best expressed in concrete. Corruption and tolerance of illegality leave the way clear for unregulated resource extraction, regardless of environmental externalities, as nothing is allowed to stand in the way of urban development.

After passing the brickyard, we have to stop at an intersection. While watching the balletic antics of the self-employed traffic policeman and waiting for him to give us way, we have ample time to study the billboards advertising the newly opened hardware and appliance store. The store is trying to sell wall-mounted wash basins, under the brand name WASSER, to replace the traditional *bak mandi*, the deep square-section bath which is used to store water for washing and as a reserve in case of shortages. We turn left to leave the main road in front of the fenced entrance of a gated community, the embodiment of 'anti-*kampung*' and one of thousands of secluded and serviced residential compounds for the affluent middle class springing up all over Indonesia, but especially here on the fringes of the city.

Further up on our way to school, on the main road up the slopes of Merapi towards the resort town of Kaliurang, we pass the fenced-off area of the large transformer station that converts the electrical energy supply to household voltage. The street alongside this large industrial area contains none of the usual small shops or *warungs* offering a cup of strong Javanese coffee, and even the mobile fruit vendors seem to avoid the area. People in cars and on scooters accelerate past the area and rush by as if nothing is to be seen or done. The transformer station is a giant that is vastly visible, but at the same time unseen and cut off from the organic urban fabric of the city. Unnoticed, it carries out its vital work of providing the city with the constant supply of electricity that residents expect and now take for granted, enabling fast internet connections, street lighting, ice boxes, air conditioning and the increasingly popular online services from banking to food ordering.

The transformer is the last stage in the process that converts lignite extracted from the far away forests of Kalimantan into energy in the form of electricity. The huge open-cast mines operating in Kalimantan (Großmann, Padmanabhan and Afiff, 2017) extract vast amounts of low-grade brown coal, not only to supply the energy needed to meet the Indonesian state's ambitious economic growth targets, but also to sell to the equally voracious economies in India and China. The goal of development defined as economic growth overrides concerns about the effects of fossil energy on climate change. These concerns are still rather intangible, though increasingly perceivable in changing weather patterns. In Kalimantan though, the environmental impacts of deforestation, the large scale removal of the earth's surface, and the noise and dust caused by transportation of vast quantities of lignite are all too apparent (Langston, 2019). Massive amounts of groundwater have to be pumped out of the deep holes, changing the hydrology over an area much larger than the mine itself. Runoffs from the mining process contaminate drinking water supplies. Indigenous Dayak groups on the island are fighting for their property rights, asserting their ancestral land tenure rights (*adat*) against the state's claim to own the land as the successor to the colonial government (Großmann, 2019). At these far away frontiers, hidden from the eyes of travellers, a vastly different conception of human-nature relations and manifestation of rurality makes possible the performances of energy-hungry urbanity. City dwellers can turn on their electrical appliances without having to experience the environmental pollution or witness children drowning in the abandoned mines (Maimunah, 2019).

## Consumerism and change at the urban-rural frontier

Where at the beginning of our stay was a fruit vendor and juice shop is now a mobile phone dealer. We enter Jalan Damai, a street that follows the contours of Merapi, a dominant presence although still 20 km away. The street is densely packed with urban eateries that even extend into the side lanes. Alcohol consumption is rare, replaced by conspicuous consumption of strong coffee and heavy smoking as markers of masculinity. Urban hipsters, most often than not tattooed, frequent the currently most fashionable restaurants. Culinary styles, ranging from Japanese and Korean to the posh coffee parlours, change fast as restaurants open, close, and reopen. Like the food, the interior decoration is constantly renewed and remodelled to provide new stylish locations for Instagram-likable selfies. Cafes decorated with nostalgic phones with rotary dials offer free Wi-Fi to cosmopolitan professionals and aspirational students, who can travel the world with no more than a smartphone and some discrete culinary adventures. Passing through these enactments of urbanity, we finally turn into a small lane.

To the left, a single row of two-storey houses is guarded by a lonely watchman in full attire; to the right an abandoned open-air restaurant. Both have seen better days. Leaving the constant stream of vehicles and scooters behind, bumping over the speed breaker, we slow down. In the distance, we can already spot the school building. This is the moment when Jacob leans forward, closely watching as the houses pass us by, giving way to fields. Counting down metre by metre, he exclaims: Now...now...we are entering the countryside! In his perception, the imagined border between houses and field clearly marks the frontier between the urban and the rural. Daily this scene is re-enacted and, as we pass fields and tree nurseries, we witness the changing seasons on the fields. What started as a paddy field, with farmers planting the bright green rice seedlings, will later turn into a cornfield. The men and women working the land usually arrive by foot or on top of old-fashioned bicycles, wearing the conical hats as protection against the sun, in sharp contrast to the bare-headed drivers dropping off children from air-conditioned cars.

Jabob's private international school caters to cosmopolitan Indonesians, mixed Indonesian-Western families, a Korean diaspora in the furniture industry, and the occasional academic like myself. It capitalises on the scenery provided and produced by the pocket of rurality in which it is located. The birds, the air and the scents of the nearby fields enter the open schoolyard and add to the feeling of carefully curated well-being. Adjacent to the field, where we watch the agricultural cycle unfold during the year, and opposite to the parking lot, a *warung* with the telling name *kampung Java* is sitting. The kiosk serves Javanese food, which is not to be found in any of the posh places along the main road, and only locally produced drinks. Constructed by reassembling the wooden panels of traditional houses, and furnished with wooden Javanese furniture, the *warung* is a conspicuous display of Javanese rurality that is intended to contrast with the surrounding areas of urbanity. In the back garden, decoratively arranged wooden *pendopo* provide attractive settings for rendezvous and Instagram shots. The staging of rurality, using accessories of village life as props, turns the rural into folklore and, as such, a component of the urban social fabric. The backdrop is provided by sight of people engaged in manual labour on the land, and the

planting and harvesting of the food crops, signifiers of a remaining pocket of rurality within the vast urban sprawl.

## Farewell

When it was time to take leave and return to Lower Bavaria, I wanted to recommend my *pembantu*, Mbak S., to a family living close to school. Before we left, Mbak S., who always arrived by bicycle, sometimes with her son or one of her daughters, wanted to invite us to her house. One Sunday, we followed her, walking in hitherto unknown direction. After a long walk, we took seats at a terrace in the *kampung* and she offered us fruits and drinks. Only after a while, I realized this was not her house; hers was the makeshift hut in the backyard, where she lived in one tiny room with her family. The place where we were sitting was for her use by courtesy of her neighbour. She told me that the household close to the school where I had thought she might be able to work was too far away for her to travel to every day. The urban poor enable urbanity in townhouses, but are restricted by mobility to rural patterns of life despite deruralisation.

The frontier between the urban and the rural in Yogyakarta is demarcated more or less clearly by the situatedness of actors, the configuration of the landscape and the re(enactment) of place-specific human-nature relations. When riding through Yogyakarta on our motor scooter, we experienced physical space defined through spatial practice. We encountered imagined concepts, expressing the social dimension of the urban life world, manifested as spaces of representation (Elden, 2002: 30). We understood how 'doing nature' in urban zones also takes place, unseen, in rural zones, in a process of connection and disconnection, as ordinary plants and animals from far away sites acquire new symbolic meanings in the content of urbanity. The life-worldly rurality of planting a field acquires a new meaning, beyond the simple production of food, as counterpoint to the urban fabric, in the context of all-encompassing urbanity. Everyone in Yogyakarta participates in the daily enactment — visible and invisible, imagined and performed — of human-nature relations. 'Doing gender' intersects with class, religion and age and plays out differently in each setting. Women and men navigate the various and sometimes mutually exclusive enactments of femininity and masculinity according to the stratified norms of Javanese society, in which one can still catch glimpses of the court culture of years gone by. But just as the mandala state faded into history, today the spheres of cultural influence of the Sultan are shrinking further — though he is governor for life with executive power — as Indonesia embraces modernity. Doing rurality and doing urbanity in the contemporary setting of Yogyakarta is manifested, spatially, in some areas as a more or less painful transformation and in others as ignorant coexistence. Through the two dialectic lens of a Lefebvrian perspective on space and a social-ecological critique of societal relations to nature, the road trip through the fringes of Yogyakarta reveals the ongoing contradictions and entanglements of rurality and urbanity.

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# Sociology of development: sociology, development studies or already dead?

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## Abstract

The term 'sociology of development' refers to the existence of a more or less clearly defined sociological sub-discipline which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. The sociology of development increasingly became a part of the interdisciplinary field of development studies, which for a long time was caught up in the debate on the 'grand theories' of modernisation and dependency. Exhausted by this theoretical debate which did not reach a conclusion, sociologists working on the Global South re-invented the sociology of development in the 1980s with an 'empirical turn'. However, the discussion on post-development started at the same time, and this critical view was later supported by post-colonialism. Sociologists working on the Global South participated in all these debates and quite a few became outspoken critics of the development concept, while others still carry the flag of sociology of development against all odds. This leads to the question whether the sociology of development still exists as a sub-discipline, or whether there are just a few institutional artefacts left, such as sections in sociological associations, which provide a playground for elderly scholars who still live and work in yesterday's world.

## Introduction

Social change and modernity are crucial topics of sociological classics. Especially the works of Durkheim and Weber focus on processes of modernisation with a wide-angle perspective that includes pre-modern societies. They develop their theories to analyse the change from pre-modern to modern societies. In their books they refer to available knowledge on societies in all parts of the world, and include historical and socio-anthropological findings. However, this openness and inclusiveness lost importance, and during the further development of sociology the core topic of the discipline became the modern societies of Europe, and later also of North America. Sociology is often unders-

tood, or least practised, as the study of modern industrialised societies, with a focus on the North Atlantic. This includes processes of change related to industrialisation and the change to post-industrial societies.

When sociology became more diversified after World War II, one of the new sub-disciplines that emerged was the sociology of development. It gained importance from the 1960s onward, and brought together researchers interested in social change in the developing countries, the then popular term for the Global South. Sociological associations founded sections or research committees for development sociology, and since then it has been part and parcel of sociology. In contrast to most other sub-disciplines, the core topic of these sections or research committees, development, is now under scrutiny. It is questioned whether the development of the Global South is still an adequate field of research, because the whole concept of development is at stake, and the sociology of development is criticised as a typical example of the arrogance of theories from the North that ignore views from the South.<sup>1</sup>

The question is whether there is still something like development sociology, or whether there are just a few sociologists doing development studies while development sociology is already dead, and only formally alive because nobody has yet decided to dissolve the more or less useless sections or research committees in sociological associations. To answer this question, we will give a short overview of the history of the sociology of development, review the post-development concept and the critique of the term development and the consequences of this critical debate, and discuss the post-colonial critique. Against this background, we can re-visit the role of the sociology of development and the label 'sociology of development' in the light of the new concept of 'Global Sociology'.

I am well aware that such an enterprise is much too big to be discussed in detail in a short article; this chapter is also written with a certain German and African Studies bias. To develop my argument I have chosen the format of an essay. I will shorten and simplify the different positions presented here and refrain from a detailed analysis of the literature.<sup>2</sup> I know that this will trigger criticism but this will not deter me, especially if it leads to a general discussion of the role of development sociology.

## The history of sociology of development

When the sociology of development emerged in the 1960s, it was closely connected to the newly emerging interest in the societies of the Global South and their 'development'. The notion of development was first politically expressed in the famous speech by the

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- 1 It is remarkable that despite the existence of research committees or sections in sociological associations, there is no article on "development sociology" in the English version of Wikipedia. The articles in the French and German versions are very short compared to other contributions related to sociology. Despite the contested reliability of Wikipedia articles, this is an indicator that sociology of development is not part of the current field of popular and scholarly knowledge that is of wider interest.
  - 2 I will draw on earlier overviews by Neubert (2003), Schrader (2010) and Dannecker (2013) that include also further references.

American president Truman when he proclaimed the need for a “bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas” (Truman, 1949). At that time, the sociology of development was more or less closely linked to the then dominant theories of modernisation (e.g. Inkeles and Smith, 1974; Rostow, 1971; Smelser, 1973) and to debates on development policy. The first publications and edited volumes included contributions by sociologists from different sub-disciplines. However, step by step, the sociology of development became a new field of research and sociologists interested in the field started to work on theories of development and on different areas in the Global South. Topics of interest were processes of modernisation of society, questions of political change, urbanisation, changes of economy with regard to agriculture and industrialisation, new forms of association (especially trade unions), changes in family life, and a debate on the new elites, to name just a few of the most important themes. The theoretical debate intensified when modernisation theory was contested by dependency theory. Dependency theory, as developed by Latin American economists (Prebisch, 1962; Singer, 1949), was soon adopted in the social sciences, and in sociology of development in particular (e.g. Amin, 1976; Arrighi and Saul, 1973). The main point was a critique of international capitalism, with reference to theories of imperialism, class analysis, analysis of expropriation of the ‘Third World’, and analysis of the development of ‘under-development’ (Frank, 1966) or of the ‘modern world system’ (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989). For more than a decade, the sociology of development engaged in the debate on grand theories.

Both camps, modernisation and dependency theorists, based their position chiefly on theoretical contributions, with some statistical data and general observations to illustrate their main arguments. Modernisation theory was still quite close to development policy, and they often combined their findings with recommendations for policy programmes. Dependency theory led to different conclusions, like a claim for radical policy changes under the heading of ‘self-reliance’: development should be based on capabilities, with dissociation from the world market and its capitalist expropriation. This goes together with a more socialist understanding of development, sometimes with a particular twist, as in the case of Julius Nyerere’s “African socialism”. In this theoretical and programmatic debate, there were only a few studies that were based on detailed empirical research. However, even when the findings contradicted the theoretical approach, authors often tried to stretch the theory to accommodate their contradictory findings (e.g. Leys, 1975).

These competing theoretical approaches shared an important commonality. Their notion of development was closely linked to economic development and industrialisation. This included the question of inequality in the countries of the Global South, but with different answers. Conventional development policy based on modernisation theory hoped for a ‘trickling down’ of wealth. Dependency theory was often linked to socialist models of economy and society.

In the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, sociology of development was closely connected with new interdisciplinary fields, area studies and development studies, which contributed to development policy. The dominant theoretical debate on the grand theories (modernisation vs. dependency) did not reach a conclusion, and left more ques-

tions open than it solved. Especially the camp of Marxist dependency theory became more and more differentiated, with new grand theories like Wallerstein's world system approach, and became engaged in internal conflicts (Foster-Carter, 1978). In the end, the theoretical debate led to a stalemate (Menzel, 1992) and many protagonists lost interest in carrying on. While some sociologists completely lost interest in the Global South, others made an empirical turn (Neubert, 2001). Empirical findings, often based on field studies, were seen as the starting point for a more nuanced analysis not influenced by theoretical assumptions. This led at the same time to a re-invention of sociology of development with a clear sociological perspective in contrast to the still vivid field of development studies. As a consequence of the empirical turn with its interest in field studies, sociology of development moved closer to social anthropology. Some scholars became interested in the transition of the former socialist bloc, and joined political scientists in transition research. As in the sociology of development, these studies were also based on empirical data, and widened the regional perspective of the sub-discipline. Against this background, the sociology of development was re-established with three main components:

*Sociology of countries of the Global South and the former socialist bloc* with close links to area studies. New topics of research included ethnicity, democratisation, civil society, conflict studies, gender, urban sociology, business activities, local knowledge, land grabbing, and globalisation. In the case of transitional countries, topics such as the introduction of a market economy or changes in labour relations attracted interest. Sociological area specialists often worked on several of these topics. Compared to other sociological sub-disciplines, development sociologists still had a sociological generalist's view of society. This was not intentional but a consequence of the limited number of sociologists working on the Global South (including researchers from the Global South).

*Sociology of development policy* as a new field in development studies. It focused on the development industry with the different aid organisations and administrative structures from a critical perspective.

*Sociology of processes of development and change*. Researchers in this field were, and still are, interested in processes of change, but are more open to empirical findings. The new point of orientation was the notion of globalisation. This included an interest in global and transnational processes, but also a view from below, with an interest in agency in the context of globalisation.

All three components of the sociology of development re-connected in different ways to general sociological debates in diverse sub-disciplines. At least in some cases, findings, concepts and middle-range theories from the sociology of development also reached the general sociological debate. Examples are the concept of ethnicity or the notion of 'glocalisation' (Robertson, 1995). At the same time, the level of interest in more general sociological theories was relatively low in the sociology of development. Interestingly, the more recent debates on reflexive modernity or multiple modernity developed separately from development sociology. Even when the term 'multiple mo-

ernity' (Eisenstadt, 2000) attracted some interest among scholars in the sociology of development, it did not trigger a wider theoretical debate.<sup>3</sup>

## Post-development and the critique of the development concept

Like the critique of modernisation theory, a more radical reaction to the debate on grand theories came from Latin American scholars (often teaching in the US). It started with Escobar (1995, 2010) and others followed (e.g. Esteva et al., 2013; for an overview, see Ziai, 2004, 2010). They pointed to the second common feature of the grand theories: the economic notion of development as industrialisation. They doubted that this understanding could be transferred and applied all over the world. They underlined the fact that this notion of development is an invention of the Global North, made directly after the Second World War following the Truman speech. According to the post-development critics, the dream of world-wide improvement of living conditions became a nightmare. In the end, the alternatives to the original modernisation theories, such as dependency theory, were bound to the notion of development according to a Western understanding. According to this view, the biggest part of the world is not developed, or under-developed, and needs to be helped to follow the Western path of development. The seemingly self-evident notion that 'development' is similar to 'progress' sets the path to be followed in all parts of the world. The consequence is that the world is divided into 'developed' and 'developing countries'. The latter are deficient, weak and in need of support. Against this background, the development industry promises a solution for a problem that has been invented by the development industry itself. People who were able for ages to care for themselves are now marked as poor, needy and even helpless. At the same time, their control over their resources is contested by capitalist development measures that interfere with established communal ways of controlling and using resources. Even in those cases where development aid is based on well-meaning intentions and benevolence, the 'target groups' are reduced to their assumed needs and presented as reliant on help and support. This is obvious in the debate on 'Third World Women' who are characterised as victims of oppression (Spivak, 1999). This links the post-development debate to the post-colonial debate. People in the Global South appear in these debates as passive and are mainly described via deficits that are a consequence of the assessment of their living conditions against the benchmark of Western development.

The post-development critique underlines that the Global South cannot be seen as a reservoir of tradition and backward thinking, as assumed by modernisation theories, and often in development policy. People and societies in the Global South are dynamic and they create social movements that express their local aims in respect of change. Often this includes a critique of capitalism, most obvious in cases of 'land grabbing', and in the replacement of subsistence and smallholder production by capitalist agriculture and inclusion in the capitalist world market. All in all, post-development theory deconstructs the notion of development and marks a clear distinction from Western ideas

3 One of the few exceptions is Korff (2016).

of knowledge creation. This is combined with a plea to respect and use local knowledge, and local aims in respect of change. This goes far beyond the idea of self-reliance and socialist concepts of development (such as African socialism), because they are linked to Western patterns of industrialisation.

The most popular protagonists of the post-development concept still come from Latin America, but they are supported by Indian scholars (Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997). This offers a link to the post-colonial debate that originated from Indian cultural studies scholars which will be discussed later. Post-development is not a closed theoretical approach, but the common ground for a radical critique of the Western notion of industrial development and of the development industry. It involves the more or less vague notion that social movements in the Global South express the local understanding of a good life (Escobar, 2007). The reference to local knowledge and local notions of change relate very well to the environmental and ecological critique of development, debated inside development studies and in the North in general.

Together with more conventional critical studies of the development industry with its international and national organisations, the scepticism in respect of the notion of development has gained more and more support from social movements in the North that criticise globalisation and the world wide domination of capitalism. These movements are still active (e.g. Attac, Occupy) (Daniel in print; Graeber, 2012; Walk and Boehme, 2002)). Once the post-development critique gained the attention of the wider public, at the latest in the 2000s, 'development' became a non-word. From this critical perspective, development was, and still is, more or less identified with modernisation or naïve industrialisation, an expression of Western hubris and colonial arrogance. It is seen simply as an out-of-date concept.

## Consequences of the post-development critique

The loss of interest in 'development' is only partly a result of post-development critique. In the early years of the sociology of development, there was a certain optimism that scholarship could contribute solutions for development. Typical basic problems and challenges to development were widely described and analysed. At the same time, the high expectations in respect of development policy were disappointed, and there was a growing awareness that there are no simple solutions. Development is not just a technical challenge, and processes of change are intertwined with policy processes and international economic processes. The grand theories proved inadequate for explaining or understanding processes of change in a single comprehensive framework. Thus, questions of development policy were seen as a matter for political analysts but not as a topic for systematic sociological research. The notion of development attracted less scholarly interest and to some sociologists it seemed outdated. Research on the transition of the former socialist bloc also lost its attraction. New topics gained importance, especially globalisation. Today, sociologists who are still interested in the Global South, or transitional countries, use their knowledge of particular areas and countries and adopt the perspective of other sub-disciplines, such as political sociology, urban sociology, social structure and others.

In the realm of development policy, however, the notion of development is hardly questioned. Despite growing scepticism in the scholarly discussion, the concept is still used and accepted as a label in development studies. This is not just a consequence of ignorance in respect of the scholarly debate. In the countries of the Global South, in policy and in everyday life, the notion of development is omnipresent. If the local perspective is relevant, then development is still an issue in the empirical field. The main critique of post-development comes from development studies which miss alternatives provided by the post-development concept. The reference to social movements in post-development theory sounds fine. But what is the particular consequence? Development studies also promotes and studies participative approaches (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Mikkelsen, 2005; Neef, Friederichsen and Neubert, 2008). These authors show that local communities do not all work together for the same purpose, but are often engaged in conflicts, some supporting radical change while others oppose any alteration of the status quo. Discussions of social movements ignore these conflicts. The questions are whose voices are expressed, who decides at the local level? Post-development theory has had the effect that local concepts are at least considered as alternatives for development.

The most well-known 'local' concept is 'buen vivir' (living a good life), originating from post-development studies in Latin America. 'Buen vivir' represents an alternative to the 'foreign' concept of development. It defines a good and desirable life according to a local perspective not dominated by the development system. It includes material well-being (food, housing, health), and culturally specific ideas of community, with access to resources for subsistence and smallholder production. The notion of living in harmony with nature, and thus an element of ecology and sustainability, is also important. It promotes a society based on solidarity with strong local communities and participation in the economy and in politics for a group that is usually marked as 'the poor'. It expresses the goals of social movements, and influences political decisions, especially in the Andean states of Latin America (Caria and Domínguez, 2016; Gudynas, 2011; Vanhulst and Beling, 2014).

Sometimes, other concepts are also presented as local alternatives, such as the South African 'Ubuntu'. However, 'Ubuntu' is less elaborated; it is a political catchword rather than a strategy (Matthews, 2018). A deeper look into 'buen vivir' shows that there are similarities in the concepts of basic needs or secure livelihoods, both part of the more recent development policy debate. At least for poor people, the improvements aimed at are similar to classical development ideas. Even the strategies for change on community level resemble the strategies of development policy, especially the above-mentioned participatory approaches. However, they do not solve the questions of how to regulate conflicts over local priorities and aims, how to protect minorities, or how to deal with micro-nationalism or notions of village autochthony. At the level of practice, 'buen vivir' and other concepts are caught in a trap where that any change or non-change is linked to crucial political decisions and power questions: who decides for whom, and whose interests are pursued? Thus, the dilemmas of development policy and practice are also significant in respect of alternatives to development.

We should not overemphasise the similarities between development policy and post-development ideas. In development policy, we find a wide range of political aims, from a radical liberal capitalist market approach to ideas of local participation and

goals of equality. In post-development, the radical critique of liberal globalised capitalism is a common ground. Thus, post-development still challenges the mainstream of economic development policy.

## The post-colonial critique

The post-colonial critique is the other pronounced and radical opposition to conventional social science and thus also to the sociology of development. The origins of post-colonial critique are as old as post-development theory. However, it reached sociology and the sociology of development much later. One reason for this is that the post-colonial critique was first articulated by Indian literature scholars. The starting point is that the cradle of Eurocentric science is enlightenment and modernity, both of which were deeply linked to colonialisms and colonial thinking (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1999). Claims of the universalism of science ignore its Western roots. Western notions of modernity are imposed on the whole world. According to post-colonial thinking, this amounts to ignoring particular contexts and local perspectives. There are obviously similarities to post-development here, but post-colonialism is a fundamental critique of science in general. This concerns not only the view from the North that is taken as 'the' only view, but also the dominance of Northern scholars and Northern scholarly institutions which patronise the debate. Gender studies was one of the first fields in social science to take up the post-colonial critique. Sociology in general reacted much later. One important example is the book by Gurminder Bhambra (Bhambra, 2007) which triggered a wider debate in sociology on post-colonial ideas. This includes another element of critique that refers to the entanglement of North and South. The histories and the 'development' of the North are closely linked to colonialism. Bhambra also criticises Eisenstadt's widely discussed thesis of multiple modernities, usually understood as the critique of a simplifying notion of modernisation according to the Western model. She underlines that the notion of multiple modernities still ignores the colonial enforced relationships. This points at the entangled histories of North and South as part of colonisation (Randeria, 2006).

The post-colonial critique has also reached the sociology of development, and led to a similar rejection of a separate analysis of the Global South. Inequality needs to be analysed from a global perspective (Boatcă, 2015). From a post-colonial perspective, the sociology of development is just a henchman of the normative hegemony of the political and economic interests of the North and the continuation of colonial ethnocentrism. At first sight, this links with dependency theory. But dependency theory is based on a kind of container model of separate societal entities and fails to challenge the basic Western idea of modernity, including industrialisation.

The first conclusion to be drawn from the post-colonial critique is that there is a need to provincialise Europe (Chakrabarty, 2000), or rather the North Atlantic with North America and Europe, as the dominating empirical fields that fuel sociological research and understanding. Another conclusion is that theories must be developed in the South detached from Northern scholarly thinking (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012). Whether this is possible, and what kind of theories might be developed in the South, is

still an open question. If we think this to the end, it would lead to scholarly theories that are always linked to particular contexts. This means a consistent plea for relativism. The post-colonial debate points in a more radical way than the post-development debate to shortcomings in theory and in epistemology in general. Questions of social change are not in the focus of the debate. However, both post-development and post-colonialism require a new way of thinking. Even for those who do not accept the post-colonial conclusions, it would be too simple to ignore the critique completely. It reminds us that a simple one-to-one transfer to other contexts of categories and theories developed for particular cases in Europe or North America will inevitably lead to shortcomings and simplifications and misunderstandings. The question is, what is the consequence for sociology? The relativist position would mean the end of comparative study and thinking, and even studies reaching beyond one context might be impossible. Obviously, the larger part of sociology does not follow this path.

### Re-visiting the 'sociology of development'

Development studies as an interdisciplinary field of research is still stable, either via inclusion in development policy or as a critical view on development policy. But sociology is no longer prominent in these debates. This part of the sociology of development seems to be dormant.

Both critiques – post-development and post-colonial – are directly relevant to the sociology of development, because it is closely linked to the notion of development, while the theories and concepts it uses come from the North and have been applied to the Global South (or to transitional countries). Together with the more or less accepted end of the grand theories, and disappointment with regard to development policy, the notion of development has lost its attraction for scholars. Even though some topics from the sociology of development have been taken up in various other sociological sub-disciplines, the sociology of development in its former shape is hardly visible anymore. The sections or research committees still exist, but development topics are no longer at the centre of their work. Some may even ask, what is the *raison d'être* of these committees or sections? The topics discussed there could be discussed by other committees and sections, where research on countries of the Global South or transitional countries is now also considered. The sections and research committees devoted to the sociology of development may be seen as institutional artefacts used for different purposes. They are also a field of experimentation, with topics relating to societies in the Global South, or particular topics from other sociological sub-disciplines. It seems that mainly older scholars push the topic of development. Does the sociology of development represent a former world that ignores current scholarly debates? If so, is this a problem?

At least one development in sociology may be seen as a success and not as problem. The Global South is now increasingly included in general sociological thinking. Sociology no longer focuses exclusively on the industrialised or post-industrial countries of the Global North. Seen from afar, this situation is comparable to the 1950s and 1960s when the Global South was a topic for general sociology. This is still true today with reference to the limited interest in the Global South as a topic in the different sociological sub-

disciplines. The difference is that today there is much greater in-depth empirical knowledge of countries counted as belonging to the Global South, including awareness of the post-colonial critique with regard to entanglements under the conditions of former colonialism, globalisation and transnational relations. Despite the critique of Eurocentric sociological concepts, the debate on the transferability or the development of such concepts has just started.

In the understanding of radical post-colonial thinkers, general theories that reach beyond a particular context are impossible. Another option, especially in sociology, is a new sensitivity to the transfer of concepts, and the development of concepts that can be adapted to fit various contexts. This could be the starting point for a global sociology based on the classics (Weber, Durkheim), with one important difference: awareness of colonialism and a fundamental scepticism towards modernisation as the teleological goal of development.

There are already examples of this understanding. It started with gender studies that integrated from the beginning studies from the Global South and the Global North. The discussion in development sociology started already in the 1970 (Boserup 1970; for more recent developments see Dannecker 2010). In science and technology studies based on actor-network theory, the Global South is a field of research, as at least some studies on Africa show which refer to the translation of concepts or travelling models (Behrends et al. 2014; Czarniawska and Sevón 1996). Another field where sociology has developed an interest beyond the Global North is neo-institutionalism with its concept of a 'world society' or 'world polity' (Drori et al., 2003; Meyer et al., 1997). This approach argues that the seemingly universal socio-political structures do not dominate simply because of their functionality, but are linked to patterns of international legitimacy set by the countries of the Global North. The concept of 'de-coupling' helps to understand and conceptualise the still existing wide variety of day-to-day political practices (e.g. Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam and Korff, 2012). From a similar perspective, actor-centred institutionalism builds a bridge between studies of settings in the Global North (Scharpf, 1997) and settings in the Global South (Long, 2001). Both debates link very well with the (former) sociology of development policy and critical analysis of development projects and programmes (Elwert and Bierschenk, 1988; Sabbi, 2017). Another example is the current middle class debate triggered by economists that is being critically reflected on by sociologists and anthropologists in the Global South (Daniel et al., 2016; Darbon and Toulabor, 2014; Kroeker et al., 2018; Melber, 2016; Wieman, 2015). This critical re-assessment of the transfer of class concepts to the Global South may lead to a more nuanced understanding of the analysis of social structure in general.

All these approaches have at least one commonality: they link theoretical thinking with empirical findings from the South and try to widen the perspective of sociology in general. As a consequence of the post-colonial critique, the question of post-post-colonial scholarship and science turns up in literature studies (O'Connor, 2003) or in education (Luke, 2005). The post-postcolonial claim refers to the post-colonial critique but does not give up theorising and searches for ways to develop categories that face the challenge of contextuality and try to overcome the limitations of Eurocentrism. These changes may build a bridge to a new term currently being discussed in sociology: 'global sociology'. One element of this is the idea that sociology needs to consider the global

entanglement of social processes and thus focus on global problems, global structures and global changes (Cohen and Kennedy, 2012). This global sociology goes beyond the criticism of globalisation and lays the foundation for sociological research that does not only refer to one quarter of the world (the Global North or the North Atlantic) but includes the larger part of our world which is changing even more dynamically. This widened perspective overcomes the simplifying division into Global North and Global South, which always has an undertone of modern, developed, industrialised, post-industrialised versus less modern, less developed, less industrialised or not yet post-industrialised. There is no doubt that we need a global and inclusive perspective, but we still need to solve the problem of developing adequate categories and concepts that can be applied in radically differing local contexts. To tackle this challenge, we need a new methodology, we need to develop and adapt concepts created for the Global North, so that they are capable of analysing the empirical variety we are facing. This will be an important task in the future: creating a sociology that combines a global and a local perspective at the same time.

One possibility is to take seriously the old distinction between *etic* and *emic* concepts (Pike 1967). Pike presents different ways to describe behaviour. One way is to follow the perspective of the respective context and culture and to use the terms and points of view of members of that culture. His model here is phonemics, or analysis of the meaningful sounds in a particular language. This is the '*emic*' (phonemic) perspective. The other – opposite – way is an abstract description from outside that claims universal validity across different cultures. His model here is phonetics, a system that can be used to describe the sounds of all human languages. This is the '*etic*' (phonetic) perspective. Berry, a comparative psychologist, uses this distinction and shows how to develop *etic* concepts via a multistage process (Berry, 1969). Concepts developed in a particular context tend to represent *emic* views. To come to an *etic* view, these concepts need to be confronted with different contexts. We may add that they also need to be confronted with open or hidden hegemonial claims and power differences. To include these findings, the concepts need to be revised, extended and re-formulated in a more abstract way to include different views. With the inclusion of more and more different contexts, including power differences, this leads to a '*derived etic concept*' that relates to real empirical findings and is applicable and useful in different contexts. If we take this as model, the question is not so much whether we theorise from the South or from the North, but how we develop our concepts and theories across different parts of the world. This also applies to transnational and global entanglements, because they operate in different ways in different parts of the world. This transnational and global dimension is another contribution to considering rationality as an important element that constitutes our reality. In the framework of this kind of global sociology, the former development sociologists with their particular knowledge of areas outside the Global North are no longer representatives of a sub-discipline, but sociologists with different kinds of empirical knowledge.

However, the critique of the dominance of Northern scholars, and even more of Northern research institutions, still holds true. Even when sociology involves colleagues from the Global South (whatever definition we apply), this does not guarantee an equal footing, because more often than not the funds for joint research come from the Global

North. When scholars from the South and Southern institutions have the same opportunities as those from the Global North, this will be a big step forward. This would mean that Southern scholars and research institutions would be able to carry out studies of contexts in the North. However, we should not overstretch this idea. Inequality as part of our globalised world will not be overcome by better organisation of research, more resources for Southern institutions or scholars, and new epistemological concepts. We may improve our methods of analysis, but this will not change real inequalities. Finally, we need to be aware that in sociology the interest in empirical data collected in the Global South, and the willingness to question established concepts based on new empirical findings, is still limited. This kind of 'global sociology' is a goal, or a research programme, rather than an established reality.

Let us assume this global sociology really exists: is this the end of development sociology? Yes and no! 'Yes', because all empirical studies by development sociologists would fuel this wide concept of global sociology. The particular field of sociology of the Global South would no longer exist if all parts of the world were included in sociological debates. All sociologists would be 'area specialists', whether for Europe, North America, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Africa, South America, or different countries, such as the USA, Canada, Russia, Germany, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Chile, Mexico, Syria, Iran, India, China, Bhutan, Indonesia, etc. All places of research would be provincialised, while at same time being globally entangled. Sociology will then acknowledge that all sociological knowledge is contextualised and that extra steps are needed to derive etic concepts and insights. Sociologists working on the (former) Global South would participate in particular sociological discussions in the respective sub-disciplines. A side effect would be that with the end of the sociology of development, those sociological generalists who work on a variety of topics across sociological sub-disciplines, still to be found in the sociology of development, would no longer exist. This is something one may regret, but it simply reflects the differentiation of sociology.

There is also the answer 'no' as a reaction to the question of the end of the sociology of development. Development as a societal issue is still at stake in many countries of the Global South. Critique of the concept should not lead to ignoring this part of public debates and real policies. The sociology of development policy and the development industry is still a sociological topic. This includes accepting the normative load of the concept of development and the discussion and analysis of the different aspirations and notions of development. In a more general way, development is still linked with the question of social change and the question of modernity, following not the simple understanding of modernisation, but the idea of reflexive modernity in the sense proposed by Giddens (Giddens, 1990), or second modernity as suggested by Ulrich Beck (Beck et al., 2003). The question as to how societies change under the influence of the capitalist economy, technological changes and conflicting social and political ideologies is still at stake, and needs theoretical and empirical analysis. This is a core topic relating to all societies in the world, and this question has definitely come back to Europe and North America. The sociology of development as the sociology of processes of societal change is still an important topic. It involves a critical analysis of the actors who try to influence and organise change everywhere in the world, whether in the Global South or in the Global North. But this topic needs a fundamental re-orientation. Changes in

the Global South cannot be analysed on the basis of the more or less open assumption that they are just a consequence of change in the Global North. We need to include a global perspective in this field of research that takes into account the entanglements of all parts of the world, especially as the already blurred distinction between the Global South and the Global North is likely to become more and more unclear. This sociology of development might be re-named as the sociology of global change, but the basic question that is addressed remains the same.

Global sociology does not yet exist as a general orientation in sociology and we do not know whether it will really come. What is clear is, that we need sociologists from all parts of the world with knowledge and competence in respect of areas beyond the North Atlantic. If we give up denominations in sociology that are related to areas and topics that reach beyond the mainstream, then global sociology might never become a reality. Sociology would return to a restricted understanding of societies based on the view of a small part of the world where the majority of well-established and funded research institutions are based, the Global North.

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# Grow at home, buy local: (De)commodifying 'rural' vegetables and herbs

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## Abstract

In Vietnam, people are increasingly concerned about the absence of food standards and the danger this poses to their families' health. In Hanoi, urbanites are in search of clean and safe vegetables. Using results from fieldwork in Hanoi, this paper presents three strategies urbanites use to ensure food safety in the fresh produce they eat. They rely on trust-based strategies, when maintaining their daily practice of buying from local vendors or receiving their fresh food supply from relatives and friends residing in the countryside. In addition, urbanites are increasingly cultivating herbs and vegetables at home in roof top gardens or on fallow urban land. From the analysis of these strategies two main arguments are developed: First, by embedding the supply with fresh produce in social relationships and growing food at home urbanites actively shorten agricultural wholesale commodity chains. The value of vegetables and herbs in urban Vietnam is no longer solely determined by the monetary exchange value, but is assigned with a social exchange value. Accordingly, the paper argues that the commodity of fresh vegetables is being taken out of its commodity sphere, thus signifying the beginning of a process of singularization (Kopytoff, 1988). Second, by cultivating fresh produce in the city urbanites creatively employ the urban built environment and thence the materiality and materials that the city has to offer. The paper concludes that this identifies an affirmation of urban life and urbanites' "social creativity", their willingness to improve their living (Korff, 1991: 15), by dealing with the challenges and contingencies of the city.

## Introduction

Access to food, water, shelter and air are major preconditions for living in the city, like anywhere else. They constitute what Parnell and Pieterse (2010: 148) in their discussion of the 'right to the city' refer to as 'basic or 1<sup>st</sup> generation human rights'. However, particularly the first right of access to food has only recently moved into the analytical

focus of urban studies (Morgan, 2015). The ‘urban food question’ (Morgan, 2015) is often linked to the topics of food deserts (e.g. Weatherspoon et al., 2015; Whelan et al., 2002) and food security (e.g. Barthel et al., 2015; Crush, 2014; Morgan, 2015). The former frequently being linked to the cities of the Global North and the latter to cities of the Global South. In particular, discussions on urban gardening have largely considered access to produce in terms of economic and social justice, affordability or sustainability (Mendes, 2008; Tornaghi, 2014). So far, food safety, the concern for the products’ origin, and the usage of chemicals in food processing has hardly been discussed in the context of Southern cities, where more and more consumers, in particular a rising urban middle-class, are concerned about the absence of food standards and the danger this poses to their families’ health.<sup>1</sup> This paper presents urbanites responses to these perceived dangers with empirical reference to urban Vietnam. In Vietnamese cities residents, particularly members of the urban middle class, are increasingly in search of ‘clean and safe vegetables’ (rau sạch, rau an toàn) (Kurfürst, 2019).

Using results from fieldwork in Hanoi, this paper presents two strategies urbanites use to ensure food safety in the fresh produce they eat:

- Attaining fresh produce through trust-based relationships, such as buying from local vendors or producers
- cultivating herbs and vegetables at home in roof top gardens or on fallow urban land.

Although widely adopted, these strategies cannot guarantee urbanites’ provision with safe produce.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the presented research is interested in people’s social constructions of what they perceive to be clean and safe vegetables and how they ascribe new values to a well-known and usually cheap commodity. From the analysis of these strategies two main arguments are developed: First, urbanites actively shorten agricultural wholesale commodity chains in order to ensure food safety. By re-embedding the economic exchange into social relationships of trust and cultivating food at home, the value of vegetables and herbs in urban Vietnam is transformed. The value is not solely determined by the monetary exchange value, but is assigned with a social exchange value, as well. The paper concludes that the commodity of fresh vegetables is being taken out of its commodity sphere, signifying the beginning of a process of singularization (Kopytoff, 1988). The paper’s arguments follow from literature on the role of trust in economic relationships (Evers, 1995; Figuié et al., 2019; Gerber et al., 2014; Horat, 2017) and on the production of value (Graeber, 2001; Kockelman, 2012; Kopytoff, 1988). Second, the paper follows Korff’s (2018) definition of the city as an innovative milieu, in which solutions can be found. By planting their own vegetables and herbs at home or on fallow urban land, urbanites creatively employ the urban built environment to attain

1 For an exemption see the edited volume *Food Anxiety in Globalising Vietnam* by Ehlert and Faltmann (2019).

2 For example, the interviewed gardeners were not concerned with the origin of the soil and the seeds they used to grow their own food, nor did they worry about the degree of air pollution in the city.

food safety. Accordingly, the practice of urban gardening represents urbanites' "social creativity" (Korff 1991: 15) in dealing with the everyday challenges and contingencies of the city.

This research is drawn from fieldwork conducted between September 2014 and October 2015 in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The data were gathered using qualitative methods: interviews and site-visits at gardens. The sections on the creation of trust through face-to-face interactions, rural-urban supply and urban gardens are based on semi-structured and narrative interviews with urban consumers of fresh produce, urban gardeners and market vendors at the local Yên Phụ and the larger wholesale Long Biên market. Additionally, expert interviews were carried out with Vietnamese historians and social anthropologists.

### **Agricultural commodity chains and food safety in urban Vietnam**

The rising awareness for food safety in Vietnam goes hand in hand with an increasing mediatization of society. Newspapers, television and online fora increasingly report about food scandals and food poisoning, particularly with respect to the usage of agrochemicals in agricultural production. As 35-year-old Hà puts it "Everyone knows about food poisoning. Farmers use fertilizers and pesticides (...) It is everywhere, in the media, the newspaper. They run tests and explain that vegetables are contaminated."

For example, a study from 2012 conducted in eight provinces with 1050 vegetable samples showed that 51.24% contained too much pesticides according to WHO standards and 47% comprised exceeding amounts of nitrate and heavy metal substances. Another study of the Hanoi Medical University found that 72% of the 660 vegetable samples collected in Hanoi and Nam Dinh had *E. coli* bacteria (The Anh et al., 2012). In 2015, the Vietnam Food Administration reported 171 cases of food poisoning. Food poisoning and food scandals affected 5,000 people with 23 deaths (Vietnam Plus, 2016).

Figuié et al. (2019: 152) conclude:

"No sooner than the Vietnamese modern agro-industrial sector emerges, than it already shows characteristics of late modernity such as large-scale food scandals associated with new technologies (hormones, pesticides, etc.) or the influential role of media in the food system."

Accordingly, the concern about clean and safe produce has become an integral part of urban dwellers' everyday life: when friends and co-workers meet for lunch at small restaurants, when parents buy fresh products at local markets, or when families dine together, they all discuss the origin of the vegetables and the safety of the food. In other words, 'clean and safe vegetables' has evolved as an urban idiom. It is an urban idiom and at the same time the hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1978). In fact, Hà's quote shows that the images of 'clean and safe' produce have lost their referents. The symbol of 'clean and safe' increasingly replaces the 'real' safe food that is ideally not contaminated with agrochemicals, such as pesticides, herbicides and fertilizer. This symbol is interpreted quite differently by the multiple actors involved in the urban food question. It is against the background of the hyperreal that the strategies presented in the following need to

be analysed. They are not to guarantee clean and safe food in instrumentally rational terms, but they do represent people's social constructions of what they imagine to be clean, safe, and fresh foods.

Vegetables and herbs are an integral ingredient of every Vietnamese meal (*món ăn*). Every dish is accompanied by cooked leafy greens and a plate of aromatic herbs and lettuce. According to Avieli (2012: 27) "greens are essential, contributing to several dimensions of the meal: nutrition (adding fiber, vitamins and minerals), texture, color, fragrance and taste". Accordingly, vegetables and herbs are sold at almost every street corner, as well as in supermarkets. Particularly seasonal greens are easy to afford, even for households with low incomes. For example, a bundle of fresh herbs in 2015 cost 4,000-6,000 VND (0.15-0.23 Euro). Consequently, it is not the access to fresh produce that poses a problem for urbanites, but the uncertainty about the products' quality and origin.

Tracing agricultural commodity chains in Northern Vietnam, Gerber et al. (2014) found that particularly the vegetable commodity chains are highly diversified. Over two-thirds of vegetables consumed in Vietnam's capital originate from Hanoi's peri-urban region, while the rest is imported from the highlands in Southern Vietnam around Đà Lạt or from China. Much of this produce is exchanged at one of the city's four major wholesale markets. From there it passes on to restaurants or neighborhood markets with the remainder being sold by mobile street vendors (Gerber et al., 2014). The complexity and diversity of such commodity chains means that the tracing back of agricultural products to their sites of origin is a difficult task for consumers. Particularly difficult is the generation of information on environmental impacts. Bolwig et al. (2010) note that environmental impacts of value chains, such as pesticides, additives and chemicals used in food processing and cleaning, may be triggered at one place, but can well reach beyond the area of origin. These environmental problems are often related to activities in a particular node of a value chain, that is the point in the value chain, where a product is exchanged or undergoes a major transformation or processing, e.g. production, transportation, or storage (Bolwig et al., 2010).<sup>3</sup> As a result, consumers find it increasingly difficult to decipher the nodes and segments of value chains, facing a great amount of uncertainty, when purchasing fresh produce.

In his theory of social reflexivity, Giddens (2001) argues that the notion of risk needs to be put alongside trust. Trust is required in order to cope with the increasing insecurities and risks in a globalized world. Trust implies having confidence in abstract systems and institutions such as in contracts or authorities for food regulation. Where such regulations or the monitoring thereof are missing, social capital has become an important resource to draw on (Horat, 2017; Koh, 2006). Gerber et al. (2014) show how social capital helps to overcome institutional gaps in agricultural wholesale commodity chains in Northern Vietnam. Due to shortcomings in the regulatory framework and monitoring of the commodity chains, the actors in these chains need to rely on relationships of trust with their business partners. Such relationships of trust evolve

3 Bolwig et al. (2010: 175) differentiate between 'nodes' and 'segments' of global value chains. A segment connects two nodes. For example, a segment exists between production and export or import and retail.

between wholesale traders and local vendors, sellers and end consumers etc. Here, the reference to social capital ensures the smooth functioning of economic transactions at each node of the agricultural commodity chain. Accordingly, social capital is maintained as a “collective property resource” (Korff and Rothfuß, 2009: 363), in an environment where abstract systems of regulation or control seem to be missing or are not trusted. For consumers the building of relationships of trust with sellers is a way to reduce the uncertainty they are confronted with in the anonymous agricultural commodity chains (Dannenberg and Kulke, 2014). Accordingly, many Hanoians maintain their daily practice of buying directly from local and street vendors in the city or in the countryside or receive boxes of fresh produce from rural residents they trust in. This (re-)embedding of economic processes in social networks is not a characteristic limited to traditional societies as suggested by Polanyi (1977), but occurs each time markets expand (Evers, 1995).

Such re-embedding of food supply in social relationships also transforms the value of the usually cheap and easy affordable commodity. In *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* Graeber (2001: 1-2) differentiates between three definitions of value: First, value is what makes a meaningful difference. Second, value can be measured by the willingness to give something up for something else. Third, value is what is desirable and good. In the light of food safety, the symbol of ‘clean and safe’ is exactly what makes a difference, when buying or receiving vegetables and sets them apart from the usual fresh produce sold at the market. Furthermore, the index ‘clean and safe’ is exactly what makes the vegetables desirable and good. The second definition of value is based on the logic of equivalence. The idea that “equivalence of value should turn on geometric ratios” (Kockelman, 2012: 12) is based in Aristotelian thinking. Drawing upon Aristotle’s conceptualization of value, Marx (1867) defines value as a relation between people mediated by a relation between things (Kockelman, 2012). Kopytoff (1988) adds to this that the social relations of the production of a commodity determine its value. The empirical cases presented in the following illustrate that value is determined not only by the social relations of production but by the social relations of exchange, too.

The following section discusses the state’s attempt to attain control and to assign responsibilities for food safety in the segments of agricultural commodity chains. The empirical data hints to citizens’ distrust in the control and monitoring system stipulated by the state. This discussion is followed by one on the rise of supermarkets, which are promoted by the state as warrantors of food safety. Again, this state initiative does not receive much acceptance by urban consumers. The main part of the paper, divided into two empirical sections, then investigates urbanites’ strategies to ensure food safety.

## The state’s attempts at food safety

During the last decade, the Vietnamese government has undertaken diverse efforts to establish a control system along the segments of value chains. Already in 1995 the government introduced the “safe vegetables” program. The program comprised training as well as technical support for farmers to improve the management of irrigation water, fertilization, as well as the application of pesticides (Mergenthaler et al., 2009).

The current legislation consists of two laws, one more generally targeting the quality of products and goods and the other directly addressing food safety. According to the 2008 Law on the Quality of Products and Goods, manufacturers and traders are held responsible for the quality of their products, while the overall control of the quality of goods, including food products, is assigned to the Ministry of Science and Technology. The 2011 Law on Food Safety establishes the rights and obligations of organisations and individuals with respect to food safety, the business conditions to ensure food safety and the advertising and labeling of food products, etc. The overall responsibility for the testing and enforcement of food safety is assigned to the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Industry and Trade (Van Nguyen, 2014).

Even before the passing of these laws, two important decisions were made in 2007, the year cholera reappeared in Hanoi. The government and the municipality both identified the lack of hygiene and awareness of the careful preparation of food as the main cause of the outbreak. Therefore, immediately after the outbreak, the municipality of Hanoi started public awareness-raising campaigns. In the same year, the Prime Minister signed Decision 149/2007/QĐ-TTg. Among other measures the program sought to ensure food hygiene and safety in producing, preserving, and processing agricultural products. Furthermore, the program particularly aimed at ensuring street-food hygiene and safety. With respect to agricultural production, Decision 102/2007/QĐ-BNN of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development further defines the legal utilization of fertilizers. The decision supplements 155 fertilizers that can be produced, sold and used in Vietnam (Bo Nong Nghiep va Phat Trien Nong Thon, 2016). Although this legal framework exists, most citizens complain that producers' and suppliers' adherence to the regulation is not properly monitored.

For modern retail outlets, the government has additionally introduced a certificate for vegetables. The certificate testifies that vegetables are produced in line with the national regulations on the production of safe vegetables (Wertheim-Heck et al., 2014). Overall, the presented policies aim at the promotion of supermarkets, and the reduction of local markets and street trade.

The first big supermarkets were built in Hanoi around the turn of the millennium in the two central districts of Hoàn Kiếm and Hai Bà Trưng. One was established in the upper floor of what was then the first shopping mall of Hanoi, Tràng Tiền Plaza, another in the basement of the Hanoi Towers at Hai Bà Trưng St, which is where multinational companies and international donors are located. By 2005/6, larger supermarkets had already emerged at the Southern urban fringe such as Big C in the district of Thành Xuân and later Metro in Hoàng Mai District. These supermarkets had a two-fold appeal for consumers. First, their modern outer appearance and sanitized interior appeared to promise hygienic and healthy products. Second, the storage racks offered global products that until then had hardly been available in Vietnam. Going shopping in the supermarket became a sign of distinction and of status. The ascribed value of distinction was equaled by a monetary value that made these goods only affordable to particular social groups with high enough incomes.

Yet, the purchase of goods in supermarkets cannot be simply reduced to forms of "conspicuous consumption" in Veblen's (1899) terms. On the contrary, supermarkets of-

fer a wide array of everyday products that urban dwellers need for their daily food supply. In particular, in the New Urban Areas (NUA) of Hanoi, supermarkets are often the sole provider of fresh products. For example, in 2005, the inhabitants of the then quite recently built NUA of Ciputra and Trung Hòa Nhân Chính found themselves in a dilemma: On the one hand, they could not afford to buy in the supermarkets because the goods there were too expensive. On the other hand, purchasing fresh products from local markets or street vendors in the area was not an immediate option since they were just not available in the neighborhood. The NUA had been built on agricultural land lacking a generic infrastructure such as local markets (Labbé and Boudreau, 2011). Supermarkets were the only places to turn to. Interviewees explained that they would still purchase vegetables, fruits, meat and fish from the local markets in their old neighborhoods, which they had left for a higher quality of life in the condominiums or villas of the NUA.

The promotion of supermarkets also affected the system of established urban markets. The 'Decision of the Prime Minister Approving the Program on the Development of Marketplaces until 2010' promulgates the upgrading of marketplaces in urban areas and the construction of supermarkets (Gerber et al., 2014). Big markets that had been the economic center of the city for centuries were torn down, making space for new large-scale developments such as supermarkets and shopping malls (Endres, 2014; Gertman, 2011). Most of the old markets occupied urban land of high economic value. An example is Chợ Cửa Nam, the origin of which dates back to Hanoi's role as royal city. The royal citadel was surrounded by a rectangular wall with four gates in the direction of the cardinal points. In front of the gates, permanent and periodical markets were held (Logan, 2000). Cửa Nam, translating into Southern Gate, was one of these gates, where markets were periodically held. In 2010, right in time for Hanoi's 1000th anniversary, a new commercial center opened on this site. In the basement of the 13-stories-high-rise building a supermarket offers vegetables, meat, fish and beverages, while the remaining floors are used as office space and car park. However, many of the upgraded markets remain empty and are generally not accepted by urban consumers.

Catering to the demand for safe and clean fresh produce, a new shop model has evolved in Hanoi. So-called safe foods shops (cửa hàng thực phẩm an toàn) are mushrooming all over the city. These privately owned shops actually fill the gap between the anonymous purchase in supermarkets and the personal interaction with traders at the local markets. The shops all carry a big green logo saying 'safe foods'. The label frequently comes with a photo displaying a beautiful basket of fresh vegetables and fruits and sometimes meat. Although the logo and photo suggest some form of standardization and certification, most shop owners seem to interpret the label of safe foods quite differently. For example, the safe foods shop at Yên Phụ St. in Tây Hồ District only offers imported goods. These goods comprise fresh produce from New Zealand, Italian Barilla noodles and German Haribo. Vegetables, fruits and meat are packed in plastic and kept in the refrigerator. The vegetables carry a label indicating that they are imported from New Zealand, yet without any specifications and labels from New Zealand. By contrast, the safe foods' shop in the NUA Linh Đàm, located approx. 8 km south of the city center, is run by an elderly woman. Her portfolio is not as diverse as the one at Yên Phụ. She does not sell any imported fresh products at all. Asked about where her vegetables come

from, she answered that she receives them from suppliers in her home province Nam Định, one hundred kilometer south of Hanoi. Likewise, there is no label indicating the safety of food, except for her verbal insurance.

Consequently, the labeling of food – be it verbally or indexically - has become an important marketing point. The idiom and hyperreality of clean and safe vegetables has opened up a space for negotiation and for marketing, as diverse providers seek to cater to the demand for safe fresh produce. The idiom is even appropriated by street vendors in Hanoi. At 5 pm, the peak of the rush hour, a street vendor offers her commodities in a small basket on the road side in Hanoi's Ancient Quarter with a green sign indicating 'safe vegetables for sale'. The adoption of the label by street vendors is particularly interesting since authorities have blamed street trade for the lack of hygiene and for creating health hazards. Indeed, since the 1990ies, the municipal authorities have conducted several attempts to eradicate street trade from the urban landscape (Koh, 2006). When cholera broke out again in Hanoi in the winter of 2007, street vendors, who were deemed unscrupulous and profit-oriented and thought to be unhygienic in their food preparation practices, were publicly blamed as purveyors of the disease (Lincoln, 2014). Shortly thereafter in 2008, the municipality of Hanoi ordered a ban on street trade in 64 streets of the city center (Kurfürst, 2012; Turner and Schoenberger, 2012). However, so far this policy has not yielded the desired results. Instead of finding themselves in decline, streets markets have mushroomed in Hanoi. Rather than turning to the promoted supermarkets, urban dwellers seem to stick to their daily routine of buying from street markets (Gerber et al., 2014; Wertheim-Heck et al., 2014). In fact, the census by Wertheim-Heck et al. (2014) shows that 95% of the total vegetable consumed in the city of Hanoi are exchanged at local markets or through street trade, and only 2.3% of the vegetables are traded in supermarkets and convenience stores. 40-year-old Nam says: "Even in the supermarket you cannot be sure that the products are clean and safe." According to him, the state label is not a warrantor of food safety since the regulation lacks a proper control and monitoring system.

This asynchronous development of the promotion of supermarkets as warrantor of safe foods and the persistence of local markets argues for a lack of trust in the national certification system and private wholesale regulations on food safety. In other words, the attempts at standardisation have yet to result in the construction of trust among consumers. Meanwhile in an effort to respond to this uncertainty, urbanites have developed different strategies that are built around personal relationships based on trust.

### **Buying local: creating trust through face-to-face interactions**

At local markets and between mobile street traders and the consumers, the economic exchange is embedded in a social relationship of trust. The sensory experience of being able to touch, smell or even taste the fresh produce increases trust between the seller and buyer (Figuié et al., 2019; Mele et al., 2015).

Through the daily face-to-face interactions at the market, sellers and buyers create "bridging social capital" - social relationships with people different from oneself but acting in the same social field (Putnam, 2000: 20). Consumers will usually buy particular

goods from different stalls, depending on recommendation from others and their own experience of the quality of goods offered at the market stalls. If the quality of the produce is low, consumers will know whom to blame.

Truth be told, people buy little from supermarkets, this has yet to be developed. By contrast, the market is close to the home, it is more convenient. People will buy from stalls where they know the vegetables are safe (Anh, 28 years old, translated from Vietnamese).

Buying local, can also mean buying directly from the producers in rural areas. Again “farmer shopping” is a form of consumption solely based on trust as consumers actually do not have any information on the actual farming practices (Wertheim-Heck and Spaargaren, 2016: 659). Important is the reference to the countryside that is considered a purveyor of safe and fresh produce (Kurfürst, 2019: 223). The idea that ‘rural’ produce is clean and safe, moreover, appears to be a driving force, when urbanites attain their supplies with agricultural products from kin or friends residing in the countryside (Kurfürst, 2019; Wertheim-Heck and Spaargaren, 2016). Such an appraisal of trust-based relationships and the countryside hint towards the different evaluative techniques urbanites apply to assess food safety. They maneuver between utility-based and value-based evaluative techniques, the former referring to instrumental rationality, and the latter to value rationality (Weber, 1978). The instrumental values underlying preferences for one agricultural product over another might be tied to price, certification, or the products’ origin (such as being imported from New Zealand or Germany). In contrast, value rationality implies that “the relative desirability of two options makes sense because of some aesthetic, ethical, or religious ideal. Such ideals make unconditional demands on us, and we value them for their own sake, independently of our prospects for success” (Kockelman, 2012: 193). The evaluation of those agricultural products that are delivered directly from the countryside as clean and safe appears to be value-based. It is informed by the prevalent imagery of the countryside in Vietnam as being less polluted than the city (Gillen, 2016; Fuhrmann, 2017). Of course, the adoption of different evaluative techniques can result in a discrepancy between what is rationally defined as safe foods (degree of contamination with agrochemicals or bacteria) and what is perceived to be clean and safe (rural origin, trusted seller). Likewise, Ehlert and Voßsmer (2015) note that customers tend to draw on different kinds of knowledge, such as rational information on food quality or emic constructions of what is believed to be fresh food. These different evaluative techniques are also at stake in the context of urban gardening. Although cultivating vegetables and herbs in a highly polluted environment in the city of Hanoi, still the home-grown produce is valued for its safety.

## Grow at home: roof top gardens and urban green

Apart from attaining fresh produce from trusted persons, vendors or kin in the countryside, the cultivation of vegetables and herbs at home has become a common strategy among the city dwellers, particularly the urban middle-class, to attain clean and safe produce. Urbanites grow food on rooftops, balconies, in recycled fruit boxes and milk packages as well as on fallow urban land. The so-called tube houses (nhà ống), which

can be found throughout urban areas in Vietnam, have a very narrow front, with often only one room per floor, but several floors. In fact, the horizontal style of houses was changed into a vertical one. The upper floor of most houses has multiple functions. This floor often consists of two parts. The inner space is foremost used as the space where the ancestors are worshipped on a small altar. By contrast, the outer space comprises a small rooftop terrace, on which the house's facilities such as the reservoir for fresh water and the air conditioning are located. With the striving for clean and safe food this outer space, is increasingly used to cultivate vegetables and herbs (Kurfürst, 2019). These spaces of cultivation signify the house owner's wealth. The building of large roof-top gardens has become a sign of social and economic distinction as the following three cases illustrate.

Anh and Hoa live together with their two children and a female house-keeper in a spacious 5-storey house with a roof top garden in Bắc Từ Liêm, an urban district in the western part of Hanoi. They own a private business in the health sector. The office is located on the first floor. On the 2nd floor, the family's socio-economic status is displayed through a big TV screen, a large aquarium, and the wall decorated with souvenirs from abroad such as a plate with the Eiffel Tower in Paris and a miniature Taj Mahal. The family's bedrooms are situated on the 3rd floor and the kitchen is installed on the 4th floor. The 5th and last floor is divided into an inner space with the ancestors' altar and an outer space consisting of the roof-top garden. The house maid, who refers to herself as "the main vegetable cultivator", names the different kinds of vegetables and herbs she grows here: garlic, onions, chilies, chive, and different kinds of cabbage, tomatoes, and leafy greens that are used to cook the soup that is served with almost any Vietnamese dish (canh). To cultivate the fresh produce, she creatively employs diverse materials such as ceramic pots, in which ornamental trees are usually grown, old polystyrene fruit boxes from the market as well as cut up water bottles hanging upside down. Asked about her motivation for gardening, she answers that she likes to grow vegetables for relaxation and to reduce stress. Of course, she uses the home-grown produce to cook the meals for the children, but she buys additional ingredients from the local Đồng Xa market.

Lan, is a 38-year old lecturer. She lives in a house in the Thành Trì District, a designated rural district of Hanoi. Lan uses many of the open spaces in her house to grow vegetables as well as medicinal herbs, utilizing diverse materials such as fruit boxes and ceramic pots to grow the greens. In the courtyard of her house, she even keeps chicken. She gardens not only because she is concerned about safe vegetables but also because she enjoys the beauty and fragrance of the plants. Being a working mother, she cannot keep up with the gardening on her own. That is why her aunt, who moved from her rural hometown to live with her in Hanoi, assists her.

Vân Anh lives together with her husband and two children in a generic housing area in Hanoi's Southern Thành Xuân District. The area is characterized by the typical small alleys that become narrower the deeper one gets into the housing area. In contrast to the usual tube houses, Vân Anh's houses has three spacious floors of approx. 50 sqm each. The kitchen is located on the first floor. The second and third floors house the family's bedrooms. The garden is located on the roof top. It occupies an area of approx. 50 sqm. Vân Anh explains that her family completely rebuilt the house two years ago. It

was then that they decided to build a roof-top garden. The planting beds are made of concrete. To fill them, they ordered three soil transporters. This weight requires a specific structural analysis of the house and thus a superior building material than usually applied when constructing houses in Vietnam. In their rooftop garden, Vân Anh and her husband grow tomatoes, garlic, potatoes, beans, kohlrabi etc. to such an extent that they are completely self-sufficient. “Last year we had 2 dozen kilos of tomatoes”, she says displaying a photo of her harvest on her mobile phone. She likes to garden for fun as well as to prepare her own food. Nonetheless, she still continues to buy additional supplies such as fruit from the neighborhood market. In sum, urban subsistence production is no longer limited to the urban poor as previous research on Southeast Asian cities (Forbes, 1996; Mc Gee, 1967) suggests but is increasingly being conducted by an emergent urban middle class that can afford the construction of a roof-top garden and the personnel to look after the greenery.

### **Commoning: filling urban green with meaning**

In many better-off housing areas, such as Bắc Từ Liêm and the Tây Hồ District, public spaces and wasteland are appropriated by individuals to cultivate their own food. Bắc Từ Liêm is an area that rapidly urbanized within the last ten years, now consisting of spacious one family houses with a dominantly middle-class population. Previously, the area consisted mainly of paddy fields. Today many families grow chilies, lemons, garlic and rau ngót Nhật (*Dicliptero chinensis*, a leafy green used to cook soup) in ceramic pots or recycled fruit boxes on the streets and sidewalks in front of their houses.

The Tây Hồ District, bordering the West Lake in the North West, used to be famous for its plantations of *đào/quất*, the traditional Vietnamese Lunar New Year tree. Yet, since the 1990s, great parts of the former agricultural land have been transformed into building land. Today it is a district popular among the better-off and expats living in Hanoi. The area is characterized by spacious one-family houses in walled compounds. In some streets, such as *Đặng Thai Mai Street*, a number of nurseries are still witness to the land's former usage. From *Đặng Thai Mai Street*, a small private street leads into a dead end that is surrounded by newly built one family houses. A designated flower bed of 15x3m is located right in the middle. In October 2014, the lot lay idle except for some palm tree seedlings. In between the seedlings, residents had planted egg plants and morning glory. A woman taking care of the vegetables declared the vegetables as clean and safe. According to her, only the people living in the immediate neighborhood had access to the land. One year later in October 2015, the urban green on the lot had become quite dense. Interviewees residing in the area explained that the lot is managed by the municipality, which plans to beautify the lot with greenery. While the land is lying idle, the residents of the neighborhood use the land to plant vegetables. This temporary usage of fallow land for gardening is a very common practice in Hanoi. Individuals occupy construction land in order to grow vegetables. Often a development plan already exists. Yet, as long as the constructions have not started, this kind of interim usage is

tolerated by the authorities (Kurfürst, 2019).<sup>4</sup> That is how urban dwellers make use and sense of the urban green surrounding them. By planting greenery, urbanites literally fill fallow land with meaning. Access to the land and the permission to harvest are subject to the social control within the neighborhood.

Here the people living in the area grow vegetables. This is state land, but it is not used. There is a plan to plant flowers on the lot, but it has not yet been realized. That is why the people cultivate the land. Everyone who likes to can use the lot (Qũynh, 58 years old, Tây Hồ District, translated from Vietnamese).

This is what Harvey (2012) refers to as the social practice of commoning. “This practice produces or establishes a social relation with a common whose uses are either exclusive to a social group or partially or fully open to all and sundry” (Harvey, 2012: 73). The relationship between the social group and this aspect of environment that is regarded as a common ought to be non-commodified, and thus outside the market logic. Such non-commodified usage of waste land for cultivation in Hanoi once again hints towards the bypassing of agricultural commodity chains and thus towards the de-commodification of vegetables.

## Conclusion

The idiom and hyperreality of ‘clean and safe vegetables’ signifies urbanites’ fear of consuming fresh produce that is contaminated with chemicals. Urbanites respond to these anticipated dangers of eating in diverse ways. Since the national food regulation is not trusted, they adopt trust-based strategies, such as maintaining the daily practice of buying from local vendors, and receiving boxes of fresh produce sent to the city by relatives and friends residing in the countryside. Additionally, urbanites grow vegetables and herbs for their own consumption in rooftop gardens in the private space of the home or on urban wasteland, which is collectively used to cultivate food. From the analysis of these strategies two main arguments were developed: First, by re-embedding their food supply into relationships of trust, the urbanites systematically shorten agricultural wholesale commodity chains in particular and global commodity chains in general. To put it in Kopytoff’s (1988) terms, this indicates the beginning of a process of de-commodification and singularization. Commodities are singularized by pulling them out of their usual commodity sphere (Kopytoff, 1988). For a long time, the monetary value of vegetables and herbs used to be equivalent to the availability and cost of their production. Since much of the fresh produce is easily grown in Vietnam, or the neighboring countries, it is quite cheap and thus affordable to many urban households. Yet, by cultivating vegetables at home or obtaining them directly from rural areas, urbanites have entered a process of selection, selecting between what they consider safe and unsafe foods. In this process of selection both instrumentally rational and value rational evaluative techniques are applied. Consequently, the process of selection is accompanied

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4 Le Huu Viet and Tra Giang (2014) report of the development of so-called ‘mini’ gardens in the NUA of Trung Hòa Nhân Chính, Nam Trung Yên and Định Công.

by the process of significance as new meanings (Kockelman, 2012), such as the value of safety, are ascribed to the fresh produce.

According to Kopytoff (1988) the only moment the commodity status of a thing is not in question is the immediate moment of exchange. In their study of transactional orders Parry and Bloch (1989) differentiate between two spheres of exchange activities: a short-term cycle, comprising e.g. commodity exchange, and a long-term cycle, “concerned with reproduction of the social and cosmic order” characterized by reciprocity (Parry and Bloch, 1989: 2). While the purchasing of vegetables would correspond to exchange in the short-term cycle, the exchange via kin and friends as well as gardening would need to be considered in the long-term exchange cycle. The commodity of vegetables and herbs is no longer exchanged based solely on a monetary value but also based on a social value ascribed to it. Urban gardeners provide home-grown fresh produce as a gift to family and friends, while using it to prepare food for their families and friends.

Second, in the light of food safety, urban residents provide solutions to the problems they are confronted with in urban areas. To attain what they regard fresh and safe vegetables and herbs they creatively employ the spaces and materials the city offers them in their home or their immediate neighborhood. Accordingly, the creative employment of diverse materials and the urban built environment to grow food demonstrate urbanites’ social creativity in dealing with the challenges and contingencies of the city.

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# Divisoria Night Café: Showcase of Public Space Renewal in Southeast Asian Urban Context

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*Luzile Satur (Passau)*

This study deals with festivals manifested as the Night Café in the Southeast Asian City of Cagayan de Oro (CDO), Northern Mindanao, the Philippines. From 2003 until 2013, Mayor Vincente “Dongkoy” Emano together with the city councillors enacted Ordinance Number 8920-2003 that established the weekly Night Café in the public space of Divisoria. The Night Café offered leisure and entrepreneurship activities. Vendors and other informal sectors converged to provide dining, shopping and entertaining activities. It strengthened the informal economy through the generation of employment and livelihood. The Night Café also symbolised CDO as the ‘City in Blossom, Bloom and Boom.’ The activities and symbolism showcased renewal of public space; however, they were solely intended for economic consumption. This paper argues that the renewal process utilised cultural references to advance economic interests. Thus, this paper aims to trace the main civic actors, key drivers and the role of the city government in conceptualising the Night Café.

## Introduction

Public spaces in Asia, especially in Southeast Asian cities, are characterised as “pluralistic with visible chaotic disorder” (Lim, 2014: 220). The phenomenon is attributed to the extreme rate of the region’s urbanisation. Asia and Pacific displayed a 2.3 per cent rate of urbanisation in 2014; it is higher than the 2 per cent global rates (UN- Habitat & United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2015). In Southeast Asia, the rate of urbanisation grows at 2.8 per cent; correspondingly, 47 per cent of its population lives in cities (Department of Economic and Social Affairs & United Nations, 2014). Similarly, in the Philippines, 48 per cent of its population lives in urban areas. In the southern Philippines, the region of Northern Mindanao has two Highly Urbanized Cities (HUCs), including CDO with an entire urban population of 675,950 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2003).

As CDO is the capital city of the province and region, the city possesses significant roles in the development of the area. CDO serves as the centre for education, administration, commerce and industry. As a result, CDO maintains high annual revenues. To demonstrate, the city garnered Php 2,108.23 million (estimated 35 million euros) of operating income in 2013 (Commission on Audit, 2014). The city's rapid urbanisation and economic growth complement the festivalisation vis-à-vis endured disorganisation in the streets and public spaces.

The most important public space in CDO is Divisoria. The weekly festival of the Night Café took place in Divisoria for a decade from its establishment in 2003 until its abolishment in 2013. The Night Café altered the landscape of Divisoria through gentrification. The aim of the process was primarily for financial benefit. In the end, it resulted in contestation and eventual elimination.

This narrative first elucidates the framework of the study that utilises Lefebvre's three-dimensional space. It then examines the crucial function of the city administration and the actors involved in the dispute. Lastly, it reviews the outcome following the abolishment of the Night Café.

### Three-Dimensional Space of Divisoria

The study of Divisoria is framed within Lefebvre's conceptual triad

“consisting of three elements: representations of space, or “conceived space,” which for my purposes includes not only the drawings and images produced by the designer but the material manifestations of those designs in the built environment (i.e., urban form); representational space, “lived space” or the symbolic values produced by the inhabitants; and spatial practice, “perceived space” or the ways in which spaces are used. These elements are not independent, and it is the interaction between them that results in the production of space.” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 269)

To elaborate, conceived space, “serves as an organising schema or a frame of reference for communication, which permits a (spatial) orientation and thus co-determines activity at the same time” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 37). In concrete terms, urban planning of CDO incorporates schemes for Divisoria. In particular, the Framework Plan for City of Cagayan de Oro (1972: 20) explicitly designed Divisoria as a “Pedestrian Shopping Mall.”

In lived space, or spaces of representation, “the material “order” that emerges on the ground can itself become the vehicle conveying meaning. In this way, a (spatial) symbolism develops that expresses and evokes social norms, values, and experiences” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 37). Divisoria is full of symbols from the monuments to the giant streetlamps. The symbols are integral to the daily life of the locals. The symbols are also embedded in the city's three historical periods—Spanish, American and post-World War II.

The third element of perceived space

“designates the material dimension of social activity and interaction. The classification spatial means focusing on the aspect of simultaneity of activities. Spatial practice, in analogy to the syntagmatic dimension of language, denotes the system resulting from articulation and connection of elements or activities.” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 36)

The Night Café significantly reflects spatial practice where the users of space or actors perceived various activities for their own advantage. Furthermore, the triangular dimension of space is supplemented by other scholars who specialise in Southeast Asia such as Evers, Korff, Lim, Lee and Kurfürst among others. The insights of these specialists are integrated into the analysis of the contestation of Divisoria.

## Historical Symbolism of Divisoria

Divisoria sits at the core of the city’s Población or Central Business District. Its importance has remained since the early twentieth century up until the present time displaying the city’s history while also acting as a repository of everyday life for the locals.

Divisoria is a Spanish term that refers to a dividing line. Divisoria originally served as a fire breach dividing two areas in the población. To avoid conflagrations, the revolutionary leader and town mayor, Tirso Neri, spearheaded the establishment of Divisoria (Montalvan II and Fortich, 2004).

Divisoria sits between two major tree-lined streets with six ‘islands’ or blocks situated between the parallel roads. The western end is bounded by the Cagayan River; the eastern end bounded by Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan. The islands exhibit monuments of Filipino political figures, namely, Jose Rizal, Andres Bonifacio, Justiniano Romulo Borja and Ramon Magsaysay. Other symbolic reminders, such as the remains of the local fighters in the Filipino-American War, are buried underneath the monument of Andres Bonifacio. The amphitheatre, now demolished, Kiosko (stage), benches and trees offer venues for entertainment and recreation.

The monuments, buried remains, and fixtures in every island of Divisoria equate to urban symbols. Kurfürst (2012:14) considers that, “urban symbols are public symbols.” They convey meanings as symbols in public spaces (Kurfürst, 2012; Nas, 2011). To a greater extent, Lefebvre analyses symbols in the production of space as integral in spaces of representation or representational space.

“This concerns the symbolic dimension of space. According to this, spaces of representation do not refer to the spaces themselves but to something else: a divine power, the logos, the state, masculine or feminine principle, and so on. This dimension of the production of space refers to the process of signification that links itself to a (material) symbol. The symbols of space could be taken from nature, such as trees or prominent topographical formations; or they could be artefacts, buildings, and monuments; they could also develop out of a combination of both, for example as ‘landscapes.’” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 37)

Divisoria eventually serves as a business district that connects several commercial pedestrian streets together. The prominence of the place rose when

"[b]y the 1920s to the 1930s, all the big commercial establishments were in main avenue Divisoria, tree-lined and traversed by horse-drawn *tartanilla* and American automobiles. There was the large *Paradies* store, the Japanese, Chinese, and Indian shops. The *Cagayan de Oro Hotel*, and the *Plaza Hotel*. A 1938 visitor to *Cagayan* described *Divisoria* as a place of 'mercantile chatter.'" (Montalvan II and Fortich, 2004: 97)

*Divisoria* is not only typified as a vital commercial area but also

"a symbol of the town's progress during the American period, more so it was a picture of her migrant microcosm and an echo of *Cagayan's* colonial and revolutionary past. *Divisoria* represented the dominance that *Cagayan's* migrant class had reached" (Montalvan II and Fortich, 2004: 98).

The symbols and symbolism of *Divisoria* prevail over historical periods. Korff (1993: 230) postulates that, "Due to the relative persistence and immobility of spatial structures, they play an important role as "facts" for the invention of tradition. The tradition is easily and convincingly verified by reference to remains from history." *Divisoria* is in essence a historical landmark.

## **Divisoria within CDO Urban Plans**

*Divisoria* possesses a significant component in the urban plans of CDO. As a conceived space, *Divisoria* conforms to the purpose of urban designers. As claimed by Lefebvre

"Conceived space refers to "representations of space" by planners, architects, and other specialists who divide space into separate elements that can be recombined at will. The discourse of these specialists is oriented toward valorising, quantifying, and administering space, thereby supporting and legitimating the modes of operation of state and capital." (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 137)

Urban planning in CDO started with the appointment of Maximo Suniel as the first city mayor in 1948 (Along, 1950). By 1952, city zoning was determined to put order in the erection or renovation of infrastructures (Minutes of the Municipal Board Series of 1952). In the same year, the Committee for City Planning and Beautification was instituted to promote cleanliness and, at the same time, cooperation between citizens and city legislators. Two years later in 1954, the third city mayor—Justiniano Romulo Borja spearheaded the creation of the city's urban planning board.

In 1963, the CDO City Planning and Development Board was given authority to plan, study and recommend suggestions for the urban development projects. An official map of CDO together with zoning and subdivision ordinances, public improvement plans, health and sanitation, as well as building codes were formulated. A special provision included Mayor Borja's initiative to appoint private citizens to participate in the planning board. The appointed citizens represented civic organisations, schools, labour and women's groups.

Community participation coupled with visionary leadership was demonstrated when *Divisoria* won the first prize in the Plaza Category National Committee Beauti-

fication Contest in 1962 (Mindanao Star, 1963). This award prompted Divisoria to gain nationwide prestige. Furthermore, this national recognition brought a new height of success to CDO due to the inclusion of community members in the city planning. Recognition was achieved because

“the community has a greater share in the design of their physical spaces. Development planning then becomes less prescriptive, modifies to become a more enabling process whose main role is to nurture the necessary conditions for a larger group to work together to plan the city. The city then becomes a place where citizens’ assets are acknowledged, co-opted and potentials maximised.” (Lee et al., 2014: 220-221)

Divisoria’s reputation above the nation’s other plazas attracted foreign urban specialists whose views added stimulus to urban plans. Craig Whitaker, an American Peace Corp Volunteer assigned in CDO, articulated the usefulness and significance of Divisoria.

“There is no question of the park’s centrality. If one says to a friend that he’ll meet him the middle of Cagayan de Oro, that same friends know that he means somewhere along the Divisoria. This centrality gives a focus to our city. It is the point towards which parades march, people wander on evening strolls, and in which rallies, meetings, and open-air radio programs are held. In short, because it is a “place” and is centrally located it is the point in the city to which almost all public activities gravitate. It has a life of its own.” (Whitaker, 1966: 8)

Divisoria exemplifies qualities that makes it distinct as a space for aesthetical and practical functions. According to Whitaker (1966: 8), Divisoria is perfectly suited to the idea of Louis I. Kahn, a prominent American architect, who conceptualises that, “the centre of the city is a place to go to and not through.” Likewise, Zukin (1996) and Sennett (1992) equate public space to a meeting point or melting pot of various activities. Given these points, Divisoria is portrayed as

“an absolutely necessary part of our downtown urban fabric. Its importance can be measured simply by saying that it is a place. To describe it we can stretch our imaginations a little and call it an outdoor room, a long large sized room that has no ceiling and whose walls are the buildings which line it on either side of the street. Once we look at the Divisoria in this light we can see also the streets which lead into it as hallways or corridors to the room.” (Whitaker, 1966: 4)

Finally, Whitaker emphasises that Divisoria fits the ideal concept of a park in an urban landscape. He highlights Divisoria where it stands in the foreground; while the rest of the city sits in the background of the schema.

“The park sits as a quiet hub to the rest of the city which is spinning around it (this effect is certainly heightened by the continuous stream of one-way traffic around it). It is as if someone places a giant thumbtack in the centre of our city to pin it to the landscape then started turning the rest of the city around it.” (Whitaker, 1966: 8)

The theory, definition, and discourse of Divisoria as shown by Whitaker, conforms to the paradigm of Lefebvre.

“representations of space give an image and thus also define a space. Analogous to the paradigmatic dimension of language, one spatial representation can be substituted by another that shows similarities in some respects but differences in others. Representations of space emerge at the level of discourse, of speech as such, and therefore comprise verbalised forms such as descriptions, definitions, and especially (scientific) theories of space.” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 37)

Designs for Divisoria continued with the completion of the Framework Plan for the City of Cagayan de Oro in 1972. The Framework Plan turned out to be the critical juncture in the city’s planning schemes. The advent of the 1970s signalled a swift economic transformation of CDO. Commerce and industry dominated the economy of the city since it was promoted as the ‘Gateway to Northern Mindanao’ (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972: 5). The city’s industrialisation was boosted through speedy construction of infrastructure projects that included power and water supplies, roads, public transportation as well as seaports (Satur, 2009).

The city’s reputation as the business hub in the Northern Mindanao region paved the way for designing Divisoria into a Pedestrian Shopping Mall where “improvements will be made to mould a leisurely atmosphere conducive to shopping. Kiosks, in all sorts of variety will be constructed on the Mall with designs regulated within the frame of the Urban Design Concept” (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972: 20).

The economic development of the city prompted a re-interpretation of the symbolic meaning of Divisoria. The design to convert Divisoria into a mall brings forth, “archetypal public spaces of modernity” (Zukin, 1996:188). In effect, the planned transformation signals “symbolic economy” (Zukin, 1996: 265). The modern design of Divisoria confirms that, “symbolic economy is determined by growth in cultural consumption and its industries” (Kurfürst, 2012: 148). It is further determined that

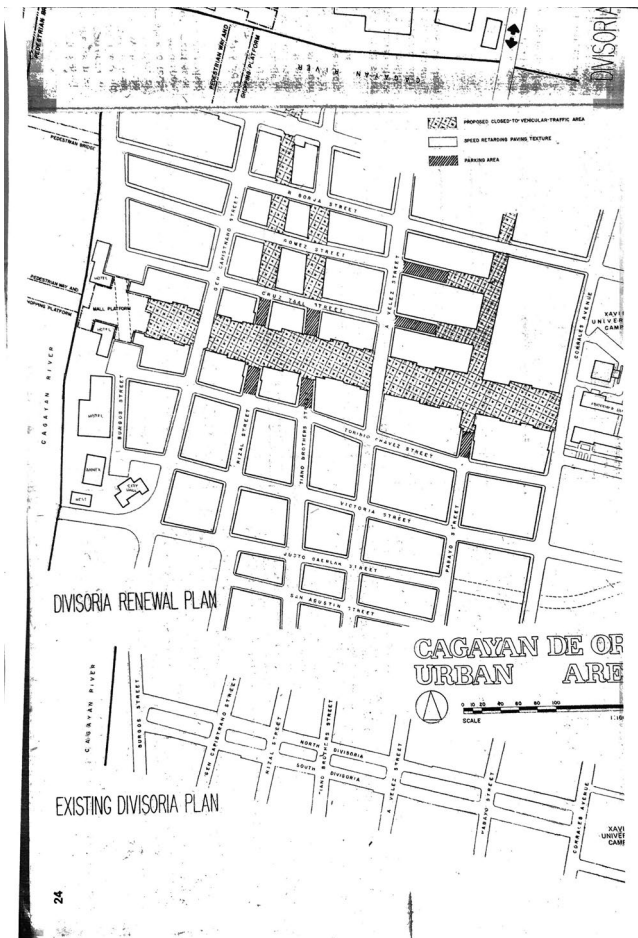
“the symbolic economy features two parallel production systems that are crucial to a city’s material life: the production of space, with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings, and the production of symbols, which constructs both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity. Every effort to rearrange space in the city is also an attempt at visual re-presentation.” (Zukin, 1996: 24)

The Framework Plan not only advances the city’s economic prospects, but it also “embodies a community’s vision” (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972: 75). The Framework Plan primarily considered the participation of urban dwellers. As Lim (2014: 22) notes, “How the city can be perceived is by the intensity of active participation of local urban citizens.” The contribution of the locals, ordinary as it may be, allows redefinition of the symbolic economy of public spaces in the city (Kurfürst, 2012; Lefebvre, 2003; Zukin, 1996). For these reasons, the designs for Divisoria “are geared towards attracting tourist-oriented activities in the area without forgetting the needs of local residents and shoppers for a better place to shop and relax” (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972 20).

Community participation also extends to the vendors in Divisoria. The Framework Plan aimed at “expanding the scope of vending within the park without sacrificing sa-

nitation or cleanliness” (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972: 20). Therefore, the conception of Divisoria with the inclusion of informal sectors reveals how, “real public spaces ought to have the capacity to provide for the full extent of the public, in any given society, from the very wealthy to the wretched” (Wee, 2014: 193).

Figure 1: The Divisoria Renewal Plan in the Framework Plan



From Urban Designers Associates, Inc. (1972). Framework Plan for the City of Cagayan de Oro. Quezon City, Philippines: Urban Designers Associates, Inc, p. 24. Copyright permission from Ramir M. Balquin, Officer-in-Charge of the City Planning and Development Office, 2019.

Unfortunately, the effort to implement the design for Divisoria came to a halt and Divisoria was never converted into a Pedestrian Shopping Mall. The reason is attributed to the political crisis that the country, including the city, experienced in the period of Martial Law from 1972 until 1986. Nevertheless, Divisoria prevailed as the hub of the city without substantial alteration.

There were two major urban plans following the period of Martial Law. In 1991, the Cagayan de Oro-Iligan Corridor Master Plan was conceived primarily to facilitate agro-industrial development in the region of Northern Mindanao. The Master Plan was based on a macrostructure encompassing nineteen municipalities and two cities (Louis Berger International Inc., 1991). For this reason, plans for Divisoria were not given attention. Nine years later in 2000, the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) was launched under Mayor Emano. However, the CLUP proposed no rectification for Divisoria. Rather, the CLUP merely recognised Divisoria as part of the built-up area in the Major Urban Node (City Land Use Coordinating Committee of Cagayan de Oro, 2000). Although both plans missed out community participation, Divisoria nevertheless remained an unaltered microcosm of the city. Divisoria maintained its traditional symbolic meaning as the primary public space in the city, however, not until the advent of Night Café in 2003. On balance, the lack of community planning provides an avenue for new forms of re-interpretation of public space in the city. The conception of the Night Café re-interprets the symbolic meaning of Divisoria.

### **Key Drivers in the Conceptualization of Night Café**

Élites define and redefine images of the city (Evers and Korff, 2000; Kurfürst, 2012). The Cagayan de Oro City Council (2003), with the approval of the mayor, created Resolution Number 5779-2003 declaring CDO as the “City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom.” The élites supported the legitimization by citing well-grounded socio-economic factors. Accordingly, the resolution outlined satisfactory peace and order conditions, continuous foreign investment, the spread of multi-million infrastructural projects such as bridges, public markets, bus terminals, malls and residential subdivisions as determinants of the city’s economic prosperity. It highlighted the “average growth rate of investment over a 5-year period from 1997 to 2002 of 6.14 percent and Php 8.54 Billion worth of investments poured in 2002 alone” (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003). In addition, the established image of CDO as the “Gateway to Northern Mindanao” (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003) was reinforced in the resolution.

The élites, who are the authors of the resolution, ultimately decided on how CDO was portrayed. The portrait of the ‘City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom’ appertains to “urban constructions” by “an urban ideology of élites” (Evers and Korff, 2000: 17). The ‘blossoming, blooming and booming’ (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003) of CDO are “cultural strategies that initially represented the results of economic development turned into strategies aimed at stimulating economic growth” (Zukin, 1996: 280). The construction of the images of CDO by élites, coupled with the growth of investments and infrastructural programmes, are the key drivers in furthering economic prospects as manifested by the establishment of the Night Café.

## Role of City Government in the Conceptualization of Night Café

Mayor Vicente Emano originally conceptualised the Night Café in order to find a viable solution to informality. Emano approached vending as a “phenomenon to be managed” (Recio and Gomez, 2013: 177). The mayor’s “vision is power” (Zukin 1996: 257) is transparent in the streets of Divisoria. Emano envisioned a venue where hawkers could exhibit commodities on weekends (Palmes-Dennis, 2013). In offering an alternative for the marginalised sector in the city, his idea was supported by the city councillors who articulated and converted it into a statute.

The city council created Ordinance Number 8920-2003, which legitimised the establishment of the Night Café in September 2003. The ordinance defined the Night Café as a regular weekend festivity, open to the public, specifically in Tirso Neri and RN Abejuela Streets in Divisoria, from seven in the evening until two in the morning. The Night Café permitted vendors to operate under the 2003 Cagayan de Oro City Revenue Code. Correspondingly, the ordinance laid down the rules on the set-up, lay-out, food and beverage preparation, services, sanitation and waste disposal (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003a). The city government, headed by the mayor and dominated by his allies in the city council, took on the role of legitimising the Night Café.

The legitimisation of the Night Café uncovers “changes in the configuration of élites” (Evers and Korff, 2000: 17). The mayor, together with the councillors, envision a renewed CDO. The Night Café symbolises the renewal of the city. Therefore, the reconfiguration by the city government “imply re-definitions of the meaning of the city and urban “re-construction” so that the new social and symbolic demands are satisfied” (Evers and Korff, 2000: 17).

## Renewal of Divisoria

The physical renovation of Divisoria started a year after the installation of the Night Café. The Cagayan de Oro City Council (2004a), through the issuance of Resolution Number 6864-2004, endorsed the designation of Divisoria as a ‘Business-Tourism Park.’ The resolution-initiated guidelines in coordination with the City Tourism Board, Public Works and on Commerce, as well as the private organisation of local businessmen known as Cagayan de Oro Chamber of Commerce and Industry Foundation, Incorporated (Oro Chamber). Moreover, the resolution recommended the installation of lollipop lights (giant, multi-coloured lamp posts), permanent toilets, a dancing fountain, and paving stones on footpaths. Ultimately, it “aimed at reviving Divisoria’s old glory days” (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2004a).

Renewal is manifested not only through re-interpretation of image but also by architectural alteration. Architecture, as Eco (2005: 194) articulates, “is an act of communication, a message, of which the parts or the whole can perform the double action of every communication, connotation and denotation.” The new objects and fixtures in Divisoria refer to architectural parts or symbols that communicate new meaning. Their installation connotes that the Night Café in Divisoria symbolises “blossoming, blooming and booming” of CDO.

Zukin (1996: 263) observes how “Culture is often reduced to a set of marketable images.” “City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom” and “Business-Tourism Park” are merchantable images. These images, combined with marketable symbols such as the lollipop lights, are then utilised as cultural references to reinforce economic interests. The Oro Chamber partnered with the city government to foster profit-seeking interest through the renewal of Divisoria. In other words, “people with economic and political power have the greatest opportunity to shape public culture by controlling the building of the city’s public spaces in stone and concrete” (Zukin, 1996: 11).

Figure 2: *The Night Café*



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## Contestation

Power in public space does not totally belong to the élites. It is important to realise that spatial practice is evident in Divisoria. Zukin (1996: 11), succinctly addresses that, “public space is inherently democratic. The question of who can occupy public space, and so define an image of the city, is open-ended.” Various actors participate in public spaces and indeed partake in the contestation of public space. Kurfürst (2012: 62) posits, “Cities are socially constructed and therefore politically contested. Conflicts between different groups are likely to arise about the shape of the landscape. This stems from the fact that a “unitary culture” does not exist.” In the context of urbanism in Southeast Asia, Evers and Korff (2000: 6) make the case of “the struggles of different actors, who are trying to shape the city in a conscious effort, or who simply put their stamp on the city through

their everyday life within it.” In the case of the Divisoria Night Café, the actors can be categorised into four groups: vendors/informal sector, mayors/city government, local citizens and the private-business sector. The following sections discuss the contestation.

## The Vendors/Informal Sector

As soon the Night Café began, vendors installed makeshift stalls, chairs, tables, grills and patio umbrellas in the streets where locals, as well as tourists, gathered to eat, drink, and shop. They grilled meat and seafood especially for low-and-middle-income consumers. They displayed assorted goods such as imported second-hand apparel (i.e., Ukay-ukay), pirated DVDs, domestic pets and other affordable everyday products. The Night Café was equally open to the services provided by masseurs, henna tattoo artists, prostitutes and band players. By and large, the activities provided by the informal sector were for economic consumption. To interpret precisely, the Night Café advocates a culture of selling. Zukin (1996: 12), contemplates that, “culture is a system for producing symbols, every attempt to get people to buy a product becomes a culture industry.”

After several months of operation, the vendors began violating the rules in the ordinance. Firstly, the vendors did not follow the prescribed schedule. The rules stipulated that operations started at 6:00 p.m. and ended before 3:00 a.m. However, in reality, the vendors set up their stalls earlier than 5:00 p.m. and their operations ended after 3:00 a.m. Secondly, the vendors who sold dry goods occupied the islands. Thirdly, the garbage disposal system was not followed. Worst of all, liquor was made available to minors, particularly the students coming from nearby schools and universities.

The city government responded to these violations by amending the rules. First, Ordinance Number 8948-2003 issued prohibition on the use of the islands to the vendors and also restated the precise opening times (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003c). Second, Ordinance Number 9008-2003 regulated the use of umbrellas; vendors were only allowed to erect umbrellas when rain occurred (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003b). Thirdly, Ordinance Number 9372-2004 prohibited the sale of alcoholic drinks to minors below the age of eighteen (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2004).

Despite the amendments, official regulators assigned in the Night Café lacked the capacity to implement the guidelines. The violations continued to escalate. As a result, the Night Café elicited reactions from the locals.

## Local Residents

The issue of the Night Café divided the locals into opposing sides and neutral parties. The various groups highlight either the advantages or disadvantages of the Night Café.

Supporters of the Night Café sympathise with the vendors, reasoning that vendors are part of the locality and contribute to the economy. To demonstrate, a mango vendor profited as much Php 3,000 (60 euros) per night from the Night Café; in contrast, she earns only up to Php 700 (14 euros) per night without the Night Café (Interview with

Street Vendors, 2016). In short, the Night Café generated a livelihood and employment for the underprivileged.

The Night Café brought pride and uniqueness to CDO; it was the “trademark of CDO”, (Pagapulaan, 2016) as articulated by a former barangay councillor. The advocates further claimed that the Night Café revitalised Divisoria because it promoted local tourism. In effect, the city government achieved its goal of renewing Divisoria.

On the other hand, the opponents of the Night Café complained of several problems. First, drunken customers desecrated monuments of local heroes (Alegre, 2013); they urinated on the statue of Andres Bonifacio that is also the burial site of soldiers from the 1900 Battle of Macahambus when Filipinos defeated the Americans. The result was that urine combined with vomit on the streets, walls, fixtures, and other monuments to fill the air with a stench. Second, as there was no proper water supply, the vendors did not follow sanitation rules. Instead, they stored pails of water in the streets to be used for dish and hand washing. In addition, piles of garbage were left on the streets and, every night after the market ended. Divisoria was plagued with filth. Third, the loud music from live bands disrupted classes in the university adjacent to Divisoria. Fourth, the closure of two streets, Tirso Neri and RN Abejuela, two main thoroughfares of the city, caused a traffic jam that lasted for hours, with the congestion affecting all drivers and passengers. Fifth, the opposers to the Night Café claimed it to be an event where crime and prostitution flourished. Moreover, a female prostitute earned as much as Php 5,000 (100 euros) per night during the Night Café; in contrast, she collected a mere Php 300 (6 euros) per night in the absence of the Night Café (Interview of Prostitutes, 2016). Given these concrete points, “limitations of the administration allow the market to emerge as the dominant mechanism for the structuration of urban space” (Evers and Korff, 2000: 13).

One of the locals argued that a “plaza is not for business” and stressed that the Night Café was not a “food centre” (Interview of Local Residents, 2016). Instead, he proposed to find ways of establishing a proper venue and alternatives for the vendors. The Night Café could be transferred to another public space such as the rotunda. Lastly, the locals suggested the need for stricter enforcement of rules to maintain sanitation.

## Private-Business Sector

It may be noted that at the beginning, the private-business sector organisation in the city, otherwise known as the Oro Chamber, coordinated with the government to endorse the Night Café. However, the group later denounced the weekly event. Oro Chamber members who own commercial establishments in the private spaces of Divisoria complained of decreasing sales since the traffic congestion discouraged clients. When the Night Café ended in 2013, the president of the Oro Chamber announced, “We are happy to receive reports from our members on sales improvement” (The Mindanao Current, 2013). Surprisingly, the occupation of vendors in Divisoria adversely affected the profits of private enterprises. Thus, the renewal of Divisoria produced a paradoxical effect on legitimate enterprises.

Another private entity, the Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan, equally detested the presence of the Night Café. Students inside classrooms across Divisoria lost concentration due to the loud and constant music. The university further criticised the negative influence the Night Café had on the undergraduates in terms of encouraging an unhealthy lifestyle. By and large, the private sectors opposed the negative effects of the Night Café as it encroached on their private spheres.

## The Mayors

The Night Café ultimately became a political issue in the 2013 mayoral election. It triggered a contest between the two leading candidates: the incumbent Mayor Emano, and Oscar “Oca” Moreno. Both contestants shared similar educational and political track records. Both were former provincial governors of the Misamis Oriental province where CDO is the capital city with Emano governing from 1986 to 1995 and Moreno from 2004 until 2013.

Although both Emano and Moreno possessed public charisma and originated from influential political clans, they differed in vision and agenda. On the one hand, Emano remained with his program to continue the Night Café and promote the slogan “City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom.” On the other hand, Moreno’s campaign centred on *Hapsay nga Panggobyerno* (Orderly Governance). In other words, Moreno aimed to re-establish order in the streets and within city government. The election was a close race with Moreno winning over Emano by a thin margin.

Immediately following his victory, Moreno mobilised the programme *Hapsay Dalan* (Orderly Streets). Moreno eradicated the Night Café with his first Executive Order 001-2013. The Oro Chamber then supported the new program to clean up the city’s streets. Specifically, the Oro Chamber agreed with the official order to eradicate the vendors in Divisoria in order to regain income. The informal sector was immediately alarmed and threatened by the sanction. The impact of the sanction can be summed up by the following:

“Daghan kaayo nawad-an trabaho, nanga pasmo, nanga boang ang uban na giwala diretso na wala gi taga-i ug trabaho. Mura mig mga kawatan, kriminal” (Many lost their jobs and starved. Some whose livelihoods were abolished abruptly without prior notice and without any job prospects went crazy. We were like thieves, criminals) (Interview with the Leaders of the Association of Massagers in Divisoria, 2016).

The afflicted further lamented

“Na apektohan gyud mi pila ka bulan. Nangita mi aha maka pamaylo ug kwarta para makalingkawas. Nag ampo gyud mi sa Ginoo na malouy si Mayor [Moreno] na tagaan mi ug lugar” (We were affected for several months. We tried to find ways to borrow money in order to survive. We prayed to God that the Mayor [Moreno] would pity us and find a space for us) (Interview with the Leaders of the Association of Massagers in Divisoria, 2016).

Notwithstanding the complaints, the mayor intensified the implementation of the sanctions. The Night Café was prohibited for the reason that “it was a tragedy” (Moreno, 2016). The mayor reiterated the point that “There was tremendous traffic, bad smell and even criminality” (Moreno, 2016). He further rationalised his decision to close the Night Café by commenting “What happened was that the Night Café—that the intention of making Divisoria a cultural place had been abused by too much commercialism. The Night Café became a nightmare” (Moreno, 2016). Nevertheless, the mayor agreed the Night Café had been a “good idea in the beginning” (Moreno, 2016).

The following evaluation summarises the contest between the two mayors:

“Kung sa masa, medyo epektibo si Emano kay daghan man pobre nakapahimulos; Pero kung koan lang may katungod sa kahapsay, mas epektibo si Moreno kay naka baton man ug kalinaw” (For the masses, Emano is quite effective since many of the poor benefitted [from Night Café]; however, if we refer to orderliness, Moreno is more competent because peacefulness [on the streets] was achieved) (Interview with a Disabled Vendor and Toilette Fee Collector in Divisoria 2016).

Emano may have had the best intentions for both the marginalised and the privileged. The Night Café served the informal sector on one hand, while, on the other hand, the slogan ‘City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom’ fulfilled the promotional needs of the private-business sector. In spite of the success of the Night Café, the weak implementation of rules and regulations encouraged disadvantageous consequences for all stakeholders.

The contestation between the political élites proved who could dominate over the public space in the city. Importantly, it must be recognised, that the winner depends on support from business élites. For some time, Emano retained domination because the Oro Chamber supported his vision of furthering economic interests through cultural references. Evers and Korff (2000: 13) stress “The rationale for the production of space is its exchangeability and the profitable usage of space, while the administration tries to develop the cities following the rationality of their plans.”

Then again, Emano might have underestimated the business élites and instead overestimated his influence on the masses. The moment Emano lost the support of the business élites, the momentum shifted to Moreno. Oro Chamber’s approval of Moreno illustrates the shift in control. Therefore, the partnership of political and economic élites ultimately controls the city. Evers and Korff (2000: 11) encapsulate the idea that, “Cities are made and experienced by the people. Not in a harmonious cooperative effort but through conflicts between those dominating and imposing their understanding of the city on those dominated.”

## Alternative Spaces

The dissolution of the Night Café pushed displaced vendors to seek other avenues, such as the semi-public spaces at Paseo del Rio, or, what is commonly known as the rotunda. The rotunda is a roundabout where one can drive around its perimeter road and occupies an estimated area of 10,000 square meters. This land had been donated to the city

government by the prominent family of Dr. Jose Golez and Rafaelita Golez (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2000). The family then initiated the step of renting out the rotunda to provide an alternative venue after the Night Café ended. The vendors paid minimal rental fee to the city government. The experiment succeeded for some time, particularly during fiestas and the Christmas season; nonetheless, it ultimately proved infeasible because of its inaccessibility (Escobar-San Juan and Pastrano, 2016).

Centrio Mall opened a night market, Mercado de Oro, within its indoor garden, months after the closure of the Night Café. Mercado de Oro was modelled after Mercado Centrale at Bonifacio Global City/BGC (Ayala/Centrio Mall, 2013) in Makati city. The Ayala family corporation owns both BGC and Centrio Mall, along with its emerging business park. The two establishments are located in the central business districts of their respective cities. Most importantly, both business centres embody the “small urban spaces,” like privately managed public parks that can be refashioned to project an image of civility (Zukin, 1996: 44). The two commercial spaces exhibit the “monopolistic formal players in a globalizing economy” (Recio and Gomez, 2013: 177) since their spaces contain global brands, shops, hotels, offices together with condominiums. BGC and Centrio Mall project “an image of global power and influence” (Shatkin, 2005: 591). In short, both commercial hubs exhibit artificial public spaces exclusive to wealthy clients.

Mercado de Oro replicated the Night Café by following a similar weekend schedule: Fridays and Saturdays from 4:00 p.m. until 3:00 a.m. This new night market promoted the selling point: “The Night Food & Lifestyle Market of Northern Mindanao” (Ayala and Centrio Mall, 2013). Mercado de Oro then used the pineapple icon, a trademark of Northern Mindanao, where the Del Monte Philippines Corporation has the largest pineapple plantation in the country. The night market promised to offer arts, crafts and food at reasonable prices, along with free live music. Mercado de Oro accelerated the end of the Night Café; however, it excluded those vendors who could not afford the rental of mall space. The privatisation of urban spaces by the entry of malls erodes the claim of the vendors to public spaces (Shatkin, 2005). Yet, for the most part, Mercado de Oro was a failed alternative due to the exclusivity of its customers. The night market in Centrio Mall quickly faded owing to exclusive artificiality.

After the unsuccessful attempts in the rotunda and Centrio Mall, the mayor sought another alternative and contemplated relocating the hawkers to Isla de Oro (Moreno, 2016). The city planners, however, noted that the planned relocation was discussed in the previous years by the heads of the local private business sector (Escobar-San Juan and Pastrano, 2016). Most importantly, the devastating effects of typhoon Washi on Isla de Oro in 2011 must be seriously considered, as the area has been declared a no-build zone. The hawkers could face the risk of disastrous floods.

## Conclusion

None of the alternative public spaces offers a solution to the needs of the informal sector. The vendors face the challenges of accessibility in the rotunda, affordability in Centrio Mall, and security in Isla de Oro. Notwithstanding the spatial challenges in the informal sector, the masseurs, after their vehement protest, have managed to remain

legally in the westernmost island of Divisoria. Moreno allowed exemption for the masseurs because of their work ethic, including their adherence to sanitation standards and general reserved demeanour. In contrast to the vendors, the masseurs occupy and leave their area without waste because they are equipped with only chairs and massage kits consisting of oil/lotion, wooden reflexology tools, towels, and disinfectant. In contrast to other vendors, the masseurs desist from using or making loud music (Interview with the Leaders of the Association of Massagers in Divisoria 2016). In conclusion, the actors from the informal sector prove the 'idea of public space cannot be guaranteed as it can only be gained through struggle and contestation' (Wee, 2014: 23). The appeal of the masseurs convinced Moreno. Thus, they regained their rights and won the confidence of the mayor. Kurfürst (2012: 110) stresses "Urban landscapes are socially produced; they are the outcome of processes of negotiation between diverse social actors."

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# Shifting Landscapes - Shifting Cultures in Xishuangbanna, Southwest China

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Though relatively small in size, Xishuangbanna (Banna) displays an astonishingly high degree of cultural and biological diversity. This fact has always made Banna attractive and special, but also vulnerable to external attention, interests and interventions. Geographically and politically wedged between the powerful empires of Burma and China, the Buddhist kingdom struggled to keep its independence from the time of its founding in the 13th century. The Dai, the ruling class of the feudal state settled and dominated the lowlands while various ethnic groups followed relatively secluded and independent ways of life in the remote and topographically challenging uplands. From the 19th century, Banna came increasingly under the influence of the Chinese Empire and later on the Republic. After 1950, Banna lost its remaining spheres of sovereignty and was absorbed into the People's Republic of China (PRC). Soon, it became integrated into the national and global economy as a supplier of natural resources and was also the target of ambitious projects of civilization, modernization and development implemented by the Chinese state.

Over the last decades, the face, function and structures of the social and physical landscape of Banna have completely changed. Arguing on the premise that space is produced and transformed within and through social relations, I will discuss these changes along with the concept of the *paddy line* and the *rubber line* – socio-ecological boundaries defining and dividing the landscapes and local societies. This article is closely based on the author's dissertation (Wehner, 2011) and extensive fieldwork that was undertaken between 2006 and 2010.

## Banna's Ecological Features

To comprehend the human and social landscape of Banna requires a basic understanding of its environmental and physical conditions. Over many centuries, livelihoods and land-use techniques have become highly adapted to the diverse local environment. In its physical geographical features and historical configurations, Banna can be regarded

as part of the mountainous mainland of Southeast Asia, and environmental factors still directly and indirectly influence recent economic and social development. Nestled between 21 and 23 degrees north and 99.5 and 105.5 degrees east along the Tropic of Cancer, Banna is in many aspects a transition zone that supports a high degree of biological and cultural diversity. Annual mean temperatures range from 22°C in the lower areas to around 16°C in higher altitude areas of Western Banna. Average rainfall amounts to 1400 mm per year (with microclimatic variations). Between May and October, the south-western monsoon from the Bay of Bengal brings hot, moist air masses whereas the months from November throughout March are practically free of rainfall. However, annual precipitation is increased during the dry season by about 145 foggy days, which are crucial for the native tropical vegetation (Zhu, 1997). Banna's topography is diverse, with altitudes ranging from 450 m to 2500 m above sea level (asl). With the foothills of the Himalayas running from north to south, the landscape features rugged mountains and steep valleys. One of the most striking features is the Lancang Jiang or Mekong River, which winds through Banna from north to south and is fed by tributaries from twenty watersheds. The flat valley basins, which cover only 5% of the terrain, are limited in area but of outstanding importance for human settlement and agricultural development (Li et al., 2007: 1734).

The Banna region has the highest biodiversity in China; although it covers only 0.2% of the country's total landmass, it is home to 5000 species of higher plants (16% of those found in China), 102 species of mammals (22% of those found in China) and 427 species and subspecies of birds (36% of those found in China) (Zhang and Cao, 1995: 229). This diversity is owed to Banna's location as a transition zone for flora and fauna between tropical Southeast Asia and subtropical/temperate China. As an old cultural landscape with a long history of settlement, it also hosts a high degree of cultural and agricultural diversity.

## **Banna: Land of a Thousand Paddy Fields and Beyond**

Chinese chronicles mention human settlements in the area about 200 BC. However, considering the settlement history of the wider region of Southeast Asia, it is likely that settlement dates back even earlier (Zhu, 1992: 3). The largest and so far most dominant group have been the Dai Lue, who came from the North to settle in the fertile valleys, driving other groups into less favourable environments in the hillsides. In 1181 AD, the Dai kingdom of Banna was founded, and the area became an autonomous political entity. Paddy rice cultivation that had flourished for centuries in the fertile valleys of Banna allowed surplus production and thus facilitated the development of social stratification and political organization. Besides the dominant people of the Dai Lue, many other ethnic groups settled in the mountains of Banna. These peoples, some semi-nomadic, were hunters and gatherers with little to no political organization beyond the village gate and little internal social stratification (Kunstadter, 1967)

From a socio-ecological perspective, the advent and expansion of the Dai saw the emergence of the *paddy line*. The concept of the *paddy line* helps us to understand how social and cultural processes interrelate closely with the physical environment (Weh-

ner et al., 2014). The *paddy line* can be described as a socio-ecological boundary that divided the kingdom of Banna into two spheres: the areas subject to paddy cultivation and the non-paddy cultivating areas. Determined mainly by environmental factors such as topography, water availability and temperature, groups with different cultural characteristics developed and co-existed.

Below the *paddy line*, in the valleys of the Mekong and its tributaries, the Dai people established a feudal Buddhist kingdom with a certain degree of centralization and the development of “urban” centres. The consequent transformation of tropical rainforests and wetlands into permanent paddy fields resulted in a very strong impact on the natural environment. The first shift had taken place from an untamed and almost unused environment to a cultural landscape with the strong management institutions necessary for the complex task of wetland rice cultivation.

Above the *paddy line*, the mountainous areas were home to non-Dai groups, such as the Lahu, Akkha, Yi, and Bulang (Kunstadter, 1967), whose livelihoods depended less on permanent agriculture and more on hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation. Because these groups were spread over mountainous Southeast Asia and parts of Southwest China, their political and social stratification was limited to within the village community. Interaction beyond the village area was mainly limited either to marriage between people of the same ethnic group from different villages or to trade and exchange of goods (Walker, 1999). As in other areas of mountainous Southeast Asia, the terrain was rugged, difficult to access, heavily forested and extensively used. With a low population density, the area remained under forest cover, and although pristine forests were sometimes encroached on, long fallow periods allowed the regrowth of biologically diverse secondary forests.

Albeit to a much lesser extent than at present, Banna of the past was divided by the *paddy line* with the wild, untamed and not formally regulated landscapes of the mountainous areas on the one hand and the orderly and legible irrigation landscapes of the valleys under the direct control of the Dai.

## The Emergence of the *Rubber Line*

The advent of Chinese rule over Banna brought a total change in political-economic terms; as one of the few subtropical areas in the PRC, Banna attained strategic importance as a rubber cultivating area. From the 1950s on, rubber plantations encroached on Banna’s more or less pristine forests, facilitated by the collectivization of land throughout the republic. State farms were established, staffed mainly with deployed military and Han Chinese farmers, and later with young urban Han Chinese during the Cultural Revolution. About 200,000–300,000 young people – some forced, some highly ideologically motivated – were sent during the *Youth to the Countryside campaign* to labour on the plantations of rural, backward and uncivilized Banna (Jianchu et al., 2005).

Radiating out from the 11 state rubber farms of lowland Banna, rubber cultivation spread into Banna’s lowland landscapes, building pockets of modernity. On the state rubber farms, technological knowledge was applied to create legible and productive landscapes for rubber cultivation, which was a resource of strategic importance in deve-

loping and modernizing industry and economy in the young PRC. The impact of these rubber colonies went far beyond land-use change.

Migrants brought their culture and lifestyles to the state rubber farms. The Han Chinese lifestyle was considered modern, in contrast to the backward and traditional culture of the local people from ethnic groups. As Sturgeon (2010: 323) points out, immigration and the introduction of the state rubber farms led to “a spatial manifestation of social hierarchy”, with Han people clearly on top. Those spaces of modernity soon reached beyond the gates of the rubber farms into the rural capital of Jinghong, where an influx of Han Chinese started to alter the formerly Dai-dominated urban structure.

In the early 1980s, a period of decollectivization and economic liberalization brought a completely new dynamic to land use in Banna. The local communes were dismantled and local farmers received land-use titles for small-scale farming. Hitherto mainly involved in farming food crops for subsistence, local smallholders were encouraged to diversify and invest in rubber trees. State-extension services propagated rubber expansion on the farms of private smallholders in areas below 700 m (asl) (Grötz, 2016). Driven by increasing national and international demand, a diffuse expansion of *hevea brasiliensis* started from the ever-growing pockets of the state farms.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, poverty alleviation programmes were implemented by the central government, such as the Slope Land Conversion Programme (Grain for Green) during the Go-West Campaign, which started in 2001. Local farmers converted land used for shifting cultivation into rubber plantations, pushing the elevation limit to well above 1000 m asl, which is beyond the ecological limits for *hevea brasiliensis* in these latitudes. By 2016, almost 100,000 households from over 1,000 villages were engaged in rubber cultivation (Xu and Yi, 2015: 803).

Sequences of aerial or satellite images clearly show that the 5-hectare rubber pockets of the state farms in the 1950s became a carpet of more than 300,000 hectares by 2014 (Min et al., 2017). Rubber now covers about 20-25% of Banna's total land area. Banna, an old cultural landscape in terms of morphology, vegetation and function is not as homogenous a landscape as it was in the past. Divided roughly by the *rubber line*, we can now observe at least three different cultural landscapes, each with its own ecological, social and economic morphology and characteristics. First, the “legible” landscapes of the lowlands (Scott, 2009), which have mainly turned rubber monocultures, have lost much in terms of biological, agro-biological and land-use diversity. Even under smallholder farming systems, perennial cash crop plantations have replaced shifting cultivation and forest systems. Cash crop cultivation has diminished the significance of rice cultivation and rice subsistence. Lowland landscapes have turned static and have little flexibility left for land-use change.

The second type of cultural landscape lies in the upland areas above the *rubber line*, which have also undergone far-reaching transformations. However, neither face nor functionality has changed completely in those upper, less accessible parts. Despite the intensification of land use and introduction of cash crops, the landscape has maintained some of its important features of dynamism and flexibility and still supports diverse farming practices and land-use patterns.

The third landscape type could be described as urban, and includes the city of Jinghong, followed by Mengla and Menghai, which all have a tendency to intensive ho-

horizontal and vertical expansion; from 1976 to 2015, those three cities multiplied their demand for space from about 15 km<sup>2</sup> to almost 200 km<sup>2</sup>. From a remote and laid-back town on the banks of the Mekong River, Jinghong developed, or rather was developed into a sparkling and exotic tourist gateway to Southeast Asia. Hotels, restaurants and sights of interests, including Southeast Asia's largest Buddhist temple complex, were constructed. In 2013, Banna received more than 2.7 Mio. tourists (Neo and Pow, 2015). As part of the Go-West strategy, huge sums were invested in Jinghong from the late 1990s, with local and regional governments striving to increase and diversify tax revenues and generate employment. Not only the urban centres but also rural areas and infrastructure increased the demand on the landscape: in the case of townships and villages from about 6 km<sup>2</sup> to 115 km<sup>2</sup> in the same period (Cao et al., 2017: 8). Albeit not the focus of this article, it is worth mentioning that urbanization and the development of the tourism sector have repercussions on the surrounding rural areas; for example, urbanization increases demand for agricultural and non-timber forest products, and tourism acts as an employment motor and a magnet for the under-employed youth from rural areas.

## Institutional Changes in Land-use Regulations and Practices

Having described changes on a physical level, this article will now focus on the underlying socio-political processes that triggered or facilitated change in land-use and landscape. These processes were driven by institutions, which can be best described using Scott's (2008: 48) definition:

"Institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour. Institutions are transported by various carriers – culture, structure, and routine – and they operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction."

At the constitutional level, the area was subdued over the last seven decades by two major transformations, or rather institutional ruptures. During the Mao era, many institutions were abolished to make way for "modern" communist regulations and structures, the most prominent example of which was the introduction of the People's Commune. As Shapiro (2001: 67) points out "Ideas would unleash raw labour to conquer and remould nature", destroying institutions that ensured a certain level of efficiency and sustainability in economic and ecological terms.

Then, during the 1980s, responsibility for agricultural production returned to the household level and the flow of money, goods, ideas and people became increasingly liberalised. However, responsibility for land use in a wider sense remained beyond the individual or the local level. Rather, land-use regulations increasingly became an issue of strategic concern. Even more intensively than during the first decades of communist rule, space was turned into a commodity, and its produce – rubber and other cash crops or electricity from the hydro-electric plants – was fed into national and international markets (Korff and Wehner, 2009).

Landscapes and spaces in Banna are currently under an increasing amount of pressure, triggered by the advent of actors with a plethora of different interests and intentions. Land-use policies, rights and access to land are negotiated and influenced by an increasing number of actors, often with completely diverging interests, such as local individuals and administrators, business people and state agencies from different levels of administration. These diverging interests mostly stake their claim in a spatial sphere by claiming space and triggering a change in land use. Put simply, we can find three main groups with interests and aims that sometimes overlap but are more often contradictory: small- and large-scale investors, ranging from local business people to state-owned companies; government-driven poverty reduction schemes; and international- and state-driven environmental protection schemes (Wehner, 2011).

### **Institutional Change on an Operational Scale**

The described integration of Banna into national and global networks had two simultaneous but rather contradictory effects on the development of land-use institutions: homogenisation and heterogenisation. We will look at the change in land use by focusing on two villages that lie on different sides of the *rubber line*. As a methodological framework, Ostrom's Institutions and Development Framework (IAD) helps to analyse and understand the structures, actors and activities that shaped landscapes and livelihoods in Banna (Ostrom, 2005; Wehner, 2011).

#### **Mandian and Xiao Nuo You Shan Zhai: Only 25 Kilometers Distant, and yet Worlds Apart**

Mandian (MD), an old Dai village, and Xiao Nuo You Shan Zhai (XNY) are located respectively at about 800 m asl and 1200 m asl. Whereas MD has had road access since a state rubber farm was established in the vicinity in the early 1960s, the all-weather road to XNY was still under construction in 2013.

Both villages were only a handful of bamboo and thatch houses in the 1960s, with limited cultivated land in their vicinity and surrounded by native forests (Grötz, 2016). The villages and their surroundings took different paths of development, despite similar institutional settings concerning land use. When land use is categorised according to Ostrom's IAD framework of human-environmental interactions as irrigated land, dryland and forest land, it becomes evident how livelihoods and landscapes developed.

#### **The Heart of the Southeast Asian Cultural Landscape: Paddy Cultivation**

Paddy fields in both the lowlands and the uplands have been subject to the *green revolution* propagated by state agencies. In the 1980s, hybrid varieties replaced a plethora of local rice varieties and required the input of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Although some of the old varieties that had adapted to the highland climate survived in XNY, in MD only small patches of glutinous rice for consumption on festive days have been kept. Historically, paddy rice cultivation demanded a high level of cooperation wi-

thin the village, and the maintenance of the irrigation systems and transplanting and harvesting of rice were traditionally tasks shared between households working mutually. Mechanization of paddy cultivation, which occurred especially in the lowlands, led to higher labour efficiency but also to less need for mutual support, thus weakening the social fabric of the moral economy as a foundation of Southeast Asian societies (Scott, 1977).

The fact that animal husbandry, especially of buffaloes, went into a strong decline might appear negligible at first sight; however, the impact on the livelihoods of a certain part of the population is significant. Taking care of animals and herding buffaloes were the responsibility of senior villagers, so though being released of this responsibility might be a blessing for some, for others it represents a loss of value and meaning. More than just a farm animal, buffaloes provided fertilizer and fuel, gave financial safety as a tradable good and played an important role as a status symbol and in cultural practices and rituals (Rousseau and Sturgeon, 2019).

Despite the introduction of modern farming technologies, paddy cultivation is still a prevalent feature of the landscape. Under the nationwide Land Management Law revised in 1998, conversion from high-class agricultural land (such as irrigated paddy land), at least by individual leaseholders, is prohibited (Ding, 2003). Thus, the area of irrigated land has remained relatively stable, and remote sensing analysis suggests that paddy area in Banna did not decline between 1976 and 2015 (Cao et al., 2017).

The example of MD, however, shows how local interests are overruled from above. Farmers faced the expropriation of almost 15% of their fertile paddy areas because the land was reallocated to build a resettlement village to accommodate those whose village was flooded during the construction of the Jinghong hydro dam, one of the dams along the Mekong cascade, (Wehner, 2011).

Because the introduction of hybrid varieties allowed rice productivity to exceed the subsistence level, some of the paddy fields are leased to external producers. Investors from other counties, or even provinces, lease the land to cultivate fruit and vegetables on an individual and short-term basis. Though this practice certainly adds to income diversity, the long-term benefits are not clear. Considering that almost 20% of China's agricultural land is already polluted (Chen et al., 2014), farmers run high risks of losing control over the health of their soils since it is not easy to regulate the use of farm chemicals by contractors with short term interests.

Implementation of land-use regulation makes clear that irrigated land is a major factor in the food security of households in the community. The tenure for paddy fields is not as secure as tenure for other land use classes; to endow every villager with a local hukou (local resident-ship) that provides at least the minimum of paddy field for subsistence, tenure is rededicated from time to time (Grötz, 2016).

In XNY, exemplary of other highland areas, paddy cultivation remains a more substantial part of agriculture due to the higher degree of subsistence. Morphological and climatic conditions mean that paddy cultivation in the uplands has undergone less technological change than in the lowlands because small terraces in steep terrain limit mechanization, and vegetation growth is limited to 6 months between May and October. Because of a general lack of cash income, upland farmers cultivating fields in these environmentally less favourable conditions tend to apply fewer chemical fertilizers and

pesticides, and hence the margins of increased expense on farm chemicals remain relatively minimal. Another feature of paddy cultivation in the uplands is the distance between fields and settlement. While most paddy fields in MD surround the settlement in close proximity in the relatively wide valley bottom, many of the rice terraces in the highlands are located in steeper valley bottoms and at the lower reaches of the valley slopes to provide access to the water resources. This means long travelling distances (up to two hours walking) to the fields, which draws heavily on the time budget.

### **Shift and Shape: Dryland and Shifting Lands Disappearing**

Also typical of the landscapes of mountainous Southeast Asia in the Mekong region are the mosaic patterns of dryland and shifting agriculture. The Chinese government made great efforts to put an end to shifting agriculture; both to end non-sedentary forms of livelihood and for environmental reasons. Shifting cultivation/swidden agriculture was made the scapegoat for the destruction of natural forests over the last decade but has found some rehabilitation lately (Alcorn and Royo, 2015; Cairns, 2015).

Nevertheless, this land-use type has been affected by conversion, both in the upland areas and even more so in the lowlands, leading to significant changes in livelihood and the environment. In MD, as in all other lowland areas of Banna, areas that were used for dryland agriculture of annual plants with or without fallow periods or grazing have been dedicated to another use, namely rubber plantations. Agricultural production since has been limited to rubber and rice. Production of corn as a food and fodder crop has ceased, and grazing land for livestock is no longer available.

Situated close to a state rubber farm, MD village was among the very first villages to come in contact with the rubber economy. After the household responsibility system was introduced, the government and the state farms massively propagated the expansion of rubber cultivation. In relatively favourable climatic conditions, the financial benefits of rubber became evident rather promptly, and after emanating from a trial area of about 3 ha in 1984, rubber plantations now cover all arable land except paddy fields. Even the tea plantations that villagers had cultivated for decades were transformed into rubber plantations (Wehner, 2010).

Since the transformation from subsistence to market economy, the village of MD has one of the highest cash incomes per capita, with a far-reaching socio-cultural impact. This includes a change in food habits, dependence on an external food supply, housing and altered workloads, working schedules and tasks.

In XNYZ, perennial rubber plantations have not encroached on the flexible dryland areas. However, as in other upland areas of Banna, the Sloping Land Conversion programme, the Grain for Green programme and the ban of slash and burn practices all led to the introduction of permanent or perennial cultivation practices (Xu, 2006). Tea plantations were recovered and expanded, including newly introduced mixed-cropping systems (Leshem et al., 2010). Bamboo plantations were introduced with the Menghai-based bamboo factory as a reliable buyer and processor of construction material. Furthermore, the area given over to tea plantations was expanded, both those owned by local villagers as well as those owned by external investors. In 2008, hemp was introdu-

ced as a new cash crop. Grown as a resource for fibre production, hemp is, like bamboo, purchased by the regional processing plant in Menghai. This state-owned enterprise manufactures fabrics for the national market, including fabrics for the People's Liberation Army. While receiving intensive technical and financial support from government extension services, individual households adopted the new crop quickly. To facilitate the transport of bamboo and hemp to the markets in Menghai, a former jungle path connecting XNY to the westward villages was upgraded to a gravel road, improving access to the villages and towns in Menghai County.

From the macro perspective, landscapes of the uplands have not changed as profoundly as landscapes of lowland Banna. Even though the uplands are still predominantly void of perennial cash crops, agricultural innovations nevertheless have had a significant impact on local socioeconomics and ecology. The cultivation of ecologically well-adapted upland rice and corn varieties, once the backbone of local grain subsistence, was cut back, with a loss in food sovereignty and agro-biodiversity. On the other hand, the structure of the local, monopolistic sales markets for hemp and bamboo and the demand for seeds and farm chemicals have increased the dependency of local farmers. Though XNY has a relatively large amount of land per inhabitant, pressure on ecological systems of the dryland areas has increased beyond the input of farm chemicals and exogenous seeds. As local farmers report, the swidden-cultivation circle has drastically altered, allowing for much shorter fallow periods, or even none at all, and the effect of this change on the biodiversity and subsistence opportunities that swidden landscapes normally provide has been detrimental. Swidden agriculture systems in Southeast Asia provide rich agro-ecosystems hosting hundreds of species of plants, fungi and animals, many of them collected by swidden cultivators to provide food, medicinal plants and other materials (Kunstadter, 1967; Rerkasem et al., 2009). In Banna, research found that villagers use more than 70 plant species from their fallow fields for direct use, diversification of their house gardens or for sale (Fu et al., 2003). Especially in the more remote areas of Banna, traditional medicinal plants and food supplement from wild plants still play a big role, as Ghorbani et al. (2012) point out.

### From Holiness to Homogeneity: Forests in Banna

Seemingly untouched, native and wild forests are definitely a land cover of the past. Primary forests remain intact only in a few areas of Banna, like the core zones of nature reserves.

Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) statistics on forest cover in China do not show severe forest loss, but rather an increase of forest cover. However, because these statistics do not discriminate between natural forests and tree plantations. Thus they do not reflect the profound transformation in quality. This includes, for example, the severely diminished degree to which rubber plantations provide biological diversity, erosion control and carbon storage capacity, their negative impact on the macro and meso-climate and other declines in the eco-system services provided by natural forests (Hu et al., 2008). However, research shows that forest transformation is reaching new peaks. Between 1988 and 2003, "Rubber plantations in Xishuangbanna showed a linear increase, while at the same time, natural forests showed a linear decrease. From 1999 to

2010, expansion of rubber plantation and decline of natural forests accelerated dramatically” (Zhai et al., 2017: 151). Particularly, forested areas suitable for rubber plantations were converted to rubber, including areas within protection zones (Sarathchandra et al., 2018).

However, the forest areas around XNY close to the Nabau Nature Reserves Core Zone were not converted. Quite the contrary, in the area of this highland village, natural regrowth of natural forest area occurred and, at least theoretically, the use of the forests is strictly regulated. Villagers are entitled to collect timber for construction and firewood and also to collect non-timber forest products. Especially bamboo-shoots and fungi, namely the Mu-Er mushroom, are marketable products sought after by tourists and inhabitants of Jinghong and other urban areas. Although, as Ghorbani et al. (2012) point out, this puts pressure on the remaining forest ecosystems, the appreciation of forests in XNY prevails, certainly also fostered by the support and educational efforts of the nature reserve extension staff.

In the lowlands, the picture is an entirely different one. In MD as well as in other Dai villages nearby, rubber plantations have completely replaced natural forests. Apart from the loss of natural forests as a base for material resources mentioned above, forests have lost their meaning as metaphysical spaces in every-day and ritual life, as has been manifested in the desecralization of the relationship between humans and the environment. Culturally intrinsic to all ethnic groups, the bond between people and nature went well beyond the environmental space as a base for food, medicines and housing. Within the last decades, propagated firstly by the ideological claims of the cultural revolution and later on by capitalistic market-driven ideologies, the environment has lost its former meaning and importance as a spiritual space, for example the Dai Holy Hill Forests as “the place where gods live, (...). Any violence and disturbance for plants and animals in the forest will be punished by the gods” (Hongmao et al., 2002: 707). While the Holy Hills of the Dai are the last remnants of conservation throughout Dai villages in Banna, there are none in MD village. Determined by the Land Management Law and the dictate of cash crops, monocultures shape the village-scape of MD, resulting in orderly rows of rubber trees and hybrid-rice terraces.

## Shifting Landscapes: Shifting Cultures

Below the *rubber line*, everyday life has become better. Secure housing in concrete buildings, best described as Neo-Dai architecture, have replaced the quaint traditional timber-and-brick constructions. Cash income allows the purchase of modern household appliances and vehicles, at least a motorcycle if not a car. As pointed out before, food patterns have changed from subsistence to a market-based diet, with the exception of rice. Not only have consumption patterns of food changed, also an integration of consumerism has taken place. Dai lifestyle has become similar to everyday life in other parts of the PRC. After decades of poverty and shortages, consumerism has become a dominant force in Chinese popular culture (Jacka et al., 2013). Consumption patterns are only one side of the coin of economic prosperity, the other is the mode of production. Fossil fuel-free subsistence farming in an environment of agricultural diversity has been re-

placed by a monoculture cash crop for the world market. As Sturgeon (2012) points out, rubber is a completely generic product. There is no linkage along the supply chain, no attachment between producer, product and post-production or the consumer. In other words, the car mechanic in Shanghai will certainly not bear Banna's undulating rubber hills in mind while changing his tyres. This can be interpreted as a profound alienation from the production base. However, in the local discourse being a rubber farmer is seen as modern and progressive and the economic status that allows an improved standard of living is perceived as a positive development (Wehner, 2011).

Returning to the landscape level, rubber monoculture and despiritualization have profoundly reduced the potential for promoting tourism. A huge gap exists between the exoticized imaginary Dai landscapes consisting of pristine forests, lush paddy fields and historic Dai architecture and the reality of rubber plantations and Dai-ized concrete houses. For example, the Mandian waterfall, a popular site for individual tourists in the 1990s, has lost its attraction since the surrounding forests have disappeared and changes in meso-climate and hydrology have reduced the waterfall to a trickle during most months of the year. The modern Dai rubber landscape does not leave much opportunity to develop types of tourism, for example ethnic tourism that caters to individual tourists and travellers, which could have facilitated the re-introduction of traditional cultural practices (Chen, 2014).

In the case of the upland communities, development has been less rapid and less profound. Quality of housing and living standards have increased steadily on a less steep curve, as has the intensity of land-use transformation. Farming at the subsistence level is much more prevalent compared to the rubber-based village economies. Integration into the national and world market has only partly taken place, using a range of cash crops, which is less lucrative but also less volatile to external drivers. Since there is still little surplus income after meeting basic demands in farming supplies and basic household goods, consumerism has not yet become a reality. The glitzy world of middle- and upper-class urban China remains a dream (or nightmare) delivered into the households by Chinese soap operas on TV or on an infrequent trip to the urban centers of Banna.

The most important cash crop is tea, a plant endemic to the region, which has found worldwide appreciation over the last decades. The ancient tea horse road once linked Banna and Southern Yunnan to Tibet and other parts of Asia (Fuchs, 2008). Somewhat neglected during the Mao period, a long-standing tradition of tea cultivation was revived in the early 2000s when the first studies on its health benefits were published. Since 2008, the name Pu-Erh tea is protected and can only be used for fermented tea of *Camilla sinensis* var. *assamica* that is produced and processed in Yunnan. China-wide and increasingly on the international scale, Pu-Erh tea produced in the region offers wide opportunities for tourism and regional marketing. In Jinghong and Menghai, streets are lined with numerous tea shops, offering the whole range from cheap to high-end premium tea. Unlike rubber, tea has the potential to be an authentic product that includes the opportunity for an emotional connection: the producer of tea is proud of his traditional and esteemed product and the buyer is proud of an authentic and precious product, which might evoke images of bucolic Yunnanese landscapes during the process of buying and consuming (Sturgeon, 2012). Producing tea and other cash crops is not the only land-use activity that distinguishes this upland village from

the rubber areas: as mentioned earlier, forests around the village were saved and could recover. The villagers, living close to the core zone of the national nature reserve, have become aware of the multi-faceted value of their forests and have developed an attitude of stewardship.

Scott (1998) suggests a differentiation between the visual and functional order of a landscape. The order of the rubber landscapes has been changed both visually and functionally: rubber landscapes are homogenous, formalized and legible, and the village economies are tightly linked to international markets and influenced by Chinese culture. In contrast, the upland landscape retains some of its mosaic-like and unorderly appearance, and in its functionality the upland landscape is more heterogeneous and flexible. Despite the intensification and expansion of monoculture, upland land-use systems allow much more flexibility and more room for local decision-making on land use. The combination of cash and subsistence production renders upland farmers less affluent but possibly more resilient to external influences.

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# **The *moral space* and the logic of collective self-organisation of domestic workers in Chennai, India**

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## **Abstract**

Our overarching contribution in this chapter is the claim that a shared “moral topography” (Taylor, 1994) of lower classes can create forms of collective ‘consciousness’ which may lead to collective action. In order to establish that a shared moral topography is an incremental prerequisite for creating practical spaces for self-organisation, the chapter outlines Charles Taylor’s concept of morality, “moral topography”, “moral space and actions” as well as the concept of “identity”. Empirical data show that the moral topography of domestic workers in Chennai (Tamil Nadu, India) is characterized by a shared meaning and collective experiences of injustice. Further empirical evidence demonstrates that due to this common understanding of injustice, domestic workers in Chennai start organising themselves informally and establishing trade unions. Through self-organisation, domestic workers meet a demand for social security which the state fails to provide.

The fieldwork of this qualitative study was conducted within and funded by the European Project FP7-PEOPLE-2010-IRSES “*URBANSELF - A North-South-Network on Urban Self-Organisation and Public Life in Europe, India and China*” (2011-2014) which was scientifically coordinated by Prof. Dr. Ruediger Korff. We would like to share this academic achievement with him, in honour of and appreciation for years of fruitful and contradictory discussions – including those on administrative and financial issues that sometimes proved to be exhaustive and ‘painful’ – during our joint endeavour, URBANSELF.

## **Introduction – What was URBANSELF about?**

Cities are transformers of development processes (Braudel, 1992; Korff, 2003), and given the ambivalent nature of development, they not only become centres of problems, conflicts and tensions but also form innovative milieus (Hall, 2000). Accordingly, cities continuously create new ways of coping with changing circumstances through social and

pragmatic creativity (Joas, 1996). This requires new perspectives on urban planning and urban governance. Traditionally, expert-based urban planning has defined the ‘correct’ technical solutions. Yet lately, this technical-rational approach has come under question worldwide, and scholars instead emphasise the role of citizens in problem identification and solution. This alternative approach is not seamless, however. It creates other problems regarding, for example, the extent to which citizen participation is integrated into the planning of the urban future. Usually, citizen participation happens through political representation. Thus, it is politicians or influential political office-holders that decide what plans shall be made, what visions are to be followed and how these should be implemented (e.g., decisions about scarce resources).

URBANSELF - *A North-South-Network on Urban Self-Organisation and Public Life in Europe, India and China* was funded by the European grant programme FP7-PEOPLE-2010-IRSES from 2011 to 2014 and built on existing contacts of cooperative research and knowledge exchange.<sup>1</sup> The objective of URBANSELF was to bring together and integrate competences on urban processes in Europe, India and China with a specific focus on urban self-organisation and how this may contribute to the development and enhancement of public dialogue within and between the three participating areas. URBANSELF intended to strengthen the North-South dialogue and strengthen the role of civil society within Europe, India and China. In the “urban age” (Davis, 2006), cross-border knowledge exchange is particularly significant as urban problems are increasingly becoming global challenges.

Driving transformation in governance, policy and politics has aimed at enhancing the role of citizens and their self-organizing capacities. This has been achieved through the rise of organisations that enable the articulation of interests and concerns as well as the creation of socioeconomic practices. In this process, urban governance had to collaborate with citizen-based organisations. As supporting self-organisation is crucial for such a transition towards real citizen participation, self-organisation has been seen as necessary for urban sustainability. The key objective of URBANSELF was, therefore, to understand these forms of organisation through comparative discussions and to transfer knowledge of existing research on European cities and rapidly growing (mega-)cities in India and China. This then allowed us for empirically founded theoretical conclusions which in turn provided the basis for identifying innovative approaches to urban challenges from an actor-oriented perspective.

## Some conceptual thoughts on urban self-organisation

Self-organisation is an approach which seeks to understand notions of social norming, social learning and social change within communities or groups, and their locally developed forms of organising and acting in response to locally, nationally or globally encountered and constructed problems. Processes of self-organisation fundamentally depend on the prevailing political system and the quality of labour laws. Self-organisation is more likely to be successful in democratic political systems in which labour laws have

1 See <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/99659/reporting/en>.

a legislative basis. Essentially, self-organisation is a way of representing processes that institutionalise the social relationships derived from a variety of local networks (Atkinson, Hasanov, Dörfler, Rothfuß & Smith, 2017). Thus, it is achieved through encounters – perhaps of a serendipitous nature – that lead to the identification of mutual interests, positions and relations (Mayntz, 2006; Ostrom et al., 1999). These interactions initially generate trust derived from individual relationships. Over time and through further interactions, they transform into collective forms of (moral) trust articulated actions that create “collective intentionality” (Hasanov & Beaumont, 2016) or “joint intentionalities” as Messner and Weinlich (2016: 18) would express it.

Self-organisation could also be regarded as a form of cooperation. Cooperation can be conceptualized as horizontal (i.e., among actors having the same social position) or vertical (i.e., among actors from different social positions). Messner, Guarín, and Haun (2016) have identified seven factors that make cooperation on a global level more likely: reciprocity, trust, communication, fairness, mechanisms of enforcement, reputation and we-identity. Similarly, on the micro level self-organisation might be more likely to emerge when facets of these factors are fulfilled in one or the other way. A constituted ‘we-identity’ can be regarded as the joint moral framework that creates the basis of self-organisation. This is not to say that self-organised collectives act ‘anarchical’ as they have to institutionalise some of their procedures, though they always try to uphold a certain ‘fluidity’ and openness of social processes and internal innovation to prevent a “social death” (Atkinson, Dörfler & Rothfuß, 2018). This process of self-organising is often connected to the concept of charisma. With the rise of an organisation, the charisma of the founder(s) is stabilised and routinised (or “veralltäglich”, see Weber, 2000) and incorporated into the organisation. Enhanced coordination and cooperation allows for differentiation and specialisation within the organisation, which in turn strengthens the potential for strategically pushing certain interests (Castells, 1983).

On the urban sphere, self-organisation is crucial for the functioning of cities and the creation of coping strategies. Self-organisation provides multiple benefits and reduces costs for the people as well as the administration. For instance, through self-help, housing is provided, especially in specific informal quarters of the Global urban South where the weak state is not able to deliver this service. In addition, recycling and waste treatment is organised informally and the city is supplied with cheap resources for informal trade, food production, labour, etc. (Korff and Rothfuß, 2009). This improved social cohesion results in an increase in social control which translates into less external control. The self-organised, functioning community is itself a resource (or social capital) for its members that provide mutual support, and thereby, economic and social security. Social capital is increasingly taken into account, but as a personal asset.

Against these perspectives on social capital, there is a need for research on social capital as a “collective property resource” (Ostrom, 1991). In fact, social capital is produced through the ability of collectives to create new patterns of social relations and patterns of organisation – that is, through social creativity. Thus, in self-organisation social capital is maintained as collective agency through a process by which a socially cohesive collective maintains itself (Rothfuß and Korff, 2015). Neighbourhood, joint working and collective activities are means through which multicultural tolerance is established. Multiple social relations and interdependencies amongst inhabitants de-

veloping out of work, trade, neighbourhood, kinship or friendship become stabilised through organisation. This is particularly the case when the addressed problems require collective action. In such cases, self-organisation is connected to territorial definitions and demarcations of a collective, defined as a “locality” (Korff, 2003). Localities neither resemble administrative districts, nor closely knit communities. What defines a locality are the local organisations that have the capacity to define and maintain spatial boundaries (Berner & Korff, 1995).

### “Moral space” – Our theoretical entry point

Our focus on the geographies of ‘doing ethics’ situates our theoretical approach as part of the ‘moral turn’ in human geography (Valentine, 2005; Smith, 1997). Moral geographies are commonly divided into meta-ethics, descriptive ethics and normative ethics (Matless, 2000). This refers to the ways in which the connection between humans and their social environments mirror and (re)produce moral conduct (Philo, 1991). Moral geographies shed light on the closeness to and distance from people in existential need as an important intersubjective parameter in the moral philosophy of care (Korf, 2006; Barnett and Land, 2007). Assumptions in moral geographies are often conceptualized as the plural of a given moral rule or ethical principle, and socially approved codes of conduct (Setten, 2004).

This approach is distinct, as it conceives moralities as continuously constituted through social, material and spatial relations. Within this framework, we examine the contemporary processes of ‘doing ethics’ of domestic workers in Chennai, the relational processes through which moralities emerge in a “moral space” (Taylor, 1989), highlighting the immanence of ethics in daily practices (Lambek, 2010). We intend to hermeneutically understand the moral lifeworld of ‘ordinary people’ who create their own history and geography of ‘tactics’ (i.e., the ‘differential space’ in a Lefebvrian sense) under conditions they have not chosen themselves (De Certeau, 1984; see Rothfuß and Vogel, 2013).

We hereby refer to Charles Taylor’s argumentation that the dimension of morality is not something which simply overlays human action but is rather something which is inherent to the human existence *per se* (Breuer, Leusch, and Mersch, 1996: 184). Taylor’s claim is that human subjectivity has a “moral” dimension because of its non-contingent connection to frameworks of strong value” (Abbey 2004: 43). Taylor defends the thesis “that doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations” (1989: 27). He postulates that humans always interpret the world that surrounds them and attribute sense to the social reality through their subjective horizon of experiences. Consequently, all human matters can only be described in the context of such a horizon of meanings. Human actions take place within a “moral space”, because all human actions are the result of moral evaluations. According to Taylor, *moral space* is “a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary” (1989: 28). He assumes that humans live in a space of questions to which their framework-definitions are the answers. These

answers allow humans to position themselves within the moral space and decide what meanings things have for them (Taylor, 1989: 29). Moral space is different in each culture, and though it has collective effects within each, it can also be individually interpreted. Indeed, Hartmut Rosa describes Taylor's moral space as a "space of cultural meaning" (1998: 182).

Moral topography describes moral space, its nature, property and conditions. It maps the criteria which help decide how to orient oneself within a given moral space (Taylor, 1989: 28-29). Taylor refers to "knowing one's way around a moral space" as identity; humans who know their identity know what is right or wrong. Hence, the connection Taylor draws between orientation and identity becomes clear (Taylor, 1989: 28). As an inherent part of human existence, morality is interlinked with human actions which means that a normative dimension underlies human actions, practices and structures. Humans always attribute social meaning to their actions. Consequently, they only act if the action makes practical sense to them (see Bourdieu (1998) "sens pratique"). According to Taylor, this sense is characterized by "strong values"; human beings evaluate their actions based on principles concerning how "good" or "bad" something is (Breuer et al., 1996: 184). Taylor further argues that humans position themselves in line with the perceived "good" (1989: 47).

## Socio-spatial inequality in Chennai

With 8.7 million inhabitants, Chennai is India's fourth largest urban centre and one of the hot spots of India's automobile and information technology (IT) industry (Government of India (2015a); Government of India - Ministry of Home Affairs (2014). Chennai is also the capital of Tamil Nadu, the most urbanized state of India, with 48.45% of the population living in cities (Sivakumar, 2011).

The country has experienced rapid processes of urbanization since its independence in 1947 (Bohle and Saktapolrak, 2008: 12). This extreme urban growth has led to increasing inequalities which are spatially expressed and materialized in slum areas. The number of slums is strongly linked to income per person as well as level of industrialization and employment opportunities in a city (Bohle and Saktapolrak, 2008: 14). As explained in the United Nations Human Settlements Programme report, "slums result from a combination of poverty or low incomes with inadequacies in the housing provision system, so that poor people are forced to seek affordable accommodation and land that become increasingly inadequate" (2003: 10). Though a universally accepted definition of "slum" does not exist, the United Nations Human Settlement Programme identifies the following attributes: lack of basic services (e.g., sanitation facilities, drinking water, waste collection systems, electricity, surfaced roads, etc.), substandard housing or illegal inadequate building structures, overcrowding and high density, unhealthy living conditions and hazardous locations, insecure tenure (irregular or informal settlements), poverty and a minimum settlement size (2003: 11).

Almost one third (28.5%) of Chennai's population lives in slums. Chennai's economic growth and development have mainly been facilitated through the IT industry. As a result of population growth and real estate speculation, land has become increasingly scarce

and many poor people have been pushed to live in slum areas (Bohle and Sakdapolrak, 2008: 15). In their empirical study on Chennai, Bohle and Sakdapolrak demonstrate the wide distribution of slums throughout the city, implying that the middle classes and the poor live side by side. A higher density of slums is located in the poorer north of Chennai as well as in the less secure and marginalized territories along riversides, canals and railways (2008: 15).

The Indian census from 2011 provides a statistical overview of the living conditions of households in Indian slums (Chandramouli, 2014). This census is applicable for the interviewed domestic workers in Chennai, all of which were living in slum areas.

Table 1: data on households living in slums in India (Census 2011) (Vogel 2018)

<b>Households living in Slums (India)</b>	<b>17%</b>		
<b>Households living in Slums (Chennai)</b>	29%		
<b>Housing</b>	77% Permanent housing	16% Semi-permanent housing	5% temporary housing
<b>Number of rooms</b>	49% One room	29% Two rooms	4% No exclusive room
<b>Property status</b>	70% Own their house	26% Rent	Rest – other
<b>Access to drinking water</b>	74% Tap	3% Well	13% hand pump
	7% Tube well/ borehole	3% Other sources	
<b>Location of Drinking water</b>	56% Within premises	4% Outside premises	
<b>Sources of lighting</b>	90% Electricity	8% Kerosene	0.5% No lightening
<b>Bathing facility</b>	81% Available		19% Not Available
<b>From that</b>	66% Bathroom	15% Enclosure with roof	
<b>Drainage Connectivity for Waste Water</b>	36% Closed drainage	44% Open drainage	19% No drainage
<b>Type of latrine</b>	66% Within premises	34 % No latrine within	
<b>From that</b>		<b>15% public latrine</b>	<b>19% open latrine</b>

<b>Availability of Kitchen</b>	<b>94% inside</b>		<b>5% outside</b>
<b>From that</b>	65% have a kitchen	Rest do not have	
<b>Availability of banking service</b>	53% Available	47% Not available	
<b>Possession of Assets</b>	19% Radio/ Transistor	70% Television	10% Computer
<b>From that</b>	73% Telephone 4 % Landline only	64% Mobile only	5% Both
	40% Bicycle	22% Scooter, Motor Cycle, Moped	4% Car/Jeep/ Van
	11% None of the specified assets		

The data in Table 1 show that the very basic facilities for living are fulfilled for a great majority of slum dwellers: over three-quarters of the slum dwellers live in permanent houses, 70% live in their own house, 74% have access to tap water, 90% have access to electricity, 94% have a kitchen facility inside and 80% have some form of bathing facility. This confirms that the overall living conditions for slum dwellers have improved. However, the data also shows that there is still room for improvement. Only 36% of the slum households have a connection to a closed drainage system and 34% still have no latrine. The data also give evidence of the accessibility to consumer products: around 70% of the households in slums own a television, around 73% have a telephone and around 40% have a bicycle (Government of India, 2015b). These numbers provide a general outline of the lifeworld of slum dwellers in India which is also applicable for the living conditions in slums in Chennai where domestic workers usually live. All of the domestic workers that have participated in the study sample “Maids and Madams – Negotiating Inequality in Urban Chennai” (Vogel, 2018) were living in slum areas.

## **The moral topography in the everyday lives of domestic workers in Chennai**

The remainder of the chapter examines the case study of maids in Chennai based on the empirical evidence obtained within the PhD project “Maids and Madams - Negotiating Inequality in Urban Chennai” (Vogel, 2018)<sup>2</sup>. A variety of everyday practices associated with modernization shape the domestic workers’ moral topography. In the case of maids in Chennai, a common definition and shared experiences of injustice – among others – characterize the moral topography. “Justice” is a significant moral source constituting the framework of domestic worker’s collective identity. From justice, the ideal

2 During 2012 and 2013, around 70 qualitative interviews with domestic workers, middle class employers and experts have been conducted in Chennai. 30 of these, were conducted with domestic workers, working as part-time maids in middle class households in Chennai.

of “equality” is derived. The intrinsic concept of equality is a “strong value” (Taylor, 1989) that make up the moral topography of domestic workers in Chennai. These workers have the ideal of attaining an “equal” status to their employers. They position themselves vis-à-vis their employer in relation to this ideal. Hence, domestic workers evaluate each action of the employer as well as their own actions in relation to “equality”.

Domestic Workers want to live a decent life under conditions they perceive as fair and humane. So far, the state has failed to provide domestic workers with these fair and humane conditions. Domestic service in India have hardly been touched by state policies (Neetha, 2009: 489). Neetha (2009: 497) argues that approximately 99.9% of domestic workers in India have no formal contract regulating their working arrangement. The lack of accommodation in national law and the informality of the sector reflect the domestic workers' weak position in society. Nevertheless, evidence shows that domestic workers have been demanding a life under fairer and more humane conditions. They compare their own lives to that of the middle class and feel that they “deserve” better. As explained above, domestic workers share a collective moral framework which is marked by this normative claim of equality and to which they compare their current living conditions.

One aspect, which demonstrates that domestic workers share a collective sense of justice is the fact that they expect their employers to think of them not as “servants” – which they regard as disrespectful and discriminatory – but as “workers”. They expect a certain intersubjective feeling of recognition, dignity and respect. We adhere to Charles Taylor's (1989: 64) understanding of respect, an important dimension of which is “equality”. He mentions that many people within modern culture consider their highest good to be the notion that “all humans should be treated equally with respect”. The domestic workers in Chennai demand this kind of equal respect: “*Respect. If you see a servant not think as a servant but of respect. (...) They should talk with respect*” (DW 10/ 372-374).<sup>3</sup> This domestic worker articulates directly, that she will not accept her employer to think of domestic workers as servants, but demands to be respected as an equal human being. The next quotation further demonstrates that domestic workers expect their employers to treat them respectfully: “*They should be kind to workers. Should not use disrespectful words. Should treat workers with respect. If they want us to take anything then they should say it in a kind manner rather than using harsh words*” (DW 11/ 353).

Further quotations from domestic workers show that they expect employers to talk to them in a calm, soft and respectful manner. This again demonstrates that the workers have an underlying notion of justice. Fulfilling the ideal of equality deriving from this notion, means that the employer show respect through her speech with the worker: “*See if you do not talk to me properly, then I will not be interested in doing any work. I would feel frustrated. It is just not me, everyone will feel the same*” (DW 13/ 322). The last three quotations highlight that domestic workers use equal respect as a criterion in helping them decide whether or not an employer treats them well. The statements also show that the workers do not accept disrespectful and discriminatory treatment or language. The following

3 The full transcription of the empirical data used in the study from Vogel (2018) is accessible online under: <http://www.lit-verlag.de/isbn/3-643-90996-1>. DW stands for domestic worker, M for middle class women (employer) and E for expert.

citation shows even clearer that feelings of resistance emerge when domestic workers experience disrespectful treatment:

“They should be calm and soft-spoken. They should not ask me to do something in a high-handed way. If they understand the work pressure on me and adjust and tell me: ‘Ok, you finish your other house work and come.’ Then I will also be happy that they understand me. Or if they say: ‘You have to do this. You cannot go anywhere. You have to come at this time.’ Then I will not feel like going to that house. Some people will be sitting and when we are doing our work, they will ask me to pick up something. I do not like it.” (DW 27/ 313)

This worker stated that she would not feel like going to an employer which uses disrespectful speech towards her. This feeling and habitus of resistance is another evidence for a shared feeling of injustice. Domestic workers collectively agree that disrespectful speech and treatment are not acceptable because a moral feeling of justice and equality is inherent to their human existence. Comparing their everyday experiences to the ideal of being respected equally, the workers feel a shared sense of injustice because they are not treated in the same way as their employers.

A second point demonstrating a shared sense of justice are practices regarding “eating from the same plates”. One maid reported that nowadays domestic workers could eat from the same plates as their employers: “Long back, the employers used to give us separate vessels to drink or eat something! But it’s no longer the same case. We are allowed to eat food in the same plates they eat. I mean not the plates without washing; I just mean the same plates and no separate *plates*” (DW 14/ 136). This statement incorporates a spatial dimension: domestic workers think that their employers should eat from the same plate – that is, from the same level – because they are equal human beings. This spatial manifestation of the logic of equality is a good example showing how fruitful Taylor’s concept of moral topography is in describing the connection among the spatial, moral and social dimensions.

Another domestic worker was asked about her opinion about an employer who would provide separate plates for the worker: “For our point it is wrong but for them, they feel it is right. So what can we say about it? (...) *“Because we are all human beings. Now the problem is some people may be sick, maybe because of that they are doing this. We are like this. What if they have some illness, why should we use the same thing? Some thoughts come in our minds about other people. So I do not worry about this. I just go and do the work and come back”* (DW 13/ 253-255). While by using the pronoun “our” the worker demonstrates a collective sense of justice, she also clearly articulates that, from their perspective, it is wrong not to eat from the same plates. This domestic views the separation of plates as an unequal treatment and argues that as both employer and employee are human beings, there is no need to treat them differently. However, she also thinks this cannot be stated as such in front of the madams. Her strategy to deal with this inequality is simply not to think about it. So the underlying ambivalence concerning the unjust equal positions in a social (and spatial) order becomes visible.

The following quotation demonstrates that when this ambivalence comes up, then it has to be negotiated. In this case, a worker is negotiating “traditional” roles, by using her employer’s humiliation as a humiliation towards the employer herself:

“If I have no time after I send off my children and was in a hurry. I used to go like that and no other go! And she will scold me like: ‘Why do you come like a beggar?’ (...) I told: ‘You have kept a beggar only as your servant.’ (...) I told her: ‘This beggar only is doing all your chores and cleaning works for you!’ She responded: ‘Shut up your mouth! Don’t keep answering my questions like this!’ (DW 6/ 281-293)

In this instance, the middle class employer called the worker a beggar because she did not come to work “clean” enough. The maid openly argued with her employer and turned the humiliation around. In such moments, when the shared sense of injustice surface and become openly negotiated, self-organisation processes are initiated.

This chapter reflected empirical evidence of an “intuitively given consciousness of injustice” (Moore, 1978) in the domestic worker which goes in line with Honneth’s (1995) argumentation. Honneth claims that it is not the orientation towards positively formulated moral principles that form the basis for and motivation of social protest within the excluded ‘under classes’, but rather, the experience of violation and misrecognition through their intuitively given consciousness of injustice. The potential of this consciousness of injustice lies in the way in which the excluded can disclose and enforce possible suggestions for justice. Struggles for recognition indicate distributive injustices in society often suffered by less-privileged groups (Honneth, 1995).

### **Unionising processes as forms of self-organisation based on a shared awareness of human rights and dignity**

The empirical data from Johanna Vogel’s (2018) study demonstrates that domestic workers in Chennai share a common sense of injustice. On this basis, processes of self-organisation may be triggered and domestic workers may start claiming and fighting for their rights. Charles Taylor refers as “dignity” to the characteristics by which humans think of themselves “as commanding (or failing to command) the respect of those around” them (Taylor, 1989: 15). In other words, for Taylor dignity is the “sense of ourselves as commanding (attitudinal) respect” (Taylor, 1989: 15). In Chennai, domestic workers start demanding respect from their middle class female employers and through the inceptive processes of self-organisation, they fight for a life in dignity. The following empirical statements highlight this argument.

An interviewed social worker mentions an increased social consciousness among the middle class resulting from the workers’ and the Dalit movement. She further explicates that middle class women are forced to treat their workers better because of high demand of the workers:

“I think the middle class are being forced to pay higher wages and treat them a little better than they did before. (...). I think one is of course the demand and supply. But I also think there has been very built up social consciousness, which comes through the workers movement and the Dalit movement.” (E 03/66- 68)

Here, the social worker also mentions an awakening social consciousness among the workers. Thus, a higher level of education in line with the extended possibilities of be-

coming educated resulted in a deeper awareness of labour and human rights among domestic workers as well as middle class women.

For the workers, the newly gained consciousness of their rights has often led to a self-confident behaviour. Furthermore, it can be argued that the benefits of globalisation and liberalisation has had what Ulrich Beck describes as an “elevation effect” (Beck, 2003) on the lives of the lower classes. The living standards of domestic workers have increased, and this in turn, has made them less dependent on their employers. Thus, based on the above outlined shared sense of injustice, maids start organising themselves. The employers in Chennai report that domestic workers have started to articulate their rights and change their expectations:

“So they know their rights. They can demand certain things. If they are not happy, they (have) better opportunities everywhere” (M 27/ 218). Likewise: “Yea they understand. Like they know, like this we can expect only this from them. You can expect more money, you can't expect more money. All this they know very well. Even though some of them are not well educated. By their experience, they know very well, what they get from where.” (M 25/123)

The collective articulation of injustice is the basis upon which maids claim their rights for decent working conditions and a decent life – a good life. Domestic workers declare the necessity to fight for their rights: “(...) *In Madras only if you protest and struggle you can survive and work here. Else they will grind chilly on your head*” (DW 10/ 103). Meanwhile, forming domestic workers' unions has become more common: “*Before they used to call us 'workers' in such a degrading way and give us work. Now it is changing. We will fight for our rights. They will take members for the society and we can talk about our problems in these meetings. I am in one of the societies for (the) past five years*” (DW 09/ 141). Therefore, processes of self-organisation have started to become more institutionalised. The following paragraphs present three organisations with which the interviewed maids are affiliated and through which they have started institutionalising/unionising processes in Chennai.

The first of these is the National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM) which seeks to improve the legal situation of domestic workers. Founded in 1985, the NDWM is one of the biggest and most influential national and statewide organisations (Mattila, 2012: 13). This organisation is registered as an NGO and has strong links to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (Neetha and Palriwala, 2011: 114). It was founded by a Belgian missionary and is now operating in 23 Indian states (ibid: 113; Footnote 64). In total it has almost 2.5 million domestic workers as members and in Tamil Nadu the organisation works in 18 districts (United Nations Development Programme, 2012: 20). Its main objectives are the empowerment of domestic workers, the fixation of a just minimum wage and the establishment of humane working conditions. They seek to reach these goals through increased unionisation, networking, capacity building, awareness and lobbying campaigns as well as formulating policy recommendations and legislations (Neetha & Palriwala, 2011: 1133; National Domestic Workers Movement, 2007). In Chennai, 3000 women were registered as members of the NDWM trade union in 2013 (E 02/ 110) and seven of the interviewed workers were part of the NDWM. Most of these women reported that they take part in union meetings. In a few interviews, an acute awareness of labour and human rights could be noted among the domestic workers de-

monstrating that workers who were unionised were more aware of labour rights issues. The prominence of the NDWM shows that state institutions in charge of labour rights protection are partly dysfunctional. The informality of the sector resulted in domestic workers in Chennai not receiving wages according to Indian Labour Wage Regulations (Neetha and Palriwala, 2011: 111). A minimum wage has only been set in 2018. Even then, this is much below market standards.<sup>4</sup>

Another prominent organisation in Chennai is the Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR) founded in 1993. According to the 2010 CWDR Impact Assessment Report, the organisation is active in 85 slums in Chennai (Azariah & Vani, 2010: 5). Their focus lies on domestic workers, adolescent girls and single women. The main objectives of the CWDR are to foster domestic worker trade union enrolment, organise women into self-help groups as well as create and strengthen educational opportunities (Azariah & Vani, 2010: 5-6). Although 14 of the interviewed domestic workers in Chennai acknowledged being members of the CWDR Manushi Trade Union, the majority felt that they had not benefited from their membership. In spite of this, there were women with a high awareness of labour and human rights among the interviewees. Even if the impact appears thus far to be modest, the empirical data demonstrates that at least a certain level of awareness has been reached.

The third organisation is the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), one of the largest party-affiliated trade unions. Efforts to increase unionisation in Chennai have been strengthened by left-leaning political parties and the long-established trade unions associated with them. The leader of the Chennai Section for Domestic Workers reported that in general the unionising processes of domestic workers is a difficult task. Due to the hours and the nature of domestic work, participation in union activities is rather low and the great majority of workers are not unionised (Mattila, 2012:13; Neetha and Palriwala, 2011:113). In explaining the low unionisation rates among domestic workers, CITU cited the fact that union work is not considered female work and that domestic workers do not recognize themselves as workers (E 04/ 96).

Hence, the above empirical case study of domestic workers in Chennai has shown that these female workers share a collective sense of injustice. Examples of workers who expect employers to talk to them respectfully or to treat them equally by using the same plates for their food show that the domestic workers have a shared moral source of justice according to which they evaluate these actions as unjust. Furthermore, this shared moral topography have resulted in domestic workers' starting to organise themselves.

## Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we intended to shed light on the moral topography and the nature and conditions that constitute everyday ethics of marginalized citizens in Chennai. Our attempt to articulate the specific characteristics of the moral topography of domestic

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4 See <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2018/sep/19/new-minimum-wage-cap-will-lead-to-exploitation-of-domestic-workers-1874107.html>.

workers and understand their geographies of “doing ethics” (Lambek, 2010) have provided a deeper understanding of how moralities are continuously constituted through social, material and spatial relations.

The moral topography of the everyday lives of domestic workers in Chennai is characterised by shared experiences of injustice. Justice, as a moral source, begets the ideal ‘equality’. Consequently, domestic workers express their ideal of a relation marked by ‘equity’ to their middle-class employers. This shared sense of justice become evident in the domestic workers’ claim to a decent and fair life. One aspect of this claim is their expectation of recognition and respect from their employers. The empirical evidence demonstrates that domestic workers often do not (any longer) tolerate disrespectful and discriminatory actions or forms of communication from their employers. Indeed, the presence of such treatment leads to feelings of rejection and resistance which, in turn, result in specific collective practices.

Furthermore, examples from the everyday practices of domestic workers show that the moral dimension also manifests spatially; different levels of respect are attributed to different societal groups. Especially the topic ‘eating from the same plate’ provides a good example of the spatial manifestation of morality. The above mentioned logic of equality in the collective conscious of domestic workers necessitates they eat spatially on the same level as their middle class employers. A shared sense of injustice and increased awareness of their rights drive domestic workers to start organising themselves in the lack of such spatial equality. The National Domestic Workers Movement along with two other examples of organisations promoting domestic workers’ rights proved that processes of self-organisation has started to become more and more formalised.

To conclude, the practical and pragmatic knowledge production of marginalised urban citizens is increasingly important in an urban world evermore complex and polarised. Knowledge and practices created and implemented by citizens themselves are powerful and socially often more legitimate, and therefore, promise to be effective in everyday life. The project URBANSELF provided a conceptual basis for identifying and understanding collective practices in the realm of the citizens in order to tackle urban challenges in the Global South and the Global North.

*Figure 1: Domestic workers in the Canal Bank slum in Mylapore, Chennai (Vogel 2018 )*



*Figure 2: Domestic worker washing dishes in the kitchen while the employer (right) is preparing tea (Vogel 2018 )*



*Figure 3: Slum area at a river bank in Chennai (Vogel 2018)*



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# Mobility, porosity and the peri-urban city in Vietnam

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Mirjam Le (Passau)

## Introduction

Driving from Đà Nẵng to Tam Kỳ along Highway 1A, one passes endless rice fields, crosses small rivers and sees water buffalos. However, one can also observe continuous construction efforts as every town and village along the highway is keen to modernize. Arriving in Tam Kỳ, provincial capital of Quảng Nam province, these efforts continue as the city slowly grows into its hinterland. Urban transformations dominate these spaces in small Vietnamese cities. These transformations include changes to their spatial structures, the livelihood strategies of local people and the urban identity of the cities. Many of these transformations follow patterns similar to big urban centres: a changing demographic due to migration from rural areas, the construction of new infrastructure and the development of new urban areas. Urban planners and city administrations cause this homogenization in the urban periphery based on a singular path of development. They produce visions of a modern urban future for small cities based on “travelling urban forms” (Söderström, 2013) with large national or international cities as point of reference. On the surface, urbanization in these small towns is hence only a repetition of developments already described and analyzed elsewhere. This is supported by research focused on large, national cities, like Hà Nội or Hồ Chí Minh City (Ton Nu Quynh Tran et al., 2012; Fanchette, 2016; Harms, 2011; Harms, 2016). In this paper, I extend this research on urbanization in Vietnam by looking beyond the national urban centres towards secondary cities.

I argue that processes of self-organized urbanization and social creativity (Evers and Korff, 2003) in small urban centres can counter this homogenous process of urban planning. They create a space of interaction in which urban aspirations are able to realize a liveable urban future for its citizens. To make this possible two related dimensions are relevant: (1) mobility and (2) porosity. Whereas mobility is a main feature of modern societies, it is especially important for smaller cities, which are located at the periphery. Practices of mobility allow engaging with the world (Talcoli, 2004). Local planners import mobile urban forms from outside sources, which they use as a blueprint to transform the physical, functional and symbolic landscape of the city. However

mobility also becomes a resource for local people in navigating these changing landscapes and thereby a tool to access new opportunities.

Wolfrum (2018) defines porosity as the existence of open, mobile spaces without any clear function, easy to enter and re-imagine continuously. It is a precondition for the use of mobility as resource. A multifunctional use of open space, a lack of boundaries as well as overlapping practices and symbols characterize urban porosity. The spatial proximity between rural and urban areas and the existence of empty wasteland, newly developed areas, construction sites and in-migration produce porosity. It can be found everywhere in small towns in Vietnam from the city centre to the peri-urban areas and enables mobility for local people. It produces a multilevel landscape of urban planning, self-organization and negotiation between state and non-state actors.

Mobility and porosity create the peri-urban city, which I define as a fluid space of transformation, which contains a high level of porosity with an urban level of density. This provides numerous open, undefined spaces to explore and appropriate. In the setting of small and medium sized towns, not only does the urban space cut into the rural hinterland, but the rural hinterland also reaches into the heart of the urban centre.

This paper is a by-product of my field research in Tam Kỳ in 2014 and 2015 and explores the practices of mobility and porosity used by local actors and local state administrators, which create the “peri-urban city”. To this end, I use qualitative data from 35 semi-structured interviews of local inhabitants conducted from November 2014 until March 2015 in four wards of Tam Kỳ (Tam Thành, An Phú, Hòa Thuận and Trường Xuân). Visual data on urban development, mostly photos, document the use and transformation of space. Furthermore, the study analyses local newspaper articles as well as official documents of the local administration.

## Defining the Peri-urban City

### Small town urbanisation as multi-dimensional interface

Looking at urbanization of large national cities in Vietnam, the existing literature describes a dual process of metropolisation and peri-urbanisation, which combines the integration of rural space into urban space with the integration of this urban space into a global network (Ton et al., 2012; Fanchette, 2016; Harms, 2011). The socio-spatial integration of space and people takes mostly place at the peri-urban edge. Harms (2011) anthropological study “Saigon’s Edge” describes the emerging new urban areas on the outskirts of Hồ Chí Minh City, Bousquet (2016) analyses peri-urban space in Hanoi and the book “Hà Nội: a Metropolis in the Making” edited by Fanchette (2016) focuses on the integration of villages into the urban fabric of Hà Nội. Here, peri-urban development is characterized “by low to medium density dispersed urban development with low connectivity and sometimes large areas of vacant or low-level production agricultural land between settlements” (Roberts, 2016:11 based on Almeida, 2005). This also includes poor urban services and infrastructure, the prevalence of farming activities on small plots and family-owned commercial and business activities. With growing urban development, the industrial manufacturing increases. (Roberts, 2016)

However, in the case of small and medium-sized cities like Tam Kỳ, the distinction between rural and urban and the localization of peri-urban space become more difficult. The integration of rural areas into urban space takes place at the same time as the consolidation of the urban core into a homogenous urban space occurs. In the meantime, rural and peri-urban processes, activities and spatial characteristics reach into the urban centre, because the urban centre and the rural hinterland are geographically close. Markers of rural activities, especially agriculture, are still prevalent in the urban core, close to modern housing facilities or supermarkets. Contrarily to the idea that the urban is spreading out into the periphery and transforming rural into urban space, in small and medium-sized cities, the characteristics of the rural survive and push into urban space. The whole city is simultaneously rural and urban. Instead of a peri-urban frontier at the edge of the city like in Hà Nội, the whole city becomes a frontier space, on the edge between the urban and the rural as well as the local and the global.

I argue that small and medium-sized cities in Vietnam can be perceived as peri-urban spaces of transformation and hence 'peri-urban cities'. A mixed spatial use of rural and urban activities in the surrounding hinterland as well as in the city centre characterizes these cities. Peri-urbanisation as frame of analysis cannot only help to understand the transformation processes in the surrounding periphery of these cities, but also to analyse the distinct functions, characteristics and processes of these cities.

The ambivalence of peri-urban space defies the clear categories of urban or rural used in the local discourse and by the Vietnamese state during the urban planning process (Harms, 2011). Peri-urban space is often defined as a continuum between rural and urban. This creates a space of transformation changing rural into urban structures (Brook et al., 2003; Narain, 2010; Simon et al., 2006). Peri-urban space becomes an interface for people, goods and information, which move through space (Brook et al., 2003; Narain, 2010; Simon et al., 2006). This in-betweenness also characterizes the urban in smaller cities in Vietnam that are rapidly transforming due to urbanisation. Being located in the urban periphery, they provide an interface, which transforms rural into urban citizens and relocates goods and services between rural and urban space. (Talcoli, 2004)

Furthermore, Harms (2011) defines peri-urban space by its social edginess. This means the mutual existence of opportunities and marginalisation created by the position of local actors at the blurred boundaries of urban and rural space (Harms, 2011). Social edginess emerges from the ambivalence of peri-urban space that exists as a grey zone of administrative, social and economic status. This ambivalence and the emerging insecurities create a mobile contested space (Narain, 2010) and the need for risk spreading and the diversification of livelihood strategies. The peri-urban grey zone enables some actors to take control and adapt their own strategies (Harms, 2011). Others are faced with marginalisation due to a lack of access to resources in this contested space. Thus, peri-urban space creates a pattern of inclusion and exclusion based on the access to resources and social creativity, defined by Korff and Evers (2003:14-15) as "the knowledge, usage and coordination of resources available", especially concerning social interactions and networks.

This social edginess, I argue, also characterizes small towns in Vietnam. The influx of new residents, the re-orientation from the local to the national and global, the mate-

rial and functional transformation due to urban development plans force local actors in small towns to constantly renegotiate their position in the urban space. As new resources and livelihood strategies become available, others are lost. Hybrid social forms and rural livelihood strategies persist in the urban core of small towns, for example in the form of the agricultural use of land. Secondary cities become 'peri-urban' as a whole. They are a frontier between the local rural and global urban. They produce spaces of transformation and globalization. Being neither urban nor rural, they provide an interface for rural and urban goods, people and ideas to interact. They offer opportunities for new migrants and old inhabitants but will also marginalize them. They are in a constant process of transformation, produce new identities, offer open space for new developments and modern aspirations, and engage in a constant process of negotiation. The two main dimensions of these peri-urban cities are porosity and mobility.

### Porosity as spatial dimension

The urban environment differs from rural space by a higher density of people, buildings and activities (Wirth, 1938). However, this urban density is interrupted by borders, thresholds, and forgotten empty spaces. These spatial interruptions of the physical space create porosity in the built environment. Porosity combines the density of urban space with the existence of voids as empty and open spaces throughout the physical urban environment. These voids provide openness, accessibility and mobility, as well as space for innovation, flexibility and negotiation. Whereas porosity exists in every urban space, it is especially prevalent in peri-urban spaces where transformation processes continuously open and close access to space. (Wolfrum, 2018; BypassLab, 2016: 10-14)

Porosity links density to spatial openness and voids. In rural space, density is low. There exists a high degree of homogeneity combined with a high amount of vacant, open space. In urban space, high density and high heterogeneity of actors and activities dominate while spatial voids are smaller and more scatter. Between these two extremes of rural and urban, in peri-urban space, we can find a high level of porosity, but irregular growing density and increasing social, functional and spatial heterogeneity due to processes of transformation.

Finally, porosity encourages the mobility of peri-urban people within and between the urban and peri-urban. Porosity and the subsequent mobility of peri-urban people enable them to simultaneously access and use different roles, fulfil different functions and evoke different symbols, similar to the description of social edginess by Harms (2011). Porosity is leading to fluidity concerning symbols, activities and people (Wolfrum, 2018).

However, whereas existing thresholds and borders in the physical space encourage accessibility and mobility that connects spaces, fixed boundaries limit or end movements. They create dead-ends, which interrupt mobility and openness. The result is a fragmentation of space, which is also a main spatial feature of peri-urban areas. Contrary to porosity, which supports the multifunctional use of space, spatial fragmentation restricts the use of space. Furthermore, it creates a landscape of fragmented patterns in which urban and rural spatial patterns exist simultaneously side by side (Harms, 2011).

## Mobility as social dimension

Mobility of people and goods as well as of ideas and discourses has always a spatial and a social component. The physical movement in space expresses the spatial dimension. The social construction of its meaning defines the social dimension. Together, they enable the interaction with the surrounding world (Cresswell, 2007; Söderström, 2013: 2). According to Cresswell (2013: 21), underlying power relations determine the access to mobility, the meanings attached to it, its experience and practice and its regulations. The existing physical structures are the materialization of these power relations and they reproduce them at the same time.

Mobility plays a central role in producing 'peri-urban cities'. It can reduce marginalization and enable the adaptation of livelihood strategies in a transforming spatial and functional landscape. Mobility provides access to resources, networks and interactions. It enables the diversification of income at the household level. It allows incorporating global and national ideas into the local discourse. Finally, it also facilitates the establishment of secondary cities as interface between centre and periphery.

In the urban fabric, the built environment and the regulative framework enhance or limit mobility. In cities of the Global South, these spatial forms are often mobile urban forms imported from industrialized countries. They include sets of architecture, infrastructure, symbols and regulations, which together summarize the expectation of how a modern urban landscape must look like. They are part of projects of modernization implemented by urban actors as promise of a modern, civilized life (Söderström, 2013: 2). Söderström (2013) describes these urban forms as urban pedagogies, which incorporate an educative and disciplinary function. In this function, they educate their users about modern urban behaviour and help create the modern, urban subject. They also provide means of control for state agents as they encourage 'civilized' behaviour. However, urban forms also manifest an emancipatory function by opening new urban spaces for urban citizen and their mobility projects (Söderström, 2013). These mobility projects can include resistance and subversion as well innovative, interactive and integrative activities in urban space. This enables local urban citizen to participate in shaping urban identities, meanings and communities (Söderström, 2013: 2).

Mobile urban forms function as means of control and discipline and as means of empowerment and contestation. They are mobile imaginations, which attempt to create a material, functional and symbolic pattern, which influences the everyday mobility in real locations.

### Mobile urban forms: Mobility and urban planning in Tam Kỳ

Urbanization in Vietnam follows a predefined path towards a homogeneous urban image linked to global discourses of modernity and sustainability (Söderström, 2013). Urban planning reproduces this global imagination without including a local meaning. Based on a comprehensive framework of formal urban planning, state actors are the main developers of urban space. The Vietnamese state aims to regulate the urbanization process and facilitate the legibility of urban space. The state defines a vision of the urban as civilized, clean and modern that every urban area under state control should

implement as prescribed in the Law on Urban Planning. By using a master plan for each city, the state controls the urbanization process (Harms, 2011). The implementation of this orderly urban vision aims to prevent the emergence of an ugly urban image and maintain urban civility (Harms, 2011; Harms, 2014). Kurfürst (2012) and Labbé (2013) describe this process, which links modernization, urban planning with civility for Hà Nội, Kaiser (2014) and Schwenkel (2014) for Vinh. Kaiser (2014) and Schwenkel (2014) also take the mobility of urban forms (from Eastern Germany to Vietnam) to reproduce modernity into account.

The Vietnamese state further enforces its control by establishing a representation of space (Schmid, 2008) in each city, which embodies the state, its symbolisms and its power relations. This state vision of urban space as modern, clean and orderly is partly borrowed from a global discourse - and hence already highly mobile. It travels from the centre to the periphery – a process, which leads to the introduction into local discourses and the reinterpretation of this vision based on local needs. Furthermore, peripheral cities nowadays also participate in global networks and discourses. As a result, urban forms travel from the global directly to the local setting as in the case of Tam Kỳ (Harms, 2011; Söderström, 2013).

Urban civility (*văn minh đô thị*) (Harms, 2014), as used by state officials as well as local residents, expresses this “will to impose order on human beings living in social groups” (Harms, 2014: .226). This concept works as top-down instrument of government control as well as a bottom-up critique of a chaotic social order. Many Vietnamese perceive the cities as out of control (Harms, 2014). The urban realities of urban everyday life do not always align with the image of a modern, civil city. Instead, self-organization is a strong component of the urban everyday life in Vietnam as local residents adjust regulations to their daily needs and use spatial porosity as a resource. This becomes possible due to the mediation space located at the interface between state institutions and local community, which enables negotiation and adaptation of the implementation of state regulations in local space (Koh, 2006). Consequently, the emerging representational space as described by Lefebvre, which is rooted in the local environment and counterbalances state control (Schmid, 2008; Prigge, 2008) is a lived space, a space for local residents, representing symbols and meanings outside of state control and ideology.

Thus, there coexists a state-led urbanisation process and a process of a self-organized urbanisation, as well as a state space of representation and a representational space. The difference between the urban image and the urban practice is prevalent in urban areas. With regard to mobility, this differentiation happens between the introduction and implementation of mobile ideas of a civilized, sustainable modern city on the one hand and on the other hand, the practice of mobility in the everyday life as a coping strategy to adapt to the ever-changing urban realities.

## **Urban planning in Tam Kỳ: Modernisation, internationalisation and privatisation**

Tam Kỳ has been the provincial capital of the Central Vietnamese province of Quảng Nam since 1997. It is located 70 km south of Đà Nẵng along the National Highway 1A

and 30 km north of the Chu Lai Industrial Zone, at the Central Vietnamese coast. It has an area of 92.82 km<sup>2</sup> and over 120,000 inhabitants in nine urban and four rural wards. Based on the Vietnamese categorization of cities, Tam Kỳ is a Grade 2 City since 2016 (VGN News, 2016), based on the population, the provision of specific infrastructure and economic performance (Decree No. 42/2009/ND-CP OF MAY 7, 2009). Agriculture, aquaculture, handicraft, small services and a small industrial sector dominate the economy (AVC, 2013).

The Nguyễn Dynasty founded Tam Kỳ in 1906 as tax post (AVC, 2013). In the 1960s and 1970s, an American air base was located in the proximity of the city. The urban area of Tam Kỳ was concentrated along the highway, which crossed the city (today Phan Châu Trinh Street), the market and the river. The Communist forces controlled the surrounding rural areas. With the exception of a major battle in 1969 (“Battle of Yui Non Hill”), Tam Kỳ did not play any important role during the war or after the Communist conquest on March 24, 1975 until it became the provincial capital in 1997.

As a recent foundation without any historical symbolism and meanings, Tam Kỳ provides urban planners with the opportunity to realize their urban aspirations. Surrounded by rice fields and empty wasteland, this spatial and symbolic porosity provides the ideal landscape to build a modern city from scratch.

Embedded into the national urban framework and the Vietnamese concepts of the city, this vision defines the city as a space of modernity. It is not rooted in a local tradition but in a global imagery of urban modernity, having travelled to Vietnam as mobile urban form (Söderström, 2013). In Tam Kỳ, this means that city officials meet with other global actors in a global forum to develop and discuss new urban plans. These forums, meetings and workshops constitute nodes of mobility. In 2014 and 2015, the Tam Kỳ People’s Committee held two international workshops together with UN-Habitat, and in one case the Japanese city of Fukuoka and in the second case the Cities Alliance and International Urban Training Centre on green urban development and ecotourism (UN-Habitat 2015). Tam Kỳ is also a member of the regional network for local authorities for the management of human settlement (City-Net). Furthermore, Tam Kỳ is one of two Vietnamese cities, which will use the urban planning tool “City Development Strategy” crafted by the Cities Alliance to coordinate their urban development in the future (Cities Alliances, 2016). Overall, Tam Kỳ is an active participant in the global discourse on urban development, using tools provided by the international community and eager to be perceived as a role model for a green urban future.

Beyond the global discourse, Tam Kỳ also implements the national urban strategy. Urban Green Growth is the central developmental aim of urban planning in Vietnam. It is based on the urban green growth development plan to 2030 and follows the shift of the international discourse on urban growth towards sustainability and climate change adaptation. Tam Kỳ constitutes one of the 23 pilot sites for this plan (Bizhub, 2018).

The state also defines measurable criteria to classify urban centres as cities, towns and townships (Decree No. 42/2009/ND-CP OF MAY 7, 2009: The state demands that the local administration formulates plans and mobilizes resources for investment based on the criteria defined by the decree. Urban centres should aim to move up the grading scale successively. While the decree states that an “urban development program must aim to improve the quality of people’s life and make urban architecture and landscape

civilized, modern and sustainable while preserving the cultural quintessence and traits of each urban centre.” (Decree No. 42/2009/ND-CP OF MAY 7, 2009), the emphasis is on quantifiable development goals like infrastructure and population growth. Hence, in Tam Kỳ, urban development focuses on the construction of infrastructure, like the planned extension of Điện Biên Phủ Street, a new wastewater treatment plant and the new market. Many of these efforts are part of a cooperation with the ADB Secondary City Development program and require the resettlement of parts of the population (ADB, 2013). Since 2016, a new development project financed and supported by Finland aims at installing a smart power grid in Tam Kỳ (VIR, 2014). These construction projects reduce the spatial porosity found in the city and its hinterland by defining spatial functions and erecting new material boundaries in space.

The urban master plan for 2030 with an outlook for 2050 draws the image of Tam Kỳ as ‘Green Capital’ with a strong focus on green economy, green space and green infrastructure, including a comprehensive water supply network for all citizens (VAA, 2014; Doan, 2014). This master plan draws heavily on images of a modern, but placeless architecture. The urban future is not rooted in the local heritage but can be located anywhere (VAA, 2014). Local urban planners might not implement this plan literally; it nevertheless represents the urban aspirations of these local state actors. The plan is a tangible manifestation of the formal image of urban space aspired by state agents in Tam Kỳ.

Based on the aim of a growing modern city, the development of new urban areas in the peri-urban region of Tam Kỳ is incorporated into the masterplan, mainly in Tân Thạnh and An Phú ward and the rural ward of Tam Phú. These constructions of new urban areas are located along the main roads with easy access to the city centre. They consist of a grid of streets with street signs and lights, crosswalks, newly planted trees and lots of open space. Planned as construction sites for future private houses, they create open, unused space, which can be appropriated by private citizens for their everyday activities, and thereby increase porosity. This appropriation can be temporarily, for example when local farmer use these empty lots for their cattle, or permanent, for example when local residents fence off parts of this space for their gardens or build small shacks on it. These more permanent structures then reduce porosity, as they erect new boundaries, limiting access and use for other people (for similar dynamics in Hà Nội compare: Jacques, Labbé and Musil, 2017).

Economically, urban planning focuses on the development of new economic zones to attract international companies. In 2015, two Korean-invested garment companies (Panko Tam Thăng and Duck San Vina) started the construction of their production plants in the Tam Thang Industrial Zone (VietnamNews, 2015). The plans also involve the development of tourism infrastructure along the seashore in Tam Thành, including the construction of a seaside resort, the Tam Thành Beach Resort and Spa, the Tam Thành Mural Village as well as better road accessibility. At the same time, in 2015, a new city hotel complex, the *Mường Thanh Grand Quảng Nam*, was built in the city centre at Hùng Vương Street which includes a bar and restaurant area open for locals to visit. These economic plans advance globalization and mobility as they attract people – as workers and tourists –, goods and companies from the outside. However, they also

privatize space that was previously open to local people for recreation and economic activities like fishing, thence limiting mobility and porosity.

## Spaces of everyday mobility

As shown above, urban planning by different state agencies defines a strict development path for each city and imagines the urban future as civilized, clean and modern. Furthermore, urban planning aims to regulate the urbanisation process, and to bring order to the perceived urban chaos (Harms, 2014) caused by urban actors moving through the city. All of them move through urban space without being legible, which makes it more difficult to control them and install a sense of order. The urban, thus, becomes a space of everyday mobility. This is especially true for smaller towns and peri-urban spaces where different spheres of economic and domestic activities intermingle.

Mobility is hence a livelihood decision, which creates new opportunities. As mentioned above, small towns function as interfaces for their rural surroundings as well as the whole region. Spatial proximity and porosity of space characterize these towns. Due to this spatial proximity and porosity, people living in the rural district of Tam Thành can earn an income in the city in white-collar jobs in the growing administration, the university or in hospitals as Tam Kỳ provides many of these services as provincial capital. However, it also enables informal activities like street vending. Families combine rural and urban income strategies and look for employment in all three sectors. Households also stay at the fringe of the small urban centre and make their living from those passing by and crossing the space they live in. Owners of small coffee shop or mechanical workshops and street vendors benefit from the increasing accessibility of peri-urban space. Most of the late-night entertainment facilities are also located in peri-urban space. Other activities include smaller waste recycling activities and small-scale handicraft production, which often uses road space for activities like sorting and drying (for a similar case of waste traders in Hà Nội, see also Nguyen, 2018). There are thus constant movements of goods and people between urban and rural space passing peri-urban areas. Urban, rural and peri-urban space in Tam Kỳ benefits from its proximity to the urban, administrative centre and market, and the rural, where natural resources and more empty space are available.

Apart from the mobility immanent to Tam Kỳ, urban planning introduces other forms of mobility. Due to economic growth and the role as provincial administrative centre, Tam Kỳ attracts migrants from the more rural districts of Quảng Nam. At the same time, employment in the administration and at the university brings in new citizens with higher education from larger urban centres, who seek employment in these facilities. However, due to the geographical proximity to Đà Nẵng, many of those white-collar workers stay only during the week in Tam Kỳ, so their kids can go to school in Đà Nẵng (Interviews in Tam Kỳ 2014/2015). Tam Kỳ, thus, forms an interface between the local and the global, the rural and the urban, engaging in a constant dialogue with outsiders and the outside world.

This influx of migrants and office workers necessitates the construction of new urban areas in order to meet the projected population growth. As described above, these

new urban areas provide basic infrastructure and empty building land for future landowners. These newly developed urban areas also provide open space for alternative activities as the land lies idle. House owners construct small wooden structures for their private gardens next to their houses, along streets and in open areas to plant vegetables and herbs for consumption and to claim empty space. Farmers are using the same space to look after their cattle. These activities then move into the more urbanized areas where small construction sites, sidewalks, streets and empty slots provide space. Porosity allows sidewalks to become part of a wide array of economic and domestic activities. Some of these domestic activities are temporary like washing vegetables, drying clothes or having a family party; others are more lasting like smaller workshops and small gardens in Styrofoam boxes. Porosity also opens space for cattle and chicken in the urban streets of Tam Kỳ.

The existing porosity and mobility also influence the rhythm and dynamic of everyday life in Tam Kỳ. Cars, trucks and motorbikes speed along, sometimes stopping to buy something from the sidewalk. Farmers with their cattle, street vendors with their pushcarts, and schoolkids on bicycles slowly move along the street. Finally, people sit on the sidewalk to drink coffee, eat noodle soup or to engage in small talk. Other activities, like the recycling of waste and the drying of goods, like cinnamon and incense sticks, spill over into the streets, where they interfere with the flow of traffic, limiting speed and mobility. This leads to a more ambivalent urban setting and creates a fluid interface, which people can enter, engage in, and leave.

Self-organization is particularly common in the arena of private water supply in many households in Tam Kỳ. Instead of engaging with state agencies, residents use private wells or local surface water and cooperate with neighbours in times of need. They combine different water sources and use their resources to avoid engaging with the state.

Porosity and mobility thus create the functional and material pattern of Tam Kỳ, which make these opportunities available in everyday life. Mobility becomes a valuable resource for people living at the fringe. Due to mobility and porosity, a space of interaction emerges in which people with different social and spatial backgrounds can meet. Mobility helps to create reproductive functionality by moving resources, people as well as goods and services from rural to peri-urban, and to urban space and vice versa. Mobility is hence central to the everyday livelihood strategies of the people of Tam Kỳ.

## Urban mobilities as Pedagogies

As we saw, urban planning in Vietnam and in Tam Kỳ is predominantly occupied with the creation of a modern future. Söderström (2015) talks about the pedagogic component of urban planning as the need to transform everyday behaviour. In Vietnam, the omnipresent slogan of “green, modern, and civilized” represents such idea as a broad social discourse on adequate social behaviour (Harms, 2014). Being civilized might include shopping in supermarkets, driving a car, following traffic rules, and recycling. Hence, at the celebration of Tam Kỳ’s 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Vietnamese Prime Minister

Nguyễn Xuân Phúc not only upgraded Tam Kỳ to a grade 2 city, but also urged the city officials to develop Tam Kỳ into a modern and civilized city. Besides the focus on infrastructure and economic development, he especially called for the creation of an urban civilized lifestyle (VGP News, 2016).

Therefore, urban planning needs to engage with the everyday life of local residents and establish a sense of urban order against the perceived chaos of everyday activities. Therefore, local state actors need to limit and control the mobilities of everyday life activities. They engage in politics of mobility and decide which mobility projects can be explored in urban space (Cresswell, 2010). This control of urban mobility focuses on the regulated usage of public space. At prominent places, like the sidewalk along the university or the main square 24-3, official signs remind people passing by of undesired behaviour. This includes advertising, selling of goods, lottery tickets and littering. Some of the signs also forbid driving on sidewalks and public squares. The stated aim “*Xây dựng tuyến phố văn minh đô thị*” (translation: “Building civilized urban streets”) references the pedagogic aim of urban development. Whereas these signs declare clear rules of conduct in public behaviour, they are often ignored in everyday interactions, and thus require enforcement. During the winter of 2014, the administration installed low metal barriers around the square 24-3 to stop people from driving their motorbikes on the square. However, the installed barriers did not stop motorbike drivers from entering the square. Thus, over the period of two months, the barriers were regularly broken down and replaced. While the local administration tried to regulate behaviour and limit mobility, local residents were less willing to change their behaviour and found ways to circumvent those barriers.

Also in 2014, the administration implemented a plan with the aim “to turn the city into a beggar and homeless person free zone” (Vietnam News, 2014). This included sending people back to their hometowns or into social services. It defined which kind of mobility was acceptable in public and by whom. To clean up the city, an effective waste management was also established. Finally, traffic police controls the public behaviour of street vendors. They not only check permits, but they are also concerned with the obstruction of traffic by sellers sitting or standing along the street (Observations and interviews October 2014). The fast flow of traffic takes precedent over the everyday mobility of local residents and their shopping habits.

The conflict concerning the new market in Tam Kỳ in 2014 demonstrates these difficulties in establishing urban order, regulating mobilities and changing people's behaviour. As part of the urban development plan, a new market was built along Bàn Thạch River in the city centre, surrounded by small shops in narrow streets. It is also close to the bridge crossing the Bàn Thạch River, which is one of the big arterial roads in Tam Kỳ. However, tensions arose, as the old market area was located along Hùng Vương Street with better accessibility especially for people living east of highway 1 and the railways. People east of the highway felt already outside of the city and were complaining about a lack of market access (Interviews December 2014). Already during the construction of the new market, local sellers complained about the management of the new market building. After the opening, these local market sellers in the new market also complained about a lack of customers. The municipality took matters into its own hands. Market operations at the old market in An Sơn were radically reduced, the built

ding partly demolished with only some market stalls left selling fruit and clothes. This forced residents to use the new market creating new mobility through the city (Observations; PetroTimes, 2014; Thanh Niên, 2014).

Another way of regulating mobility includes the construction of new streets. The construction of new arterial roads, including Điện Biên Phủ, will create new flows of traffic and improve access to some of the more secluded areas of Tam Kỳ, like An Xuân ward and An Mỹ ward and the rural district of Tam Thành. However, better access makes the area also more interesting for land development. Furthermore, this construction affects residential and agricultural land and necessitates the resettlement of 345 households (ADB, 2016).

Finally, this urban pedagogy also references socialist ideology and revolutionary history in Tam Kỳ. There are propaganda posters announcing the achievements of the local and national government. Slogans proclaim future goals of development. Loudspeakers in public areas play music and announce local party news and the local state holds ceremonies, celebrations of anniversaries and parades in public space. This space of representation is a part of everyday mobility as people drive past posters, state parades and loudspeakers. As these activities are common occurrences in public space, local residents outside of state institutions ignore them. Participation is limited to those required by the state. Ignoring those state activities is made easier because they are limited to the administrative area of Tam Kỳ. Everyday mobilities and the state space of representation in the city centre exist as two different spheres with minimal impact on each other (Interviews and observation).

Peri-urban and rural space on the other hand provide enough empty space to create a new public space dedicated to the socialist state ideology, like the Vietnamese Heroic Mother statue (Mẹ Việt Nam Anh Hùng) in the peri-urban ward of An Phú, whose construction cost US\$19.27 million. This space of representation integrates the city into the national discourse on Vietnamese history and the legitimization of the ruling Communist party (Nhân Dân, 2015).

The inauguration on March 24, 2015 was part of the 40-year celebration of the seizure of Tam Kỳ attracting a huge local crowd. The celebration organized by mass organizations like the Hồ Chí Minh youth, included dance and music performances and a firework to celebrate the Vietnamese state. However, there were also street vendors, photographers and other kind of small business activities involved. Afterwards the park surrounding the statue became a recreational space for local people as well as a tourist attraction. Cafés are located around the park and statue. Originally envisioned as space of representation for the state ideology and as educational space for the younger generation, everyday mobilities transform the space into a recreational space. Local residents drive there to take pictures for Facebook, walk around the park, drink coffee and meet friends. The political space overlaps with a space of local practice shifting the meaning towards the mundane (Observations, March 2015). Kurfürst (2012) describes this same process for public spaces in Hà Nội.

## Conclusion: 'Peri-urban city' and everyday mobility

Global urban forms introduced from the outside attempt to create a uniform urban landscape taking inspiration from global skylines without roots in the locality. Especially smaller urban centres like Tam Kỳ have an incentive to look at successful Asian cities like Singapore to recreate a modern image and attract private investment. This process might limit local mobility in the long term and exclude local residents from the use of urban spaces for recreation, economic activities and their everyday life. Politics of mobility create new tensions. Struggles about street vendors, the new market and the flow of traffic demonstrate these tensions in the case of Tam Kỳ.

However, the realities of everyday mobilities also challenge the implementation of urban development by city planners. Local residents often look for self-organized strategies instead of engaging with the local state. They self-organize their water supply; engage in urban gardening and agricultural use of urban land in Tam Kỳ. These challenges are possible due to the high porosity of urban and peri-urban space. It allows for the mobility necessary to create a liveable city for the future.

Urban planning might also lead to new opportunities for mobility, as the use of space in Tam Kỳ is often open to negotiation. An example of the appropriation of newly developed space for everyday mobilities is the park surrounding the Vietnamese Mother Statue, which provides a recreational space while ignoring the underlying ideological meaning. Combined with spatial porosity, this creates alternative identities of the urban integrated into new urban structures.

As argued in the beginning, urbanization in small cities has many similarities with peri-urbanization in large national centres like Hà Nội and Hồ Chí Minh City due to the central function of mobility and porosity. In Tam Kỳ, the rural reaches in to the city centre, while the peri-urban and rural hinterland become urbanized. This intertwined relation between urban core and rural hinterland creates a landscape in which the implementation of urban development plans and the everyday mobilities of local residents mutually transform each other and create patterns of opportunities and marginalization. As secondary city in the periphery, Tam Kỳ provides an interface between the local and the global, for residents as well as for ideas and goods. Whereas this might change in the future, for now, the prevalence of porosity in the urban core and the existing practices of mobility provide means of participation for the people faced with the transforming landscape.

These processes of porosity and mobility create a 'peri-urban city'. Finally, I would like to suggest the following three dimensions of analysis for future research: the porosity of space in small towns, their existence as interface due to spatial proximity, and the emergence of social edginess based on the ambivalence of space.

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# Fertility Decline and the Role of Culture – Thailand’s Demographic Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Changing Demographics, Changing Challenges – Southeast Asia in Transition

Declining birth and death rates, changes in age distribution, in mortality and morbidity, in fertility and marriage behavior, in the average life expectancy and in family and household structures, as well as a transformation of traditional family life arrangements and social structures of ever larger sections of the population – these are all scenarios that only a few years ago were only relevant for countries of the Global North. In the meantime, however, demographic change has also affected parts of the less developed world with a vehemence and dynamism that, even in the 1980s, neither demographers nor politicians considered possible in the affected regions of the world: the demographic transition, which is often also graphically illustrated through the well-known demographic transition model, has taken place much more rapidly in Southeast Asia in recent decades than in other less developed parts of the world.

Accordingly, as the demographic transition progressed, the focus shifted to the demographic situation in Southeast Asia: Until the mid-20th century, population development in this region was still classified as a ‘demographic anomaly’ by many demographers. Around the middle of the last century, Wilbur Zelinsky (1950: 115), for example, commented on the demographic situation of Southeast Asia in comparison to that of India and China as follows:

“[...] it is more than a little startling that side by side with these fearfully overcrowded regions [meaning India and China] there should be found others, apparently comparable in natural resources, where the actual density is conspicuously low, so much so that underpopulation is often a serious issue.”

Shortly afterwards – after the end of the Second World War and the withdrawal of the colonial powers – it was the strong population growth and the high birth rates that were regarded by Southeast Asian governments as well as international organizations as the main problems of population development and were the focus of scientific interest and population policy measures.

The 1990s and 2000s brought with them a completely different assessment of the demographic situation in Southeast Asia: the pronounced decline in birth rates in most states in the region, the equally impressive reduction in mortality rates (above all, infant mortality rates), and – hence – the sharp rise in life expectancy brought demographic changes in Southeast Asia (see Table 1) once again into the public eye, but this time with a new focus. Above all, the rapidly changing age structure and its possible long-term effects on society and economy have already become the cause of a ‘rhetoric of demographic crisis’ in some states of the region today – not everywhere did the demographic revolution of the last decades take place at the same speed – which is increasingly being paid attention to both on a political level and in the mass media.

Table 1: Selected Indicators of Population Development in Southeast Asia 1950 to 2017

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2017
<b>Population (in millions)</b>	165	213	281	357	444	525	597	644
<b>Index (1950 = 100)</b>	100	129	170	216	269	318	362	390
<b>Average annual growth rate (in %)*</b>	1.7-1.9	2.59	2.81	2.42	2.20	1.69	1.29	1.09
<b>Population density (km<sup>2</sup>)</b>	37.9	49.1	64.6	82.2	102.3	120.9	137.8	148.4
<b>Crude birth rate (in ‰)</b>	43.7	42.7	37.2	31.8	25.7	21.5	19.3	18.0
<b>Crude death rate (in ‰)</b>	19.1	14.7	11.7	8.8	7.2	6.9	6.7	6.7
<b>Total fertility rate (children per woman)</b>	5.9	6.1	5.5	4.2	3.1	2.5	2.4	2.3
<b>Infant mortality rate (in ‰)</b>	156	115	86	68	47	34	24	23
<b>Median age (years)</b>	20.5	19.6	18.1	19.1	21.3	24.2	27.1	29.1
<b>Life expectancy at birth (years)</b>	37.0	43.4	49.4	54.8	59.7	64.0	67.9	70.5

Source: Husa and Wohlschlägl 2018: 181, Data calculated from UN-DESA 2017; PRB 2017

\* average rates for the 10-years-periods (1950-1960; 1960-1970; 1970-1980, 1980-1990, 1990-2000, 2000-2010) as well as for 2010-2017, each entered in the column marking the end of each period. Column 1950: average rates for the period 1910 to 1950 based on Hirschman 1994 and Caldwell/Caldwell 1997

The English-language Thai daily “The Nation”, for example, entitled its editorial “Grey boom on its way” on the occasion of World Population Day on 11 July 2001. The

core message of the article was that a number of Southeast and East Asian societies and governments would be under pressure in the coming decades to take appropriate measures in good time to effectively counter problems in the labor market, but above all in health care and care for the elderly, due to the foreseeable changes in the age structure of their populations.

In the meantime, there is no longer any need for an international event to draw attention to the challenges posed by rapidly ageing societies in the affected Southeast Asian states: the issues of 'lowest low fertility' and – associated with this – stagnation or even future shrinkage of the population and above all of the working population have arrived at the center of society, as the – by now – regular reporting on this topic with newspaper articles such as "Singapore's ageing population a ticking 'time bomb'" (Business Times, Singapore 7 December 2017) or "Act now on ageing society before it's too late" (Bangkok Post, Thailand 5 July 2018) has shown. But also demographers and family planning experts are already warning of an "aging tsunami" and the transition from a period of "demographic bonus" to a phase of "demographic disruption" (cf. for example Prasartkul et al., 2019).

The demographic transition was particularly dynamic in the Kingdom of Thailand, which – although the country is not among the Asian Tiger Economies – has not only achieved an impressive performance from an economic point of view and meanwhile already belongs to the group of Lower Middle Income Countries, but has also undergone socio-demographic processes of change at a speed that is unparalleled within Southeast Asia, apart from the developments in the city-state of Singapore. Within only about four decades, Thailand has undergone the phases of the classic "first demographic transition" and has faced many challenges posed by ageing population since the early 2000s (Sasiwongsaroj and Burasit, 2018). Actually it is about to enter a phase in which constantly low fertility rates and rapid demographic ageing occur simultaneously (Prasartkul et al., 2019: 2).

Similar developments have so far only been known from countries of the Global North (above all from Northern and Western Europe), where it became apparent as early as the end of the 1970s that the usual explanatory approaches such as the concept of the First Demographic Transition were not sufficient to adequately explain the continuing sub-replacement fertility and the emergence of a variety of forms of partnership and cohabitation instead of traditional family forms, the decoupling of sexuality and reproduction, the rapid demographic ageing, and thus the tendency towards population shrinkage.

Probably the most comprehensive and well-known attempt to date to remedy the deficits of the First Demographic Transition is found in the concept of the "Second Demographic Transition" (SDT) formulated by Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa in 1986, in which the basic assumptions of the classic demographic transition were complemented by considerations from Maslow's "theory of shifting needs" and thus by a central cultural component. Critics, however, consider the Second Demographic Transition as a phenomenon that is typical above all for Northwestern Europe and overseas states characterized by Europe such as the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and do not believe that it will spread in a similar form to other cultural circles, for example Asia

or Latin America. Lesthaeghe (2014: 18114) accurately describes this point of criticism, which was among others held by demographers from Asia, as follows: “The typical reaction was, ‘Not us, we’re different’, and therefore the SDT would describe only ‘Western idiosyncrasies’.”

Meanwhile, there are increasing signs that the Second Demographic Transition has also gained a foothold in parts of East Asia since the turn of the millennium: the cohabitation of young Japanese and Taiwanese couples before marriage and starting a family is becoming more and more the rule (cf. e.g. Raymo et al., 2008). For example, signs of far-reaching cultural changes can already be seen in Japan, such as the loss of significance of traditional authorities, a slow reduction in gender differences, and a gradual shift away from collective patterns of behavior towards individualism and Western norms and moral concepts (Lesthaeghe 2010, 2011a,b).

How likely is it that the Second Demographic Transition will quickly spread to countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand, which has already largely completed the “classic” first demographic transition? Are persistent sub-replacement fertility, shrinking family sizes, and the rapid ageing of the population already precursors of the onset of the Second Demographic Transition, as already hinted at in some studies (cf. Prasartkul et al., 2019), or do culturally conditioned norms and values prove to be forces that delay or modify such processes?

In the following, we will attempt to analyze the extent and course of the major demographic changes in Southeast Asia using the example of the Kingdom of Thailand, without disregarding the possible influence of deeply rooted cultural patterns of behavior and values and norms.

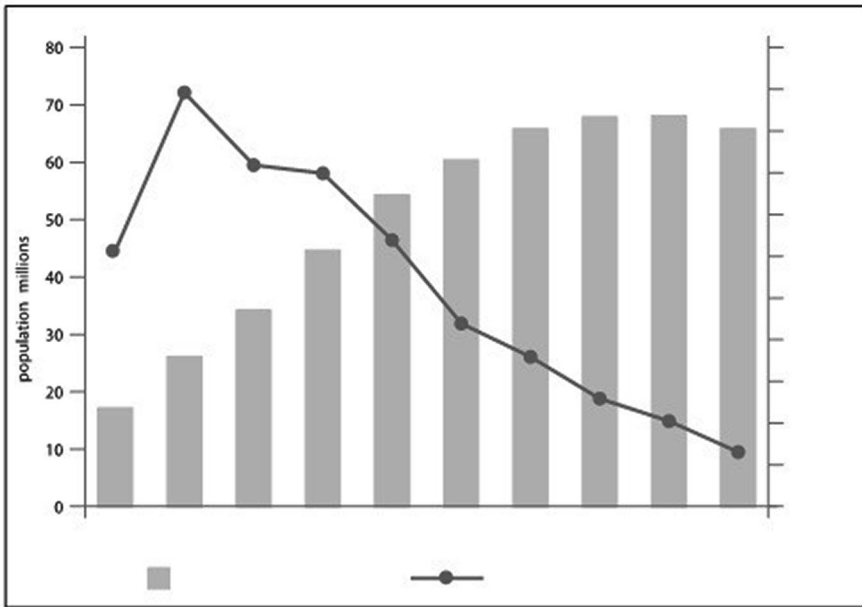
## From Growth to Stagnation? The Dynamics of Population Change in Thailand

According to the results of the National Statistical Office of Thailand, the population of Thailand in 2018 amounted to about 66.4 million people. A population projection by the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), which also takes into account the population groups not included in the register data but very well included in the 2010 census, shows a population of 68.1 million by 2020 (NESDB, 2013). This means that the population is likely to be only around two million people higher than the 65.98 million inhabitants determined at the last census in 2010, which corresponds to an average annual population growth of only 0.3 percent. After decades of rapid population growth, Thailand’s population growth has almost come to a standstill within just two decades (Figure 1).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the country was still one of the fastest growing countries in the world, with average annual growth rates of between 3 and 4 percent. Up to this time – with birth rates, which, as estimates and adjustment calculations of Bourgeois-Pichat (1960) and the UN-ESCAP Population Division (1976) have shown, remained constant until the 1960s at a level of over 40 per mil – one can speak of an accelerated population growth in Thailand. The strongest growth phase was in the 1950s; from the first half of the 1960s a slow and then accelerating decline in fertility set in, which continues to this day. As a result of this development, the average annual growth rate already fell

from 1980 to 1990 to just over 2 percent, although it should not be overlooked that such a figure still amounted to an annual population increase of around one million people per year at the time.

Figure 1: From Growth to Stagnation: Population Change in Thailand 1947- 2040



Data sources: NSO (Thailand, National Statistical Office), Population Censuses 1947-2010; NESDB (2013) Population Projection 2020-2040; own design

The official population forecasts of the Working Group on Population Projections for the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986) of the Thai government (Thailand, NESDB, 1982; Working Group on Population Projections, 1983), drawn up on the basis of the census results of 1980, assumed that the birth rate would continue to fall sharply and that the growth rate could thus be reduced to around 1.5 percent by the year 2000. However, the results of the 2000 census already showed that the decline in the birth rate in Thailand after 1990 had accelerated considerably and that the original target of 1.5 percent had already been undercut with an average annual growth rate of only 1.2 percent between 1990 and 2000.

The first decade of the 21st century showed a continuation of the trend: between 2000 and 2010, the average annual growth rate fell further to only 0.8 percent, and as the latest update results indicate, population growth in Thailand has almost come to a standstill in the meantime – within a very short period of time, concern about too rapid a population growth has now turned into concern about the consequences of too rapidly falling and now too low fertility and about the consequences of an unexpectedly rapid stagnation of the population.

## Thailand's Fertility Transition – a Spatio-Temporal Approach

A first glance at the development of birth and death rates since 1950 already shows that Thailand is the country among the more populous states of Southeast Asia that has made the most rapid transition from high to low birth and death rates and now has a similar demographic situation to the states of the Global North – only the city-state of Singapore experienced a similarly pronounced demographic change within Southeast Asia during the same period (cf. Fig. 2).

In the mid-1960s, official Thai statistics still showed a continuous increase in the birth rate up to a value of just over 40 per mil compared to 27.3 per mil in 1951, but this increase undoubtedly reflects not only an actual increase in the number of live births per 1,000 inhabitants, but also – primarily – improvements in the registration system, which cannot accurately be recorded quantitatively (cf. Wohlschlägl, 1986: 365). With a value of around 48 per mil, 1956 marks the peak of post-war developments in the birth rate. Between 1956 and 1970, the ESCAP data indicate a slow decline to a level of just over 40 per mil (1960: 44.3, 1970 with 39.4 for the first time below 40 per mil).

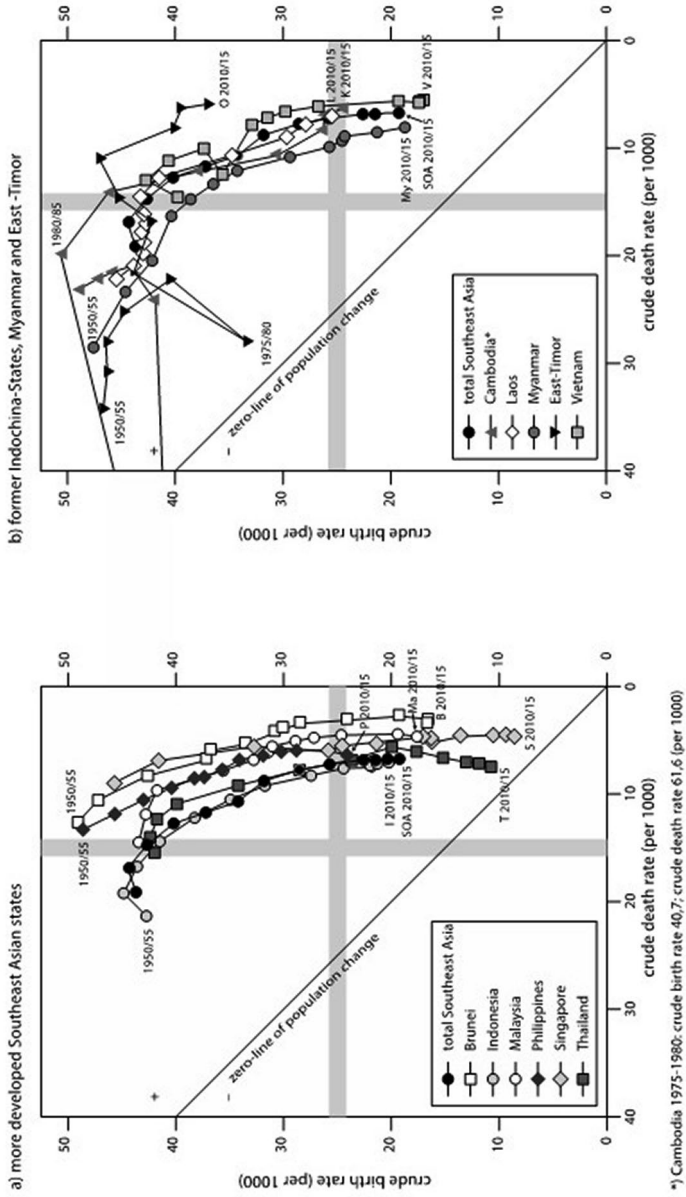
Until the early 1970s, however, the decline in the birth rate was not strong enough to have an impact on the dynamics of the natural growth rate, which remained at an annual level of more than three percent between 1965 and 1970, as the mortality rate was simultaneously decreasing. Only since the early 1970s has there been a marked and comparatively rapid decline in the birth rate, which led to the fact that in the mid-1980s the birth rate was already only around 28 per mil, around 20 per mil lower than in 1956 and around 10 per mil lower than in 1970. In the meantime, the value of the crude birth rate was again more than halved and in the five years from 2010 to 2015 is only at around 11 per mil (UN-DESA, World Population Prospects, Revision, 2019).

If one only considers the change in the birth rate when estimating the decline in fertility in Thailand, one must not overlook the fact that this clearly underestimates the actual extent of this decline. The birth rate also depends on the age and gender structure of a population, and if – as in many less developed countries – more and more women born in a period of almost uninterrupted fertility advance into reproductive age over time, it can theoretically even rise despite declining fertility levels; its decline will at least be much slower. It makes more sense to use the average number of children per woman, measured over the total fertility rate (TFR), to analyze the decline in fertility.

According to Prasartkul et al. (2011: 17), the decline in fertility in Thailand can be roughly divided into four phases:

- high fertility before 1970 (TFR 6 children per woman and more),
- phase of rapid fertility decline from 1970-1990 (drop in TFR from over 6 to just over 2 children per woman),
- further decline of the already low fertility rate to the replacement level of just over two children per woman 1991-1996, and
- finally, from 1997 onwards, the “lowest low fertility” phase, characterized by a continuous further drop in fertility below the replacement level to date (decline in TFR from just over 2 to currently 1.5 to 1.6).

Figure 2: The Development of Birth and Death Rates in Southeast Asian Countries 1950- 2015



Source: Husa and Wohlschlägl, 2018: 200. Data: Calculated from UN-DESA (2017) World Population Prospects Database – The 2017 Revision; own design

The high level of fertility that prevailed in Thailand in the 1950s and 1960s has been the subject of little research. For the first half of the 1950s, the United Nations estimated a gross reproduction rate of 3.2 on average (United Nations, 1965). As can be inferred from the results of the *Survey of Population Change 1964-65*, the rate is likely to have remained fairly stable until the mid-1960s, when this nationwide survey, which did not include Bangkok-Thonburi however, found a figure of 3.1. The total fertility rate of 6.3 shows that in the mid-1960s, an average of more than six children were still born alive by a woman during her entire reproductive period.

The pronounced decline in fertility began around the second half of the 1960s. Due to the lack of reliable and age-specific birth statistics from the official registration of natural population movements, it is difficult to determine the exact date. However, the available figures – most of them estimated or derived from empirical representative surveys – allow the conclusion that the decline before the mid-1960s was very low and that it was only between 1965 and 1970 that the process of generative behavioral change that Knodel and Debavalya (1978) called “Thailand’s reproductive revolution” began.

The total fertility rate is likely to have fallen from 6.3 to 5.6 between 1965 and 1970 alone, i.e. by an average of 0.7 children per woman or 11 percent. According to the *Survey of Population Change 1974-76*, a rate of 4.9 can be assumed for the mid-1970s. In summary and with a cautious interpretation of the available data, it can be stated for this first phase of fertility decline that the total fertility rate in the first half of the 1960s was between 6.3 and 6.6, then began to fall significantly, namely to a level of 5.4 to 5.8 around 1970 and 4.5 to 4.9 around 1975 (see also Wohlschlägl, 1986).

The downward trend continued from the second half of the 1970s onwards, possibly even with increasing acceleration. After all, the first two rounds of the *Contraceptive Prevalence Survey* indicate that the total fertility rate at the turn from the 1970s to the 1980s probably only had a value of 3.7 to 3.8, while the calculations from the data of the third round of this survey as well as the fertility estimates of the Population Division of the United Nations or the Population Reference Bureau for the mid-1980s only showed a value of 3.5. By the early 1990s, the TFR had finally fallen to fewer than 2.5 children per woman.

In the early 1990s (1991-1996), a third, brief intermediate phase of fertility transition followed, in which the already low fertility rate continued to drop to the replacement level of just under two children per woman, which was finally reached around 1996. From 1997, Thailand then entered the “lowest low fertility” phase, in which the TFR fell further and further below the replacement level and currently oscillates at between 1.4 and 1.5 children per woman in the second half of the 2010s (Jones, 2011: 6).

Within just a third of a century, Thailand has experienced a decline from more than 6 children per woman in the 1960s to around 1.5 children per woman at the beginning of the 21st century, a dynamic development that deserves the term revolutionary and is also internationally unparalleled: even within Southeast Asia, the Kingdom – in terms of the speed of the fertility transition – is only surpassed by the city-state of Singapore, which, however, due to the completely different circumstances, cannot be compared with a populous territorial state with extensive rural areas such as Thailand (Table 2).

Table 2: The Dynamics of Fertility Decline in Southeast Asian Countries 1960/65 to 2010 /15

Country	Total Fertility Rate (TFR)			Percent Change (%)	
	1960/1965	1985/1990	2010/2015	1960/65 to 1980(85)	1980/85 to 2010/15
<b>Brunei Darus-salam</b>	6.66	3.47	2.02	-47.9	-41,8
<b>Cambodia</b>	6.95	5.99	2.70	-13.8	-54.9
<b>Indonesia</b>	5.62	3.40	2.45	-39,5	-27.9
<b>Lao PDR</b>	5.97	6.27	2.93	+5.0	-53.3
<b>Malaysia</b>	6.36	3.67	2.11	-42.3	-42.5
<b>Myanmar</b>	6.10	3.78	2.25	-38.0	-40.5
<b>Philippines</b>	6.98	4.53	3.05	-35.1	-32.7
<b>Singapore</b>	5.12	1.70	1.23	-66.8	-27.6
<b>Thailand</b>	6.13	2.30	1.53	-62.5	-33.5
<b>Timor-Leste</b>	6.20	5.40	4.40	-12.9	-18.5
<b>Vietnam</b>	6.42	3.85	1.96	-40.0	-50.9

Data source: UN-DESA (2019) World Population Prospects Database – The 2019 Revision; columns 5 and 6: own calculations

The decline in fertility in Thailand – as in most other parts of the world – did not start in all parts of the country at the same time. In this context, however, it is difficult to estimate how much earlier the fertility decline began in the cities, especially in Bangkok, than in rural areas – from a similarly high niveau – or from a level that was already lower in the 1950s (?) – because the necessary data are lacking. Unfortunately, the first *Survey of Population Change 1964-65* did not include Bangkok-Thonburi as the only part of Thailand.

However, the calculation of the total fertility rate for the provincial cities (municipal areas) from the collected data leads to the conclusion that the fertility level in the capital at that time must have been well below that of the rural areas, because even in the municipal areas, which were usually only small rural towns and administrative seats, the total fertility rate (TFR) was only 4.2 compared with a value of 6.5 for the non-municipal areas. On the other hand, the data available from the 1970s show that it can be assumed that the provincial cities had a higher fertility level than Bangkok-Thonburi (*Survey of Population Change 1974-76*: TFR values: Bangkok-Thonburi 3.6, municipal areas 4.5, non-municipal areas 5.3; cf. Thailand, National Statistical Office, 1969, and 1978).

At the beginning of the fertility transition in the first half of the 1970s, the TFR in rural regions was probably only slightly higher than in urban areas (Table 3). A decade later, however, the fertility level in the cities, especially in the metropolis of Bangkok, with a TFR of 1.8 in 1985/86 was already below the replacement level and thus well below that of the rural areas (TFR 1985/86: 3.0). It was not until the beginning of the 2000s that the TFR in rural Thailand also fell below the population replacement level and,

meanwhile, the number of children per woman in rural Thailand is only slightly higher than in the cities.

Clear differences in fertility levels and in the dynamics of the decline in fertility also exist between the individual parts of the country: the earliest fertility transition began in Bangkok, where it fell below the replacement level already in the mid-1980s, followed by the northern and central regions in the early 1990s (NSO 2017, Survey of Population Change 2015/16). The rural north-eastern region fell below replacement fertility in the early 2000s, and the last part of the country to follow was the southern region in the mid-2000s (Table 3).

Table 3: Fertility Decline in Thailand 1974/76 to 2015 /16, by Urban and Rural Residence and Regions

Area	Total Fertility Rate (TFR) by Year of Survey				
	1974/76	1985/86	1995/96	2005/06	2015/16
<b>National Level</b>	4.9	2.73	2.02	1.47	1.61
<b>Municipal Areas (Urban)</b>	4.5	1.77	1.33	1.03	1.33
<b>Nonmunicipal Areas (Rural)</b>	5.0	2.96	2.28	1.73	1.87
<b>Bangkok Metropolitan Region</b>	3.5	1.74	1.26	0.88	0.86
<b>Central Region</b>	4.1	2.49	1.66	1.19	1.33
<b>Northern Region</b>	3.7	2.25	1.89	1.57	1.79
<b>Northeastern Region</b>	6.3	3.10	2.44	2.04	1.78
<b>Southern Region</b>	6.1	4.05	2.85	1.52	1.78

Data source: NSO (Thailand, National Statistical Office) (2017) The 2015-16 Survey of Population Change; Please note: Data on fertility from Thai data sources can slightly differ from the international data of UN-DESA (2017, 2019) due to different surveys and estimation procedures.

## The Role of Family Planning Programs in Fertility Decline

The changes in fertility behavior were accompanied by an extraordinarily strong increase in the use of contraceptives and contraceptive methods and the corresponding level of knowledge of the Thai population. Whereas in the early 1970s, about half of Thai women still had practically no information on methods of birth control and could not even name a single contraceptive method (cf. Wohlschlägl, 1986: 373), today practically all Thai women between the ages of 15 and 49 are well-informed on this issue, whereby – corresponding to the lower initial level – the increase in the level of knowledge and application among the rural population was much greater than in urban areas.

Nationwide, in the forty years from the introduction of Thailand's first family planning program in 1970 to the currently last nationwide fertility survey (the *Reproductive and Health Survey, 2009*), the proportion of married women between 15 and 44 or between 15 and 49 who use a method of birth control has increased almost sixfold: from 14 per

cent in 1969/70 to almost 80 per cent in 2009. The initial differences between urban and rural areas have largely disappeared over time. Regionally, however, there are still significant differences between the southern region of Thailand and the rest of the country, as the data from the “Thailand 14 Provinces Multiple Index Cluster Survey (MICS) 2015-16”, conducted jointly by the National Statistical Office of Thailand, the National Health Security Office in Thailand and UNICEF, show: While the nationwide Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) 2015-16 was 78.4 percent, the rate for the southern region was only around 71 percent. In the three Muslim-dominated provinces of Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani in particular, the CPR was between 35.4 and 55 percent respectively, far below the values of other regions (NSO/UNICEF, 2017: 12).

As far as the differences in fertility behavior and the contraceptive prevalence rate between the southern provinces and the rest of the country are concerned, religious and cultural attitudes also play a role. From a Buddhist point of view based on one of the Five Precepts, it is fundamentally wrong to kill any living being, for whatever reason. But according to Buddhist ethics, birth control is acceptable if contraceptives are to help prevent conception. Contraceptives that stop the development of an already fertilized egg are frowned upon and should not be used. Behind this is the Buddhist belief that life begins or consciousness develops with the fertilization of the egg (Payutto, 1999). In contrast to most other religions and belief systems, Buddhist teaching does not advocate for any explicitly family-oriented positions either; conceiving children is not considered a religious duty. Even sexual activities without the intention of procreation are not rejected in principle, however acting on one's sexual (and other) desires generally stands in the way of the goal of enlightenment.

In contrast to Buddhism, Islam has a strong focus on the family, and children are basically regarded as a gift from God. There is no uniform ‘Islamic position’ on the issue of birth control, but eight of the nine classical schools of law advocate for allowing birth control. This always refers to inner-marital birth control, premarital sex is forbidden. However, the emergence of fundamentalist currents in recent decades has led more and more conservative preachers to openly campaign against the use of condoms and other means of birth control, which have undermined state measures for family planning and birth control in many Islamic areas. The view that the majority of Muslims in the southern provinces of Thailand tend predominantly towards holding strong conservative views and regard birth control as “haram” – forbidden – is also confirmed by the results of a broad-based study on the nexus between religion and reproduction among Muslims in Buddhist Thailand (Knodel et al., 1999).

In this context, the central role in (as some even believe from today's perspective, too) successfully disseminating knowledge on various contraceptive methods to distant parts of the country, in creating a broad awareness of the necessity of birth control, in providing psychological and material support to interested persons and in providing information material, doctors, and contraceptives was held by the tightly organized state family planning program, which was steered by the Ministry of Public Health. Following the establishment of a National Committee on the Family Health, the first systematic measures began in November 1964 in Potharam District, Ratchaburi Province, Central Thailand. They were accompanied by a scientific study conducted with the support of the “Population Council” in New York, the so-called “Potharam Study”, which

was “Thailand’s first population/family planning field research project” (Prachuabmoh and Thomlinson, 1971).

In 1968, the Ministry of Health began carrying out family planning activities on a broad scale throughout the whole country as part of the Family Health Project and in 1972, with reference to the official proclamation of a government population policy aimed at family planning in 1970, for the first time in a national five-year economic and social development plan (namely in the third five-year plan from 1972 to 1976), the aim was to reduce the annual growth rate of the population to 2.5 percent by the end of 1976. In fact, this figure was almost reached, while the further reduction in the intensity of population growth demanded in the fourth five-year plan to an annual growth rate of 2.1 percent in 1981, as well as the reduction to 1.5 per cent provided for in the fifth plan by 1986 (NESDB, 1982: 175, 176), was somewhat too optimistic and was not quite achieved despite the sharp decline in fertility – partly due to the move towards the reproductive age of cohorts with large populations.

The success of the program, especially its large presence even in remote rural regions of Thailand and its acceptance in most of the country (as already mentioned, the smallest successes were achieved in the southern provinces with a strong Muslim population), depended – in addition to the favorable socio-cultural background, which will be discussed in more detail later – on several factors (Knodel et al., 1980: 9f): the inclusion of specially trained personnel at all levels of state activities for birth control should be mentioned here, but especially the delegation of various tasks within the framework of family planning, such as passing on oral contraceptives and advice on their use, to people who were not doctors, especially midwives and nurses, as well as the free distribution of the pill from 1976 onwards and the establishment of a branched network of ‘family planning outlets’ even in small villages.

From the sixth five-year plan (1987-91) onwards, the emphasis in the area of population-related measures was no longer only on reducing fertility and growth rates, but shifted towards “enhancing the quality of the population” (Jones, 2011: 9). In the eighth plan (1997-2001), for the first time no target value was set for the reduction of the population growth rate, since by the end of the 1990s fertility had already fallen below the replacement level; from now on other targets such as Human Resource Development and Sustainable Development were to be promoted.

Explicit fertility-related measures then reappeared in the ninth plan (2002-2006). However, the new objective was to stabilize fertility at replacement level, with additional preparatory measures to cope with the rapid demographic ageing of the Thai population added in the tenth plan (2007-2011). In the eleventh plan (2012-2016), the measures proposed in the tenth plan were essentially retained. In the area of population-relevant measures, the to date last, twelfth plan (2017-2021) also focuses on coping with rapid demographic ageing, but especially on the risk of a shrinking working population in the future.

In any case, it is clear that the Thai family planning program – at least as far as its original intention, namely the rapid reduction of fertility, is concerned – is undoubtedly one of the most successful in the world (WHO, 2013). Whether the opposite orientation can be achieved just as effectively from the beginning of the 2000s, namely the stabilization of the already extremely low fertility rates or possibly even their increase,

can, however, be doubted on the basis of the many years of international experience which, for example, Western, Northern European and East Asian states have had with programs for the renewed stimulation of fertility.

With the population policy goals of the last two five-year plans are associated the hope of some Thai politicians and planners that the often invoked Asian values or the different cultural backgrounds of the Thai population would ultimately also contribute to a higher value of children and family and thus mitigate or at least delay a complete slide into Western individualization, self-realization, and the associated shift in personal priorities. Thailand is thus trying to follow a motto for solving demographic problems – caused by the rapid decline in fertility and the subsequent demographic aging of society – which was already issued in 1997 by the then Singaporean health minister Yeo Chow Tong at a conference on the demographic situation in the city-state as follows: “[...] family is still the best approach.” (Husa and Wohlschlägl, 2008: 165).

The following passage from the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan addresses the concern that to what extent traditional Thai values and norms are still upheld by the younger generation:

“[...] the influences of foreign cultures, being absorbed into the Thai society more easily in the digital era, can negatively impact social norms, attitudes and the behavior of some Thai people, especially those who are unable to screen out inadequate cultures.” (NESDB, 2017: 13)

To what extent the characteristics of demographic change from the low fertility countries of the Global North, which are commonly summarized under the term ‘Second Demographic Transition’, are also noticeable in Thailand, will be examined in more detail below.

## **A “Second Demographic Transition” in Thailand? The Impact of Culture on Demographic Change**

Mortality rates that dropped from around 30 per mil after the Second World War to only 15 per mil in the mid-1960s and a TFR that fell little later from over six children per woman around 1960 to below the replacement level towards the end of the millennium – these are the typical characteristics of a country that underwent the so-called first demographic transition in record time: Thailand needed only about 30 to 40 years for the transition from high to low birth and death rates, while this transformation process took place in those regions of the world where it first began (in northwestern European countries such as England or Sweden) within a time span of about 200 or 140 years and took place in Central Europe (Germany, Austria) for about 70 years.

The joy about the great success of Thailand’s family planning program, which continued until the 1990s, has meanwhile given way to a certain disillusionment, after the equilibrium postulated in the concept of classical demographic transition has failed to materialize in Thailand as well, as in most countries of the Global North, and the fertility rate has dropped to undreamt-of lows.

In order to sufficiently explain such new phenomena as “baby bust” (Lesthaeghe, 2014), “birth dearth” (Pearce, 2011), sub-replacement fertility, the systematic postponement of marriage and parenthood as well as the emergence of alternative forms of partnership and cohabitation, the concept of the first demographic transition is not sufficient, as briefly indicated in the introduction. Although the theory of the ‘Second Demographic Transition’ continues to build on the classic transitional concept, it attempts to expand its explanatory framework. Lesthaeghe (2014: 18112) writes: “Although it accepts the major tenets of bounded rational economic choice, it also allows for autonomous preference drift by relying on Maslow’s theory of shifting needs. As such, an essential cultural component is being added.”

Table 4 gives a comparative overview of the main characteristics and influencing factors of the First and Second Demographic Transitions using the example of developments in the countries of the Global North.

Before the question of the extent to which specific Thai cultural components influence or modify a possible Second Demographic Transition in Thailand can be addressed in the following, a brief clarification of how the often very diffuse term culture is used in this paper appears necessary. Here, ‘Thai culture’ does not mean the definition *wáttáná-tam*, which is based on the three pillars nation, religion, and monarchy, nor the concept of a Thai-ness of any kind recently strained by the Thai tourism authority in advertising campaigns, which can be seen as “[...] an ideology, not a description but a prescription, a set of instructions of how to be a well-behaved citizen” (Cornwel-Smith, 2013: 10). Rather, the use of the term “culture” in this work draws on the classical definition of Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952):

“Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historical derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.” (Kroeber and Kluck-Hohn, 1952, cited after Ehnert, 2004: 8)

Table 4: The First Demographic Transition and the Second Demographic Transition in Comparison – Demographic and Societal Characteristics

First Demographic Transition (FDT)	Second Demographic Transition (SDT)
<p><i>Marriage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Rise in proportions marrying, declining ages at first marriage</li> <li>· Low or declining incidence of cohabitation</li> <li>· Low divorce rates</li> <li>· High remarriage rates after widowhood or divorce</li> </ul>	<p><i>Marriage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Fall in proportions married, rising ages at first marriage</li> <li>· Increasing cohabitation, both pre- and postmarital</li> <li>· Rise in divorce, earlier divorce</li> <li>· Decline in remarriage rates, LAT relationships instead</li> </ul>
<p><i>Fertility</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Declining marital fertility via reductions at older ages, lowering mean ages at first child-bearing</li> <li>· Deficient contraception, parity and timing failures</li> <li>· Declining illegitimate fertility</li> <li>· Low final childlessness among married couples</li> </ul>	<p><i>Fertility</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Fertility postponement, increasing mean ages at parenthood, structural subreplacement fertility</li> <li>· Efficient contraception</li> <li>· Rising nonmarital fertility, parenthood outside marriage (among cohabiting couples, single mothers)</li> <li>· Rising definitive childlessness among woman ever in a union</li> </ul>
<p><i>Societal background</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Preoccupation with basic material needs: income, work conditions, housing, children and adult health, schooling, social security; solidarity a prime value</li> <li>· Rising membership of political, civic, and community-oriented networks</li> <li>· Strong normative regulation by churches and state, first secularization wave, political and social “pillarization”</li> <li>· Segregated sex roles, familistic policies, “embourgeoisement” of the family with the breadwinner model at its core</li> <li>· Ordered life-course transitions and dominance of one single nuclear family model</li> </ul>	<p><i>Societal background</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Rise of “higher order” needs: individual autonomy, expressive work and socialization values, self-actualization, grass-roots democracy, recognition; tolerance a prime value</li> <li>· Disengagement from civic and community-oriented networks</li> <li>· Retreat of the state, second secularization wave, sexual revolution, refusal of authority, political “depillarization”</li> <li>· Rising symmetry in sex roles, rising female education levels, greater female autonomy</li> <li>· Flexible life-course organization, multiple lifestyles, open future</li> </ul>

Source: Lesthaeghe, 2014.

### Thailand's “Contraceptive Revolution” and its Consequences

According to Lesthaeghe (2010: 216), the Second Demographic Transition will be characterized by three successive “revolutionary” developments, which tend to characterize the change in demographic behavior. At the beginning, there is the so-called “contraceptive revolution”. As described in the previous section, this already affected Thailand since the 1970s and was largely completed with the achievement of the replacement level at the turn of the millennium. It is also a good example of the shift in personal preferences postulated by Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa from the fulfilment of basic needs towards

“higher order needs” such as “individual autonomy, self-actualization” etc.: While at the beginning, the decline in fertility was mainly influenced by the government’s birth control programs and economic considerations, in the course of this process birth control is used less and less for preventive purposes, but more to control the desired number of children.

This generative change in behavior can also be seen in the attitude of Thai women towards the desired ideal family size and number of children. A series of empirical surveys since the 1970s, for example, have provided information on the extent to which the Thai population’s ideas about the desired ideal number of children have changed over time. The results show that the desired number of children had already fallen considerably in the 1970s and 1980s, both in rural and urban areas. While the total number of children that a Thai woman between 15 and 44 years of age could expect to give birth during her life was still an average of 4.5 in 1969/70, this figure had already fallen to 4 children in 1975 and to 3.1 children in 1984 (Wohlschlägl, 1986: 370). According to the results of the *Contraceptive Prevalence Survey 1984*, those women who had been married for less than five years at the time of the survey, i.e. the so-called newlyweds, only expected to have an average of 2.3 children by the end of their reproduction period, whereby – and this is particularly emphasized – practically no differences between urban and rural areas could be proven (Bangkok Metropolis: 2.2, rural areas and provincial towns: 2.3). Also regarding the duration of the schooling of women, there was no longer any significant differentiation in terms of the desired number of children (cf. Kamnuansilpa and Chamrathritirong 1985).

This indicates that the establishment and awareness of “new” fertility concepts had already been extraordinarily broad and successful in all parts of the population by the mid-1980s – with the exception of the provinces with a large Muslim population in the south of the country. In 1984, for example, around 57 percent of married women between the ages of 15 and 44 stated two children as the ideal number of children, 26 percent three children and only 10 percent four or more children – an attitude that even then was not too far removed from that in European states.

Current data from the most recent *Reproductive Health Survey 2009* show that the ideas about the desired number of children only marginally changed between the surveys of 1984 and 2009 (see Table 5): the desired number of children of married women aged 15-49 was, with an average of 1.9 children, only slightly below the figure from 1984, whereby the differences between urban and rural areas were rather small (municipal areas: 1.8; non-municipal areas: 2.0). Regionally, the largest difference is between Bangkok with an average of 1.7 children and the southern region with 2.3 (NSO, 2010, Key Findings of the RHS 2009).

Table 5: Average desired number of children, number of living children and “unmet fertility” in Thailand 2009

Area; Region; Age group	Average desired number of children	Average number of living children	Difference of unmet fertility
Whole Kingdom	1.93	1.67	0.26
Municipal Areas	1.76	1.54	0.22
Non-Municipal Areas	2.00	1.72	0.28
Bangkok Metropolitan Region	1.69	1.53	0.16
Central Region	1.72	1.52	0.20
Northern Region	1.75	1.53	0.22
Northeastern Region	2.08	1.78	0.30
Southern Region	2.33	1.94	0.39
Age Group 15-29	1.48	0.90	0.58
Age Group 30-39	1.96	1.74	0.22
Age Group 40-49	2.20	2.10	0.10

Source: NSO (Thailand, National Statistical Office) (2010a) *The 2009 Reproductive Health Survey*

The differences in the desired number of children among the women surveyed by age group are also shown in Table 5: In the highest age group over 40 years, a larger number of children is generally expected than among married women under 30 years of age. This is hardly surprising, since this characteristic value is generally determined from the number of living children plus the number of children still desired by the interviewees and the tendency of older women to have a higher number of children reflects their more traditional fertility behavior in earlier years (or even at the time of the survey) (Wohlschlägl, 1986: 370).

However, a comparison of the desired number of children with the ideal number of children desired at the time of the respective survey shows that the “average number of living children” is lower than the “average desired number of children” in all cases. While the women surveyed in the *Reproductive Health Survey 2009* wished for 1.93 children on a national average, their actual number of children at the time of the survey was only 1.67. This is very remarkable, because what prevents women from turning their desired number of children into reality is not only of great interest to demographers and social scientists, but also above all to politicians and planners.

## Sexual Revolution

The contraceptive revolution was followed by a so-called sexual revolution – first in the countries of northern and northwestern Europe and a little later also in Central Europe and in the USA – triggered by the broad availability of the contraceptive pill, which for the first time made an efficient decoupling of reproduction and sexuality possible. The younger generation revolted against the traditional moral concepts of the parents’

generation, premarital sex – not only for the purpose of having children – became the rule instead of the exception. This phenomenon, which for a long time was considered typical for Western societies, initially spread to other developed countries in Asia, such as Japan and South Korea, with a time lag of about two to three decades (Lesthaeghe, 2010: 236ff). Meanwhile, the first signs of an ideational change in terms of sexual freedom and decoupling fertility from sexuality can also be observed among the younger generation in Thailand. Today, the younger generation decides largely autonomously and independently on their fertility behavior, without being influenced primarily by traditional social norms.

The resulting sexual behavior, which diametrically opposes traditional Thai norms and values and considerably weakens the importance of the institution of marriage, can also be seen from numerous recent surveys on this topic. Premarital sexual activities that were frowned upon according to current sexual norms are becoming more and more common among the younger generation. A *National Sexual Behaviour Survey*, conducted in 2006, in which more than 6000 people aged 18 to 59 were surveyed, regardless of their marital status, clearly showed the prevalence of premarital sex among Thai adolescents. The proportion of respondents in the 18-24 age group who had already had sexual experiences was higher among male adolescents than among young women (around 99 percent compared to 89 percent).

The survey also showed, however, that female adolescents quickly equal men when it comes to premarital sex: in the age group of 18-24-year-old young women, the proportion of respondents with premarital sexual experiences was three times higher than in the age group of 25-29-year-old women (Chamrathritirong et al., 2007; Prasartkul et al., 2011: 25f). Thus, the traditional gender-related role attributions also seem to be slowly changing, which had largely tolerated sexual freedom among men, but not among women:

“Thais distinguish between gender – a public identity to be kept ‘riabroi’ (proper) – and sexuality, which remains undiscussed, unrestrained. Male urges are regarded as natural and requiring plentiful, but private outlets [...] with Thai women’s virginity still a commodity to be guarded [...]” (Cornwel-Smith, 2013: 113f)

The increasing emancipation of young Thai women in terms of sexuality and marriage behavior is also expressed in the marital age that has been rising continuously for about 50 years (Table 6): While the age of first marriage of Thai women in 1960 was still around 22 years, in 2010 it was already 24.4 years (Prasartkul et al., 2011: 24); at the same time the male age of first marriage rose from 25 years in 1960 to 28.3 years in 2010 (Peek et al., 2015: 27). In Thailand, too, the postponement of marriage goes hand in hand with a general improvement in Thai women’s access to higher education and increasing participation in employment (Jones, 2005).

Table 6: Increases in Singulate Mean Age at First Marriage of Thai Women (SMAM), 1960- 2010

Year	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
SMAM	22.1	22.0	22.8	23.5	24.0	24.4

Source: Prasartkul, et al. 2011: 24.

In the past, decisions regarding family formation were crucially influenced by traditional norms and values: not to marry was not an option, most married couples had children and parents lived with their adult children in the same household. Due to lifestyle changes of the younger generation, however, traditional family formation patterns are increasingly receding into the background: “[...] decisions regarding family formation have now become preeminently based upon individual choices surrounding desired lifestyles, economic opportunities, spatial limitations, educational levels and the vagaries of the modern marriage market” (Peek et al., 2015: 16).

One indicator of these changes is the increasing proportion of singles among both Thai men and women in recent decades. Table 7 shows that the proportion of men who were still unmarried at the age of 45-49 increased fivefold between 1960 and 2000, and the proportion of unmarried women in the same age group more than tripled.

Table 7: Increases in Percentages of Never-married Thais Aged 30-49, 1960- 2000

Age Group and Year	30-34		35-39		40-44		45-49	
	1960	2000	1960	2000	1960	2000	1960	2000
Never married male Thais	9.9	36.6	5.2	24.7	3.1	16.2	2.3	11.2
Never married female Thais	8.1	24.1	5.3	15.3	3.9	11.3	3.0	9,5

Source: Soonthorndhada and Khumsuwan (2014: Figures 2, 3, p. 53)

A further indicator of the upheaval in family founding behavior is the increasing share and acceptance of cohabitation. Starting in Scandinavia, this pattern of family formation began to displace the traditional family images of the nuclear family or extended family, which shaped the ‘golden age of marriage and family’, as the 1950s and 1960s are called in European family sociology, and continued to spread to other regions of the developed world. Undoubtedly the signs of an increase in cohabitation in recent years are also increasing among young Thais, although the still valid cultural norms are counteracting or delaying this trend.

Traditionally, premarital cohabitation is against Thai norms as a woman's virginity at marriage is of high value and according to Thai custom, a ceremonial marriage represents a social announcement of a couple's living together. Lately, attitude towards union patterns among Thai people has changed. According to the *Survey on Conditions of Society, and Culture and Mental Health* (NSO, 2010, 2018), within 10 years the acceptance of cohabitation of respondents aged 13 and over has significantly increased from 26.8 percent in 2008 to 41.2 percent in 2018.

So far, however, there have been few studies on the extent of cohabitation in Thailand. The results from one of these surveys show that this is most common in Bangkok, where 10.2 percent of respondents aged 18-59 said they were unmarried and lived with their partner. In rural areas, on the other hand, this way of life is obviously still highly unpopular as it applied to only 1 percent of respondents. Obviously, the inhabitants of

the capital are much more open to unconventional lifestyles than is the case in small and medium-sized towns or in rural areas (Jampaklay and Haseen, 2011).

Although no empirical study exists to support an increase in cohabitation in Thailand, regular surveys of cultural values among Thai people indicate that its acceptance is slowly increasing: the percentage of respondents aged 13 and over who considered premarital cohabitation acceptable increased from 26.8 percent in 2008 to 34.6 percent in 2011 (NSO, 2008; NSO, 2011), with male respondents more positive than female respondents and – unsurprisingly – the younger generation showing higher acceptance than the older generation (Prasartkul et al., 2011: 25). In any case, it is clear that the still relatively low tolerance towards premarital cohabitation has a fertility dampening effect because it also stigmatizes premarital parenthood.

### Gender Revolution in Thailand ... Still a Long Way To Go

Finally, the question remains to what extent the third revolution, which contributed to the Second Demographic Transition in the Western world, also affected Thailand and strengthened the trend towards “below replacement fertility”. Lesthaeghe (2010: 216) describes this development for 1960s Europe as follows: “[...] a gender revolution occurred whereby women were no longer subservient to men and husbands, but asserted the right to regulate their fertility.”

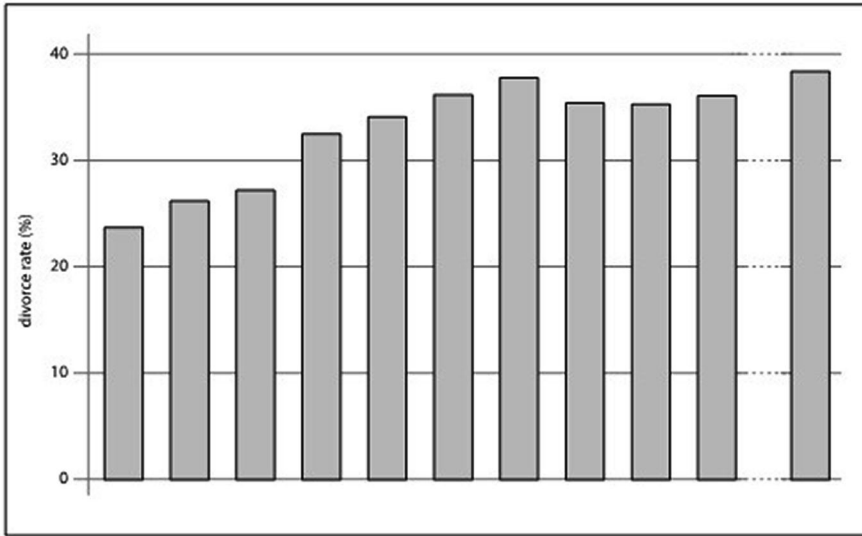
Male dominance has a long history in Thailand and this tradition can also be found in the so-called “Three Sealed Laws”, a collection of legal texts, mostly from the Ayutthaya period, which were collected in 1805 by order of King Rama I (Assavarak, 2007). The attitude that women generally have a lower status than men and are therefore hardly entitled to autonomous action is also expressed in numerous Thai proverbs. One of them, for example, is “woman is a buffalo while man is a human”, which expresses the belief that men are generally far superior to women. Another common saying is, “husband is elephant’s front legs, wife is elephant’s hind legs”, which means that the men lead while the women have to follow.

After women’s rights have become more of an issue in Thailand in recent years under the influence of increasing globalization, traditional role clichés are beginning to change more and more in the Kingdom as well: Rising levels of education and increasing labor force participation bring not only more economic independence, but also increasing autonomy in the choice of non-traditional desired lifestyles and above all control over one’s own fertility.

One consequence of these tendencies is not only a rising age at marriage and an increasing number of female singles, but also the willingness to end a dissatisfactory marriage, as the continuously rising number of divorces shows (Figure 3). The general divorce rate in Thailand in 2016, at 38.5 percent, was only slightly below the level in European countries (e.g. Austria in 2016: 43 percent).

This trend also runs contrary to the prevailing cultural norm. Conventionally, marital ties are expected to last a lifetime, and divorce is considered a disgrace, especially for women. Divorced women are stigmatized and divorce is usually attributed to a woman’s failure or “defect” of some kind. Thai women have therefore traditionally tried as far as possible to maintain their marriage despite family pressure, or even enduring

Figure 3: Divorce Rates in Thailand 2004- 2016 (in percent)



Data source: NSO (Thailand, National Statistical Office) 2019; own design

domestic violence in order to avoid stigmatization and the associated loss of face (Assavarak, 2007). The response of modern, well-educated, and economically independent women to existing traditional norms that work to their disadvantage was inevitable: the number of divorces filed by women is on the rise, and this has probably also contributed to the slight increase in single-parent families, the number of which rose from around 970,000 in 1987 to 1.4 million in 2013 (Peek et al., 2015: 72f).

One factor that has also contributed to the gender revolution in Thailand, but is only mentioned in this article for the sake of completeness, is the increasing feminization of rural-urban migration in all its forms over recent decades. The majority of migrant women are young and unmarried and migrate to big cities – mostly to Bangkok – for educational reasons or to find work. However, the norms and circumstances under which migration can take place are central to women's migration decisions. Traditionally, much more is expected from Thai women than from men. For example, the care of parents and children is their sole responsibility, without any help from the male household members. Such ideas, deeply rooted in Thai culture, also remain valid in case a daughter migrates, but the nature of the obligation shifts. Adult children are generally expected to contribute to the financial well-being of their parents in old age; however, usually more is expected from daughters, because migrated daughters are usually regarded as more reliable than sons when it comes to remitting money to their parents (cf. e.g. Husa, 1986; Clausen, 2002; Guest et al., 1994).

At the same time, however, after having lived in the city for a while, the family expectations placed on migrated young women no longer correspond with their urban reality. Young men in Thailand have always been granted a social life outside the family,

even encouraged to do so, while girls have been taught to stay at home and concentrate on their family responsibilities. However, after migrating to the city, migrant women spend much of their youth away from their families, confronted with new views, attitudes, and social practices. Whenever they return to their village of origin for whatever reason, they also bring with them ideas of urban, modern life with completely different social norms and values and thus become role models for the young girls and women who have remained in the village (Clausen, 2002: 61).

The confrontation of the female village youth with the *tan sà-mâi* (modern) lifestyle of returned migrant women drives the gender revolution in rural areas as much as the depiction of images of urban life in social media and mass media, since not only abstract images and ideas are conveyed, but also experienced and lived reality.

### Convergent Development – Convergent Problems?

Can the theses of the Second Demographic Transition help to adequately explain recent demographic developments in Thailand? Yes, all major indicators point to a demographic convergence of Thailand with the countries of the Global North, albeit with some delay. On the whole, however, the current demographic reality in Thailand suggests that the Kingdom will face similar demographic problems in the coming years and decades as has been the case for some time in many countries of the Global North.

However, whether the insistence on strengthening or maintaining culturally determined traditional values and norms will suffice to solve the problems at hand may be doubted on the basis of the experiences of southern European countries in recent decades, for example. Traditional family image and decision-making structures, traditional gender roles and a lack of women's emancipation, reform-resistant religious institutions such as the Catholic Church and the associated lack of state support in the creation of childcare facilities to enable a better compatibility of family and career – we can see today where this leads from the example of Italy and other European Mediterranean countries: namely to a society with an ultra-low fertility, where more adult diapers are sold than baby diapers, where a generation of grandparents “cheated of their grandchildren” spends more money on pets than on their grandchildren. ... Is this the way that Thailand is about to take in the near future or will the Kingdom, as so often in its history, find its very special “Thai Way” in this respect?

The renowned Thai demographer, Boonlert Leoprapai, expressed his idea on future trends of fertility in Thailand with the phrase “the river has no return” (Leoprapai, 2014: 38-39). Policy implications to promoting fertility seem to fail in reversing fertility decline; conversely, estimations indicate that the fertility rate will stay below replacement level for the next 30 years (until 2050). However, in the last few years, fertility trends in some highly developed countries have been slightly reversed. Myrskylä et al. (2009) find a so-called “inverse J-shaped” relationship between the *Human Development Index* (HDI) and total fertility rates in developed countries, suggesting a fertility rebound at a HDI of more than 0.9 which marks the approximate turning point.

Human development in terms of GDP per capita, life expectancy, and school enrolment are claimed to provoke a revival of fertility. Applying this concept to Thailand

(HDI, 2017: 0.755), the country is still a long way from an upswing in fertility (see Table 8).

Table 8: Development Indicators and Total Fertility Rate in Thailand 1990- 2017

Year	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of school	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (US \$ ppp 2011)	HDI value	TFR
1990	70.3	8.4	4.6	6,560	0.574	2.40
1995	70.2	9.6	5.0	9,177	0.611	2.20
2000	70.6	11.2	6.1	9,003	0.649	2.00
2005	72.1	12.7	7.0	11,006	0.693	1.81
2010	73.9	13.3	7.7	12,918	0.724	1.81
2015	75.1	13.9	7.6	14,455	0.741	1.60
2016	75.3	14.3	7.6	14,971	0.748	1.60
2017	75.5	14.7	7.6	15,516	0.755	1.59

Sources: Columns 2-6: UNDP 2018: 2; Column 7: Prasartkul et al. 2011: 19, IPSR: Mahidol Population Gazette 2015, 2016 and 2017.

More recently, Luci and Thevenon (2010) have specified that economic development is likely to induce a fertility rebound. They have identified female employment as the main factor impacting fertility, behind GDP variations. The increase in female employment and fertility rates suggests a key role played by the changes in norms and institutions supporting the combination of work and family that go along with the process of economic development. According to studies in the Global North, it implies a signal for the unwinding of demographic challenges. It is important for Thailand to consider new economic and social dimensions and attitudes and norms towards fertility, female education and gender roles to find a ‘Thai Way’ to lift fertility. Norms concerning fertility-related behavior in form of “public campaigns” – “Having many children leads to poverty” – have had a remarkable influence on the perception of Thai people for several decades. Reverse norms on having children and changes in norms concerning childbearing, labor market contexts, and policies to support the work-life balance may facilitate Thailand to “drive” its fertility.

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# Rural Access Denied or Difficult: Foreign News Journalists from Germany Face Obstacles in Reporting about the “Rohingya” Conflict in Myanmar’s Northern Rakhine State

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## Introduction

In September 2017, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) correspondent Jonathan Head (2017) and 17 other local and foreign journalists were given the chance to visit Maungdaw district in Myanmar, just one district of those on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border from which hundreds of thousands of people had fled in the weeks before. The journalists were confronted by conflicting realities: the refugees reported that soldiers, policemen and civilians had murdered, raped and burned houses down, whereas the Myanmar government alleged that the refugees were terrorists and had burned down their houses themselves. After his journey to Maungdaw, Head considered himself in a position to unmask attempts at manipulation by the government, but the final truth about the mass exodus from Myanmar remained uncertain. Since that unsuccessful press trip, the attitude of Myanmar’s government towards foreign journalists has changed, and work has become even more difficult for reporters covering the so-called Rohingya<sup>1</sup> conflict—“the fastest-growing refugee emergency in the world today” (UNHCR, 2017).

This chapter explores how foreign news journalists (particularly from Germany) experience this conflict and what obstacles they face in reporting it. In addition to their own views on their work, it will examine their work practices, the internal structure of their media outlets and the external influences on their work in Myanmar and Bangladesh. The empirical part of this paper is based on findings drawn from qualitative semi-

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1 The use of the term Rohingya is controversial. Whereas a group of Muslims in Rakhine State uses this term to name their ethnic group, neither the Myanmar government nor the majority of the population accept the Rohingya as an ethnic group, preferring to call this group of Muslims in Rakhine State “Bengali”. This chapter does not aim to advance any position in the discussion on naming. It uses the term Rohingya because it is commonly used and well-known.

structured in-depth interviews (conducted in 2018) with eight foreign news journalists working for German media. After an overview of the conflict and its effect on the media in Myanmar, the results of the interviews will be discussed.

## Historical and Political Background of the Rohingya Conflict

It is impossible to deal with the conflict in Rakhine without considering the complex history of multi-ethnic Myanmar. Before the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), politics in the region that is today known as Myanmar were completely different. Although it is unlikely that all tribes lived peacefully next to each other, as Myanmar history books oftentimes aver, there was still a stable system of rule and power. Numerous authorities ruled the area in a complex system of relations, obedience and patronage (Grein, 2015; Zöllner, 2015).

After their defeat by Great Britain in three wars, the precolonial dynasties were supplanted not only by new rulers but also by a totally new understanding of politics, states and nations (Grein, 2015). The area between the Andaman Sea and the Himalayas became part of the British Raj from 1886 until it was finally separated from India and given its own administration in 1937 (Grein, 2015), at which time the British defined the border that separated the Indian provinces from Burma and today separates Myanmar from Bangladesh. This demarcation of the border can be seen as one of the main reasons for the long-lasting conflict in Rakhine State (Zöllner, 2015). Furthermore, the British administration contributed to a schism in Myanmar society because during colonial rule several positions were specifically assigned to members of distinct ethnic communities. This maximised the peoples' perception of ethnic differences and their political significance and prevented the growth of a united Myanmar society (Grein, 2015; Kipgen, 2016).

When Burma gained independence from Great Britain in 1948, it was by no means a united nation. During the following tumultuous decades, ethnic tensions led to several conflicts. The colonial structures left their mark, as did events in World War II, when the Burma Independence Army (BIA) under General Aung San's command fought for the Japanese whilst ethnic minorities from the border regions kept their loyalty with the British (Grein, 2015).

In 1947, some ethnic groups were pushed by the British to negotiate the Panglong Agreement (Kipgen, 2016). Actually, the British were surprised by the willingness of ethnic groups to accept the agreement (Hellmann-Rajanayagam and Helbardt, 2015). The Bamar majority led by Aung San promised the minority groups several rights and concessions. However, the fact that the agreement was never completely implemented led to further mistrust (Kipgen, 2016). There have been several ethnic conflicts in Myanmar in the past decades, and every conflict has its own origins. The conflict in the Rakhine State centres on the following questions: Are the Rohingya an ethnic group? If so, are they entitled to be designated 'thaingyintha' (native ethnic race) and are they entitled to Myanmar citizenship?

Answers to these questions are widely contested. Leider (2014) tracked the history of Muslims in Rakhine back to the 15th century. At this time, the kingdom of Arakan

and its capital Mrauk U were strongly influenced by the neighbouring sultanate in southern Bengal. The kingdom was home to many Muslims in all parts of the society, even at the Buddhist palace. From the late 17th century the Burmese expanded their rule and in 1785 they conquered the kingdom of Arakan, extinguished the former elites and brought some Bengal Brahmans back with them to Burma. When Francis Hamilton came to Burma in 1795, he was the first one to write down the term 'Rooinga' as a designation of origin, from the word which Muslims from Arakan used in their own accent to describe where they came from. Further mentions of Muslims in Rakhine are from the early 19th century, at which time an estimated ten to 15 per cent of the population in the region were Muslim (Leider, 2014). However, there is no historical evidence that this community perceived itself as an ethnically independent Muslim people that significantly influenced the history of the country, as some of the Rohingya like to state nowadays (Leider, 2014).

There are very few reliable sources about the population in Rakhine during the colonial era; nevertheless, there is evidence that a large number of Muslims migrated from Bengal to Burma, and in 1911 more than one third of Rakhine's population were Muslims. In 1942 many Indian immigrants fleeing from the Japanese entered Rakhine, where the first violent clashes between Muslims and Buddhists took place. For the next two years, Rakhine was virtually divided into a Muslim north and a Buddhist south. After World War II, the Muslim population of Rakhine hoped that their home would become part of Pakistan, and when this did not happen, a militant organisation aiming at autonomy for Rakhine was founded under the name 'Mujahids'. The 'Mujahids' were outmanoeuvred in 1954 and finally laid down arms in 1961. During their resistance, they rediscovered the name Rohingya, using it for the first time in 1951 to name an ethnic group living in Northern Rakhine. Since the 1960s, several militant groups have been founded to combat the military government using arms and violence (Leider, 2014).

Many scholars place responsibility for the repression of the Rohingya on the 1982 Citizenship Law. The law was passed after a national census and violent suppression of minority resistance forced about 200,000 Muslims to flee the country (Southwick, 2014). This law, which groups the Myanmar population into four categories (Kyaw, 2017), is often cited as the main reason for the desperate situation the Rohingya face today because it denied them citizenship (Crouch, 2016). But a closer look at the text of the Burma Citizenship Law from October 15th, 1982 shows that, since neither the Rohingya nor the other commonly cited 135 ethnic groups<sup>2</sup> are named, the law does not directly deny the Rohingya citizenship. The more likely reason for the statelessness of the Rohingya is the fact that this law was never properly implemented. Thus, the statelessness has to be understood *de facto*, not *de jure* (Cheesman, 2017; Kyaw, 2017).

Today, the conflict is mainly a dispute between two opinions. The Rohingya, whom Leider (2014: 66) refers to as a "political movement"<sup>3</sup>, insist they are an ethnic group that has been living in Rakhine for millennia and has shaped the history and culture

2 The origin of this list, which was published by the military junta in 1990, is still unknown. Different population censuses in the 20th century identified very different numbers of ethnic groups. The lists range from 135 to 160 groups (Cheesman, 2017).

3 All non-English quotes have been translated by the authors.

of the country. They disregard the wave of Muslim immigration into the region during the colonial era. In contrast, the Buddhist majority denies the long history of Islam in Rakhine and is convinced that all Muslim immigration started during the colonial era, considering most of it to be illegal.

## A Timeline of the Recent Conflict

Although the outburst of violence in 2012 turned the eyes of the world on Rakhine, the region was far from calm and peaceful during the previous decades. As depicted by Kyaw (2017) and Cheesman (2017), the persecution of the Rohingya since Burma's independence is a story of displacement and resettlement, with the two phases of exodus and return occurring twice. The first exodus, which began in 1978, was triggered by a brutal military operation ahead of a national census which aimed to re-establish the residence status of people in Burma. Between 156,000 to 250,000 people fled to Bangladesh (Cheesman, 2017; Kyaw, 2017). Shortly after, the Burmese government agreed to take the Muslims back from Bangladesh, and by the end of December 1979 almost 187,000 refugees had been brought back (Kyaw, 2017).

In 1988, the military took power in Burma for the second time<sup>4</sup> and a wave of militarisation followed, causing human rights violations and abuses, especially in the border regions. This forced Muslims to flee the country again, and by May 1992 Bangladesh had registered approximately 263,000 refugees from Burma (Kyaw, 2017). Myanmar and Bangladesh then agreed on a second resettlement, and between 1992 and 2005 hundreds of thousands of people were compelled to return to Myanmar in a resettlement that was internationally criticised as a forced relocation. However, in 2005 Myanmar did not renew the agreement, and several thousand Rohingya stayed in Bangladesh, living in refugee camps or as unregistered illegal immigrants (Kyaw, 2017).

The second resettlement phase was still ongoing when Myanmar entered on a new political age. Although the military regime did not accept its results, the 1990 election became the first milestone on Myanmar's path towards democracy by proving the clear support of the people for the National League for Democracy (NLD) under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, who in 1991 became a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. In 2008, the military junta passed a new constitution, after which new elections brought in a civil government led by former general U Thein Sein. In a by-election in 2012 the NLD won a landslide victory, and in 2015 achieved an absolute majority in the general election, after which the office of State Counsellor, as de facto leader, was created for Aung San Suu Kyi—who, as the widow and mother of foreigners (with British citizenship), is not eligible for the presidency according to the 2008 constitution.

As democracy in Myanmar developed, it brought economic liberalisation and internationalisation and raised hopes within the international community of peace in

4 There was a successful coup in 1962, which was followed by twelve years of military government. In 1974, the military junta passed a new constitution and Ne Win, who until then had ruled as a general, became head of the Burma Socialist Programme Party. After the unrest in 1988, he resigned (? , 2015).

Myanmar. However, it did not bring peace to Rakhine. In 2012, the Rohingya conflict attracted the attention of the international media (Leider, 2014). This time, attention was not triggered by a military operation, but by a cruel crime committed by Rohingya.

In July 2012, in the village Kyaw Ne Maw three men raped and murdered a 28-year-old woman. One of the three men later committed suicide and two were arrested and sentenced to death, but this was not the end of the story. When the public learned that the victim was a Rakhine Buddhist whilst the murderers were Rohingya, hundreds of Rakhine Buddhists vowed revenge and beat ten Muslim bus passengers to death. Violence then spread to several townships in Rakhine, in which both Muslims and Buddhists burned houses and killed each other. The security forces did not interfere, some even joined the Buddhists. In October 2012, many Rohingya settlements were attacked in what human rights organisations identified as planned and well-coordinated attacks (Human Rights Watch, 2013). In the clashes between June and October 2012, around 200 people died and 150,000 more lost their homes. An observation committee set up by the Myanmar government in August 2012 to analyse the situation in Rakhine and find solutions included not one Rohingya. Nevertheless, the report called for compliance with human rights and international treaties and recommended that giving Myanmar citizenship to the Rohingya be considered. Furthermore, it demanded a more transparent handling of information and news from Rakhine (Southwick, 2014).

Towards the end of 2012, tens of thousands of Rohingya were still fleeing to refugee camps within Myanmar or outside the country. When the government of neighbouring Bangladesh decided to close its borders, thousands of refugees tried to reach southern neighbours by crossing the ocean by boat. To keep them out of the country, Thailand gave them enough food, water and fuel so that they could travel to Malaysia. By the end of 2012, an estimated 13,000 Rohingya reached Malaysia and another 6,000 were stranded in Thailand. Several hundred probably did not survive the dangerous crossing (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Throughout 2013, the riots still did not cease. This second year of fighting forced a further 35,000 Rohingya to leave the country by boat, and at least 785 drowned (Southwick, 2014).

In the following years, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)<sup>5</sup> attacked several police stations and military outposts. The country's response was oppressive and in 2016 unreasonably violent. The last and until now most serious outburst of violence started in summer 2017, again triggered by an ARSA attack. On August 25th, 2017, eleven people were killed when ARSA militants attacked 30 police stations and one military post. The revenge of the military, border police and civilians targeted not only ARSA fighters, but entire Rohingya villages. Interviews with refugees and satellite images helped human rights organisations to understand what happened in Rakhine during those days. Many interviewees reported that military personnel surrounded their villages, shot down

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5 The ARSA was founded under a different name after the outburst of violence in 2012. Members call it an ethno-nationalist movement. It had started as a small underground organisation with a few hundred followers, but in 2016 and 2017 it represented thousands of Rohingya, who supported the trained fighters with their own means. It is contested whether or not the ARSA also gets international support (Amnesty International, 2017).

people who tried to run away, and at the end looted huts in which families and the elderly or diseased were hiding. In some places, there were also reports of mass rapes and soldiers killing toddlers (Amnesty International, 2017; Bouckaert, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

According to estimates given by Doctors Without Borders, between August 25th and September 24th, 2017 at least 6,700 people died due to violence; 730 of them were children under the age of five. The main causes of violence-related deaths were gunshots, burning, beating to death and sexual violence (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2018). Furthermore, at least 59 men, women and children were killed when ARSA fighters and militant Rohingya attacked Hindu communities, and 46 Hindus went missing (Amnesty International, 2018).

Myanmar's government and army refute all accusations against the security forces and only accept the results of their own investigations. However, the role of (some sections of) the Myanmar military in the Rohingya conflict remains highly controversial. By 2018, only the mass execution of ten Rohingya villagers by soldiers, policemen and civilians had been conceded and penalised, after Reuters journalists presented undeniable evidence (Han, 2018). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2018), approximately 900,000 refugees live in camps in Bangladesh, of whom approximately 700,000 (BBC, 2018) arrived after August 25th, 2017, and people are still arriving.

Since the end of 2017, Myanmar and Bangladesh have been negotiating a resettlement of refugees to Myanmar. In April 2018, the BBC (2018) published an article on unconfirmed reporting by the Myanmar government that the first Rohingya refugee family had returned to Myanmar in full view of the world's cameras. After a visit by the United Nations (UN) Security Council representatives, the Myanmar government signed an agreement on the voluntary return of Rohingya. This agreement was concluded by UNHCR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), but does not seem to be really practicable. Experts consider the camps designated as the Rohingya's future homes in Myanmar poorly prepared (Siddiqui, 2018). Furthermore, new clashes in Rakhine State between ARSA and the national military displaced more people from different ethnicities in Rakhine and neighbouring Chin State during the first quarter of 2019 (Gerin et al., 2019), and most of the Rohingya involved hesitate to follow Myanmar's calls to return. They are waiting for the promise to provide them with citizenship, freedom of movement and security (Siddiqui, 2018). Thinking about their homeland fills many Rohingya with despair.

In the recent Rohingya conflict, several international human rights activists have accused Myanmar of alleged 'ethnic cleansings', 'systematic human rights abuses', 'crimes against humanity', 'war crimes' or even 'genocide'. The country has always refuted those accusations. In this context, international human rights activists also have demanded that Myanmar's de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, be divested of her Nobel Peace Prize.

In November 2019, The Gambia, a predominantly Muslim west African state and a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), filed a "Rohingya genocide case against Myanmar" at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague in the Netherlands (Bowcott, 2019a).

In December 2019, after a three-day “ICJ hearing into accusations of genocide” and “[i]n a defiant closing address to the UN’s highest tribunal, Aung San Suu Kyi [...] pleaded with its 17 international judges to dismiss allegations that Myanmar has committed genocide and urged them instead to allow the country’s court martial system to deal with any human rights abuses”. According to “an American lawyer speaking for [T]he Gambia” an earlier UN (fact-finding) mission had “warned about genocide and recommended criminal charges” (Bowcott, 2019b).

In January 2020, the ICJ ordered Myanmar “to prevent genocidal violence against its Rohingya Muslim minority and preserve any evidence of past crimes”. This court’s “unanimous decision” was reported to be “momentous”: the ICJ “imposed emergency ‘provisional measures’ on the country – intervening in its domestic affairs by instructing the government of Aung San Suu Kyi to respect the requirements of the 1948 genocide convention” and said “that there was prima facie evidence of breaches of the convention”. Moreover: “The ICJ’s orders are binding on Myanmar and create legal obligations that must be enforced. The provisional measures imposed by the court require the government to prevent genocidal acts, ensure military and police forces do not commit genocide, preserve evidence of genocidal acts and report back on its compliance [...]. The orders are automatically sent to the UN security council, where Myanmar’s response will be assessed.” (Bowcott and Ratcliffe, 2020)

## Effects of the Conflict on Media Freedom in Myanmar

The Rohingya conflict not only attracted the international media’s attention, it also directly affected the situation of media in Myanmar. When democratisation started in the country, media freedom improved and the censorship enforced since 1962 was lifted in August 2012. In 2013, the government allowed private daily newspapers that had been banned for 50 years to be published. Mass media of all political stripes, and even popular exile media such as *The Irrawaddy* or *Democratic Voice of Burma* (DVB), were able to open offices in Myanmar (Amthor, 2015). Although it can be argued that the state is still able to put media under pressure and encourages self-censorship (Amthor, 2015; Khine, 2015), Myanmar improved its position in the Reporters Without Borders’ (2018) World Press Freedom Index significantly between 2013 and 2017. However, in 2018 Myanmar fell again slightly in the ranking.

Reporting on ethnic conflicts in Shan State and Kachin State and especially on the conflict in Rakhine has become more and more difficult for journalists. Even in 2012, the conflict in Rakhine put the new media freedom to the test. The riots after the rape and murder of a young Buddhist woman were not fuelled just by the dynamics of social media, information published by traditional media also led to overreactions in the already tense situation in Rakhine (Ismail, 2012). Journalists working for international media reported pressure from Myanmar officials as well as civilians. In several open protests, media outlets such as the BBC or DVB were accused of deliberately reporting biased and false stories. DVB was even threatened in an online smear campaign and was attacked by hackers (Ismail, 2012).

In 2013, approximately 200 enraged Buddhists attacked the car of a UN human rights expert on his visit to Meiktila. During this time, several journalists were also threatened and hindered in their work (Southwick, 2014). In 2015, as elections approached, the number of detentions of media workers increased; the closer the elections came, the more serious the situation became. Amnesty International (2015) reported several detentions, massive self-censorship and a climate of fear. In an atmosphere where Buddhist extremism, nationalism, and the persecution of Rohingya frequently made headlines, journalists were not able to cover the conflict without endangering themselves or their informants.

Even before the ARSA attacks in 2017 it was very difficult for journalists to get admission to enter Rakhine State (Bodewein and Dietrich, 2017; Head, 2017), but after the attacks it became impossible. When the riots escalated and international media reported Buddhist mobs, plundering Buddhist monks, brutal military and a passive government, Aung San Suu Kyi (cit. in Safi, 2017) gave her first public statement on the issue; she was reported as blaming the media for spreading “a huge iceberg of misinformation”. Clear governmental information and a strategic communication policy has been seriously lacking so far. However, the government invited selected national and international journalists on a trip to Rakhine to show them the extent of destruction and the fear of Rakhine people of alleged Muslim ‘terrorists’. In fact, a different scenario unfolded. By accident, the group of journalists passed a burning Rohingya village and interviewed those who had set fire to it, only to find they were Rakhine Buddhists (Head, 2017). Since this incident, investigation of international media in the conflict area is virtually impossible.

Two journalists from Myanmar became internationally known because they were seriously prevented from doing their job for international media. Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, two local Reuters journalists, were part of a team of investigative reporters covering a massacre in the coastal community Inn Din. Together with two other colleagues, they covered the murder of ten Rohingya, took pictures as evidence and interviewed witnesses and culprits (Lone et al., 2018). But before the article was published, police arrested the two Reuters reporters in December 2017. On September 3rd, 2018 they were found guilty of breaching the colonial-era Official Secrets Act and sentenced to seven years in prison (Chalmers, 2018). However, they were released on May 7th, 2019 after having received a presidential pardon, after, in April 2019, “[t]he pair were awarded a Pulitzer Prize for international reporting” (Lewis, 2019).

Besides political restrictions and logistical problems, the strong polarisation in the Rohingya conflict is an obstacle for journalistic investigation (Brooten and Verbruggen, 2017). There are several aspects that influence how journalists tell the story of the conflict; for example, access to certain regions, interviewees and informants, or the use of translators and interpreters. In this emotionally loaded conflict, ethnic descent can cause bias.

## Foreign News Journalists (from Germany) in the Conflict

In recent years, the circumstances under which foreign news journalists work in Myanmar have changed dramatically. To offer an overview, this chapter presents the results of explorative qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with eight foreign news journalists working for German media. All interviewees covered the conflict during recent years. They live in South East Asia, South Asia or Germany and work for print and online media, news wires, radio and/or TV. The interviews were conducted in the first half of 2018 via video or audio telecommunication. Table 1 provides details of the interviewees (made anonymous).

Table 1: List of interviewees (made anonymous)

No. of the respondent	Media affiliation and position	Date of interview
R1	South East Asia correspondent (TV)	April 3, 2018
R2	Freelance correspondent (news wires, print and online media)	April 14, 2018
R3	South Asia correspondent (radio)	April 16, 2018
R4	South and South East Asia correspondent (print media)	April 17, 2018
R5	Reporter and 'parachute' correspondent (print media)	June 13, 2018
R6	South East Asia correspondent (TV)	June 15, 2018
R7	Freelance correspondent (print media)	June 18, 2018
R8	South East Asia correspondent (radio)	June 27, 2018

Source: table compiled by the authors

## The Influence of Internal Structures on Working Practices

With regard to collaboration with their editorial offices in Germany, the respondents reported a strong fluctuation in interest in the Rohingya. One interviewee dubbed the Rohingya conflict a topic “that has boiled over very quickly” (R8). Another described “waves” (R2) of ups and downs in reporting the topic. Following the events of August 2017, newsrooms of all media genres were highly interested in the topic, but previously there had been only a few flashes of international media interest. Two respondents also noticed that their editorial offices seemed to follow other national and international media in their agenda setting (R2; R7).

Interviewees explained that the growing interest of international media in the Rohingya case had different causes: according to some, the reason for the lack of interest in the conflict before 2017 may have been the huge geographical and cultural distance between Germany and Myanmar (R1; R8). Some respondents mentioned the following possible causes for the suddenly growing interest: surprise about the cruelty of a Buddhist majority persecuting a Muslim minority (R3); the extreme extent of the mass exodus

(R4; R7); and the prominence of Aung San Suu Kyi as an “icon of democracy” (R1; R7). In the time before August 2017, journalists witnessed the strong competition that this topic faced from other national and international events as well as from news within their own area of coverage (R1; R2; R4). Foreign news journalists covering the Rohingya conflict particularly considered the huge regional size of some areas of coverage to be a tremendous challenge. A public service TV correspondent (R1) reported difficulties in reacting promptly to unexpected happenings in Myanmar while being, for instance, on a film tour in Australia or Indonesia. In such a situation, editors in Germany would have to deal with those events on a simple news level, without in-depth background information supplied on-site. The huge area of coverage, which included all South East Asian countries plus sometimes parts of South Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, could lead to difficulties for the on-site correspondents.

In the case of the Rohingya conflict, some interviewees faced other challenges arising from internal structure. The border between Myanmar and Bangladesh is not only the location of the conflict, but it also separates South East Asia from South Asia, and thus is the border between two areas of coverage for several media. Although Myanmar was not in the area of coverage for which he was responsible, one of the respondents from Bangladesh reported on the conflict as an exception (R6). Another respondent felt dissatisfied with the fact that he was not able to travel to Myanmar at the right time in order to collect first-hand information himself (R1). Two journalists—one working in Myanmar, the other one in Bangladesh—experienced an unforeseen cooperation between the radio stations they worked for, to produce a joint feature containing information from both sides of the border (R3; R8).

Two of the respondents investigated in Bangladesh only, whilst one did so exclusively in Myanmar. The other five journalists investigated the Rohingya conflict while based in several countries over the last few years: in Myanmar and Bangladesh, but also from Thailand and Malaysia.

## External Factors that Complicate Reporting

In addition to the obstacles due to internal structure, the respondents also reported external factors that hindered their work. They named problems typical for the area of coverage of South Asia and South East Asia, such as time difference to Germany (R1), travel time and distances (R1; R5), travel costs (R2; R7), visa difficulties and bureaucratic barriers (R1; R3) and poor infrastructure (R3). With regard to covering the Rohingya conflict, they stated that it was difficult to plan research trips in advance and to get an overview of the situation on-site (R6; R7). One TV journalist realised that his on-site presence changed the situation of his informants and thus also the reality he wanted to record, because people he filmed were treated differently in front of a camera (R6).

A team of TV and radio journalists even experienced physical threats during their work in Myanmar (R8). They were attacked by a mob while interviewing people and eventually needed to take shelter in their hotel. One interviewee mentioned feeling severe emotional strain as a consequence of the impressions received in camps in Bangladesh (R3).

Other obstacles arose from working together with local stringers. Six respondents chose local stringers they knew already from previous reporting projects, and two contacted local stringers recommended by colleagues. The most important criteria for choosing a local stringer were knowledge of the region, local language skills and an existing network of informants in the area. Some interviewees chose to work with local journalists or members of human rights organisations (R3; R7). One journalist worked as a ‘parachute’ correspondent and was invited to Bangladesh by a non-governmental organisation, whose international workers provided stringer services, such as trip organisation, on-site support, or recruiting interpreters (R5). Stringers working with the other respondents came from Myanmar or Bangladesh, and in two cases they were former Rohingya refugees themselves.

Most of the respondents did not fear that the ethnicity of their local stringer influenced the reporting, and several emphasised their trust in the local stringers (R1; R2; R8). Only one journalist mentioned difficulties in verifying information while working together. He explained that double-checking information was impossible for economic reasons (R6). One of the respondents even had to rely completely on information provided by his local stringers because it was impossible for him to travel to Myanmar in late summer 2017 (R7). Two interviewees expressed their concern at endangering their local stringers. They admitted that they postponed some investigation trips and resorted to using information from social media to protect their local stringers (R2; R8).

Despite their deep trust in local stringers and interpreters, six out of eight interviewees stated that language barriers impeded their work. One journalist compared the transfer of information from the Rohingya language to Bengali to English and then to German without the help of professional interpreters to a game of “Chinese whispers” (R3). This journalist remarked that information can get lost in translation and the process is also very time-consuming (R3). Furthermore, several journalists complained that some interpreters tended to summarise and explain statements given by informants instead of translating literally (R3; R5; R6; R8). Several journalists admitted to having these language difficulties in most countries of their area of coverage (e.g. R3).

Irrespective of the language barrier, journalists experienced very different levels of access to information and interviewees in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Some respondents stated that, after the opening of the country, Myanmar would accept and support journalists in their work (R1; R4). Some interviewees described Bangladesh as more difficult for news coverage in general (R3; R4). According to several respondents, prior to the escalation of the Rohingya conflict in 2017 journalists were allowed to visit at least some internal refugee camps in Sittwe and other areas of Rakhine, but from the summer of 2017, Myanmar closed Rakhine State completely for journalists and started to restrict their movements more and more; obviously, it became more difficult for journalists to get a visa to enter Myanmar in general, even when they did not aim to cover the Rohingya conflict (R2; R4). According to some respondents, the government would offer only very limited information about the Rohingya topic; therefore, some respondents decided to continue their investigations and reports from neighbouring Bangladesh (R2; R4; R6).

In Bangladesh, some interviewees experienced an exceptional freedom of reporting. They got almost unlimited access to refugee camps and were not affected by any con-

trol or censorship (R3; R5; R6), though for some months access to the direct border area changed and was partly restricted (R3; R5; R6). They also reported that contacting politicians in Bangladesh was easy for journalists. However, one South Asia correspondent experienced a change in behaviour: whereas she always used to have problems getting statements by politicians in Bangladesh because of complex hierarchies, this changed within the Rohingya context. Politicians who came to the refugee camps to observe the situation or to make donations were happy to be interviewed and reported by journalists (R3). Some of the interviewed journalists assumed that the reason for this sudden openness by Bangladesh is obvious: in the Rohingya conflict, many international media portrayed Bangladesh predominantly in a positive way so that the country did not have to fear negative headlines. Furthermore, Bangladesh depended significantly on international support (R3; R6).

Some respondents assessed their working conditions in Bangladesh as free to find and talk to their informants directly and spontaneously (R1; R5; R6). In addition, they named several other sources, especially local and international media reports, humanitarian aid and human rights organisations and UN bodies. Sometimes, they also referred to official statements issued by the Myanmar government. Only one interviewee stated using news wires intensely because, by contrast, social media were not reliable or important sources (R3).

## The Difficulty in Finding Reliable Information

Almost all respondents had doubts about the credibility of the information they got, “because in such conflicts, you cannot trust any of the parties involved” (R1). One respondent did not criticise anyone for purposefully releasing propaganda or even lies to journalists but stated that uncertainty and rumours might lead to unintended false statements by the refugees (R6). Another interviewee stated that in refugee camps in Sittwe and in Bangladesh many traumatised victims gave journalists information that might not be trustworthy (R4). Some respondents doubted the reliability of information issued by Myanmar’s government. One respondent stated bluntly that “the government lies” (R2) and another one added that “government members as well as the military or Buddhist monks tell you, to be honest, a pack of lies” (R8).

In order to check information coming from refugee camps in the best way possible, some journalists used the following technique: first, they asked for detailed information; secondly, they asked whether or not their informants had eye-witnessed what they described; and thirdly, they compared the statements of several persons with each other (R3; R4; R5; R6). One respondent checked the plausibility of information with the help of international aid workers who knew Northern Rakhine State well and another interviewee checked information with the help of her local stringer and other colleagues (R5; R2).

One respondent mentioned problems in talking with some female refugees. Probably because they were embarrassed about what had happened to them, some women used paraphrases to describe that they had been raped. This way of talking was interpreted by this respondent as evidence that the women were probably not lying (R3).

Some respondents agreed that, despite journalistic techniques and knowledge of human nature, it was impossible to finally check all the information they got. Hence, they trusted their intuition (R5; R6; R8) or considered the suffering they eye-witnessed on-site and the behaviour of people they met in Myanmar (R2; R3; R8).

Three respondents insisted on the importance of telling the audience that their news stories about the Rohingya conflict could not be checked one hundred per cent and that quotes should be understood as the personal opinion of their informants (R1; R3; R6). One interviewee added that the audience should also be informed about the difficult situation for journalists in Myanmar (R3).

### **Doubtful Neutrality in Reporting the Conflict**

The difficulties in gathering and checking information about the Rohingya conflict led to the question whether or not a balanced news coverage was possible at all, and the majority of the respondents shared doubts about neutrality in reporting the Rohingya conflict. Two correspondents conceded that the Rohingya's situation triggered "strong compassion" (R1) and that it was not easy to be unbiased when dealing with Myanmar's government and in an allegedly hostile environment for journalists (R2). Several journalists admitted that international news reporting about the Rohingya conflict was not one hundred per cent balanced and unbiased. They conceded a "Muslim bias" (R2), "hardening attitudes in the different parties" (R4) and one-sided reporting by some international journalists (R6). Nevertheless, all respondents proved to have extensive knowledge and sophisticated opinions about the conflict. Some of them questioned neutrality against the backdrop of working conditions under which journalistic investigation was basically limited to refugee camps, and interviews were conducted predominantly with Rohingya, not with other people affected by the conflict who were living in Rakhine State (R2; R3; R6). One respondent noted that the common use of the term Rohingya in international media already showed there was bias in reporting the conflict (R4).

Some respondents said the main reason for the one-sided reporting was that restrictions hindered journalists from investigating in Myanmar and particularly in Rakhine State (R2; R3; R4). Furthermore, the information provided by Myanmar's government and military was allegedly untrustworthy, and additionally the fear of those Burmese who refused mainstream opinion and hatred towards the Rohingya made it difficult to interview people who were neither pro nor contra the Rohingya (R2). Some respondents considered that the difference between what they saw in refugee camps and what they heard in conversations with radical Buddhist monks in Myanmar was evidence of people accepting unbalanced and biased news reporting (R3; R8).

The respondents had differing views on the possible influence of their reports on the conflict. On the one hand, interviewees linked reports by international media with international political pressure on Myanmar's government and military (R5; R6), with Aung San Suu Kyi's decision to speak out on the conflict (R3; R8) and also with the first official and juridical investigations of a few crimes that were uncovered by journalists (R1; R2). One respondent added the episode in which Myanmar's government told what he dubbed a "giant PR story" (R8) about the return of a single Rohingya family to Myan-

mar. On the other hand, one interviewee saw no notable effects at all of international media reporting on Aung San Suu Kyi's policies or the military's attitude (R7).

Some respondents acknowledged that international news coverage even caused resistance to and criticism of the international political pressure on the country and possibly led to a "circle-the-wagons mentality" (R8) within Myanmar's society. Nevertheless, they did not hold the reporting journalists responsible for those dynamics (R2; R4). Some interviewees wished that media could have a stronger influence on the conflict and hoped it might lead to an "attitude change in Myanmar" (R1).

Moreover, some respondents would welcome media reports on the Rohingya conflict having a stronger influence on their German audience. They hoped to attract the audience's attention to the conflict and motivate recipients to make donations to humanitarian organisations active in Rakhine State and refugee camps, or even to push the German federal government to intervene politically (R2; R4; R6). They were convinced that public awareness of the conflict and a deeper understanding of its complexity have arisen since they intensified the news coverage (R1; R3; R4). However, according to some interviewees, readers' letters to the editor or online comments oftentimes did not express serious concern about the conflict, but mistakenly equated the conflict with the situation of refugees in Europe or even with jihadism (R2; R5). Some respondents remembered readers' comments which were Islamophobic or criticised journalists for being too credulous (R2; R3).

## Conclusions and Perspectives

To conclude, the doubts shared by many respondents about neutrality in reporting the Rohingya conflict indicate a serious dilemma in international media reporting; on the one hand, the respondents tried to adhere to the scheme of balanced and unbiased reporting, but on the other hand, they admitted there was an inevitable imbalance and even accepted, to a certain degree, a lack of neutrality due to this conflict's complexity. Foreign correspondents from other countries must face the same or similar problems as their colleagues from Germany.

Ethnicity has been an important factor in social cohesion in Myanmar society, ever since Myanmar's borders were defined by the colonial power. Especially in the rural border areas such as Northern Rakhine State, ethnicity has been a source of severe conflict. In reporting about ethnic minorities or conflicts, foreign correspondents—even those who live in Myanmar—still depend on the support of local stringers and interpreters. This is even more true for those foreign correspondents based not in Myanmar but in neighbouring Thailand, India or Singapore. The barriers of culture and language cannot be denied and cannot be overcome without the help of local stringers and interpreters who play an important role in the system of international reporting.

According to the journalists interviewed, the climax of violence in 2017 can be also seen as a turning point in the situation of media workers. Since August 2017, they have focussed on reporting the mass exodus of the Rohingya to Bangladesh. In parallel with this exodus, the work of journalists has become more and more restricted by Myanmar's government, as respondents stated. Meanwhile, the attitude of parts of the population

of Myanmar towards international reporters also seems to have dramatically changed and, as do workers for human rights or aid organisations, many of them face concrete problems, some even physical threats. Furthermore, access to rural Northern Rakhine State, which had always difficult for political and infrastructural reasons, has become nearly impossible.

The conflict that has been unsettling Rakhine State for decades obviously involves many different truths and the question remains as to who holds the power to define the truth? The Rohingya conflict is a long-lasting dispute between Myanmar's central government and a Muslim population group fighting for recognition as an ethnic minority. Probably, this conflict will not and cannot be solved in the near future. Due to the climax of violence and the mass exodus in 2017, this conflict has developed extreme dynamics that mean it is impossible to predict when or why the conflict will be the focus of international media again. But thus far in the field of communications, this conflict can be considered a textbook example of how limiting the freedom of the media can lead to unbalanced and biased reporting which, in turn, might lead to positions hardening even further.

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# Thailand's Flawed 2019 Election Confirms the Country's Deep Political Divide

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## The Political Context

After having been postponed a number of times and over a number of years, the Thai military dictators (the National Council for Peace and Order, or NCPO, in office after their coup of 22 May 2015) finally allowed elections to be held on 24 March 2019.<sup>1</sup> These numerous delays occurred despite the cost of aborting a newly drafted constitution in September 2015. Clearly, the military dictators wanted to spend more time in power. However, it would be a fundamental misperception to consider this election a return to democracy, or the coup as the beginning and the election as the end of a clearly demarcated period of Thai politics. Rather, both events represent elements of an era that began in earnest with the election of telecom-tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra, chairperson (in fact, owner would be a better description) of the Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thai) party on 6 January 2001. At that time, Thaksin was threatened with disqualification from politics altogether having submitted wrong asset declarations when serving as a minister in a previous government. While all other similar cases did indeed see the disqualification of the accused by the Constitutional Court, in Thaksin's case, the court voted 8:7 in his favour in, what one newspaper called, a 'murky verdict' (*The Nation*, 4 August 2001). Obviously, a very high-ranking member of the Thai traditional elite had intervened with the judges as the upper echelons of Thai society still hoped Thaksin would bring a better political-economic future. Moreover, he had out-classed all his competitors in the elections, and was generally seen as a new-generation, visionary political leader.

However, these hopes were rapidly overtaken by a very different perspective. As early as October 2001, another high-ranking member of that elite, former two-times prime minister Anand Panyarachun, ominously warned, "Danger caused by people with dictatorial inclinations has not disappeared from Thailand" (*Matichon*, 8 October 2001). This

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1 In the headline of my chapter, I am relatively polite by using the adjective 'flawed'. The Economist, not known for mincing its words, came up with a headline that captured the situation more accurately: "After an ineptly rigged election, Thailand's junta will cling to power" (Anon, 2019c).

was followed, in December 2001, when, in his annual birthday speech, King Bhumibol himself held Thaksin to account. In an editorial, the *Bangkok Post* (7 December 2001) noted

It was nothing short of a slap in the face for Thaksin Shinawatra....[He] was made to face up to reality by the one person who can truly make him listen—His Majesty the King ... He said arrogance, intransigence, disunity, and double standards would be the ruin of this country. The normally defiant prime minister could only sit and smile [before, as viewers could watch on TV, his face turned deep-red, M.N.].

These two statements were followed by a long series of actions designed to uproot what critics called the ‘Thaksin regime’. These actions included multiple mass public protests, the repeated dissolution of Thaksin’s political parties, the confiscation of a big part of his assets and a dubious court verdict that sent Thaksin into self-exile in order to avoid his two-year prison sentence. This process culminated in the military coup of 19 September 2006. Yet, in the 2011 elections, Thaksin made what the conservative elite must have seen as a shock come-back. He nominated his youngest sister, Yingluck, as the Phuea Thai party’s leading candidate, though she lacked any political experience. Nevertheless, after only 49 days of the election campaign, she became Thailand’s first female prime minister. Again, Anand Panyarachun saw the need for issuing a warning. He “called on all Thais to fight against any move to bring the government, court and legislature under the control of one person or group,” otherwise, Thailand could encounter ‘tyranny’ (*The Nation*, 3 October 2011).

Yingluck’s term was overshadowed by a poorly designed and implemented rice-pledging scheme that was basically a subsidy policy, in which the state bought farmers’ rice at a much higher rate than the market price. Furthermore, her term was dominated even more by an amnesty scheme that might have brought Thaksin back to Thailand, something that the conservative elite and people holding strong anti-Thaksin political views could never accept.<sup>2</sup> Initial protests against the amnesty developed—pushed by Royalist Democrat Party Members of Parliament—into a movement to remove Yingluck and her political party (meaning: Thaksin Shinawatra) from power. She tried to save her government by dissolving Parliament and calling new elections. These elections were strongly sabotaged by the Democrat party’s protest leaders, and finally declared invalid by the Constitutional Court. The People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), as the protest group was known, even attempted a civilian *coup d’état* (Nelson, 2014). Though this attempt failed, it prepared the ground for the ‘real thing’—a military coup on 22 May 2014, led by Prayuth Chan-ocha.

Chan-ocha’s group of military officers, making up the junta (NCPO), considered the coup of their predecessors in 2006 a waste. One of their standard concerns was that the opportunities for political-legal engineering opened up by their own coup must not be wasted again. First and foremost, this concerned the eradication of any influence

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2 It is somewhat ironic that this particular amnesty aroused the moralistic indignation it did. After all, the people responsible for military coups routinely have amnesties for themselves included in the constitutions written under their rule. The NCPO is no exception.

the Shinawatra clan still wielded in Thai politics. However, they also wanted to prescribe the future shape of Thailand by determining a comprehensive policy platform. To start this process, the so-called 'Interim Charter,' in Article 27, established the National Reform Council that was tasked with developing reform proposals in the fields of politics, administration of state affairs, law and judicial process, local administration, education, the economy, energy, public health and environment, mass communication, society and any other areas the council thought needed reform.<sup>3</sup> This intention of shaping the future of Thailand found its final expression in the 2017 Constitution, which was prepared by an NCPO-appointed committee (after, as mentioned above, the junta had rejected the 2015 version, which had been drafted by another NCPO-appointed committee). Chapter XVI on 'National Reform' expanded the fields mentioned above by references to law and the judicial process. Moreover, Section 65 mandated the state to develop a 'national strategy', for which a number of legal instruments were devised resulting in a 20-year national strategic planning framework. This strategy, drawn up by the NCPO in the form of its government, and various expert committees, would have to be followed by all subsequent governments. The result would thereby reduce even a fully elected government to some sort of administrative committee that would have to implement the NCPO's policy platform for many years to come. A newspaper comment made in the run-up to the elections described the situation this way,

No matter what policies they [the political parties] campaign on, winning parties that form the government must enforce the junta-dictated national strategy otherwise they can be impeached. In this light as an exercise of the people's will, the election is meaningless. (*The Nation*, 30 January 2019)

Moreover, from the beginning, the NCPO had emphasised that elections, meaning the end of their direct rule, did not signify a return to democracy. Rather, the elections would usher in what they called a 'transition period' of at least five years. Only afterwards, people could start thinking about moving towards a greater degree of democracy. To implement this scheme, the NCPO had its constitution drafting committee add an appointed Senate (250 members) to the elected House (500 members, comprising 350 constituency MPs, and 150 party-list MPs) in a mixed-member proportional system, or MMP, called 'mixed-member apportionment [MMA] system' in the Thai case, with a single vote for the constituency MPs, and no threshold. This Senate, handpicked by the NCPO, was empowered to vote with the House on who would become prime minister. In practical terms, this meant the NCPO-Senate only needed 126 elected MPs to push through its preferred prime minister, coup leader Prayuth, although as far as the House was concerned, this would lead to a minority government. And since the Senate term was set at five years, while that of the House was four years, the same Senate could be used in this way twice, bringing the possible domination of post-election Thai politics by the NCPO to eight years. Therefore, observers of Thai politics calculated that the NCPO, in one way or another, would continue to wield substantial power for at least one more decade after its direct rule of five years (2014 to 2019) had come to an end.

3 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (Interim), B.E. 2557 (2014) (unofficial translation prepared by the Foreign Law Bureau, Office of the Council of State; this office is the government's legal advisory body, it also screens all legislation).

Consequently, probably the most outstanding phrase of the anti-NCPO forces in this election was to prevent the NCPO from a ‘prolongation of power’ (*kansuebthot amnat*). Thus, in the election campaign discourse, there was a distinction between political parties that were in favour of such a prolongation, and those who opposed it. This was mirrored by the view that this election represented a struggle between two camps, such as ‘democracy versus NCPO’, or ‘pro or versus NCPO’ (in terms of political ideologies, ‘conservatism versus liberalism’). The liberal mass circulation *Khao Sod* (7 January, 2019) summed up a column on the issue by saying, “The question then is whether or not one wants the ‘NCPO’ (Anon, 2019a). Related distinctions connected with the key goal of the NCPO mentioned above were ‘Prayuth versus Thaksin’, or ‘NCPO versus Thaksin’. In a more general sense, an academic commentator observed that the election was not merely about who will be in government “but (about) the very form of Thailand’s political system,” with the trend suggesting the voting would lead to a “semi-authoritarian regime” (Prajak, 2019).<sup>4</sup>

## The Political Party Landscape in the 2014 Elections

Obviously, it poses a problem for a military regime if it wants to keep as much of its power as possible, while also benefiting from the increased local legitimacy and international recognition that come with elections. Relatively early in the process leading to the elections, in May 2018, the secretary-general of the Bhumjaithai Party, Supachai Jaisamut, “believed [that] Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha [who doubled as the chief of the junta, NCPO] would definitely enter politics. One reason for this, he suggested, was that the NCPO is now concerned its efforts over the past four years may come to naught if it is not permitted to keep pulling the strings as a major political player in the future” (Aekarach and Prasit, 2018). This ‘major political player’ could only take the shape of a political party. This party was called *Phalang Pracharat*, which roughly translates as ‘People-State Force’, ‘Pracharat’ being the name of the NCPO-government’s version of populist policies, to which all major parties were committed, some more, some less.

### Phalang Pracharat Party (PPRP)

In other words, the NCPO established its own electoral vehicle, hoping it would gain enough MPs in the elections enabling it to become the core party in creating a coalition government (any other kind of government being prevented by the MMP election system). In doing so, the NCPO followed the example of previous military regimes, the latest having been the *Samakhi Tham Party* that was established by the 1991 coup group that called itself the ‘National Peace Keeping Council’ (NPKC). The aim was to enable then-coup leader, Suchinda Kraprayoon, to assume the premiership after the election

4 It might be noted in this context that the phrase previously in vogue, ‘transition to democracy,’ has all but disappeared from academic writings on Thai politics. In Thailand, the form of government is sometimes put as ‘semi-authoritarian, or as ‘Thai-style authoritarianism,’ meaning a ‘hybrid system’ that combines authoritarianism with electoral and democratic elements. Internationally, one might categorize the country’s political regime as ‘electoral authoritarianism.’

of 22 March 1992. The method of assembling such parties was similar, as dictated by Thai political structures. That is, government ministers and former PDRC activists recruited a number of leaders of regional political cliques that each commanded a good number of former MPs. Since there were three such leaders, the Thai press liked to refer to them as 'the three amigos', or *sam mitr*, suitably emphasising the entirely informal nature of this procedure (after the election, the newspaper Prachachart Thurakit, 14 April 2019, identified ten factions or cliques in the PPRP (Anon, 2019b). The former MPs in the *sam mitr* cliques were supposed to command secure networks of vote canvassers (*hua kha-naen*) and solid voter banks in their respective local areas that would guarantee their re-election under the new party banner. At the same time, these cliques would poach MPs from existing parties to fill up the new party's ranks of prospective MP candidates with good to excellent electoral prospects (it might be mentioned in passing that Thaksin Shinawatra, though not a coup leader, employed a similar method in creating his Thai Rak Thai electoral juggernaut).

On 30 January 2019, the party officially invited Prayuth Chan-ocha to be its prime ministerial candidate (the constitution mandated parties to name up to three such candidates; they did not need to run as MPs in the election). A columnist commented

"The whole business about the party's leaders who are his [Prayuth's] former staff extending a formal invitation for him to be their prime ministerial nominee appears overly theatrical. Do these leaders want people to really believe that each of them is acting independently and never planned it beforehand? This is on the eve of an election. They shouldn't play people for fools." (Atiya, 2019)

While the four ministers at the core of establishing the PPRP resigned their positions, Prayuth remained the fully functional (meaning: not merely caretaker) prime minister.<sup>5</sup> Partly to avoid legal problems, Prayuth did not join the party's election campaign, and he attended none of the numerous election debates among the PM candidates. He conducted his very own campaign, camouflaged as the PM visiting the people or inspecting government activities. Government budget also kept flowing towards the people, an activity that in earlier times (such as during the Thaksin government) would have been heavily criticised as vote buying. Prayuth only made a brief appearance at the PPRP's final big election event in Bangkok.

### Phuea Thai Party (also spelt Pheu Thai; PT)

Phuea Thai was the core party of the 'Thaksin camp'. After previous incarnations—Thai Rak Thai and Phalang Prachachon—had been dissolved by the Constitutional Court. This camp had won all elections that were held since 2001 (2008, 2007, and 2011; they also won two elections that the Constitutional Court declared invalid, in 2006 and 2014).

5 Prayuth also remained the head of the military junta. In this position, he was the bearer of absolute sovereignty above the state. As the PM, he occupied a formal position within the state, and below his position as the chief of the junta. The NCPO-engineered 2017 constitution stipulated that only a post-election government assuming office would make him lose the position as the PM and abolish the NCPO. Thus, even after the election had been held, Prayuth still variously used his absolute power as the junta chief, based on the infamous article 44 of the 'Interim Charter.'

Phuea Thai's main competitor, the conservative-royalist Demo-crat Party, were simply unable to compete in the electoral field. This was one major reason why the traditional establishment, via the military, used the means of military coups in 2006 and 2014 to remove a political camp from access to power that they intensely disliked.

With the NCPO-engineered constitution of 2017, an attempt was made to reduce the number of MPs that PT could gain through changes in the electoral system. The previous mixed-member majoritarian election system (MMM) always provided PT with a disproportionate number of MPs. Phuea Thai won many constituency MPs, and through a second party-list vote (PT mostly gained many more party-list votes than its constituency MPs received combined), they also gained high additional numbers of party-list MPs. To prevent this from happening again, the NCPO-appointed drafters of the 2017 constitution, changed MMM to MMP. Thereby, a party's total seat claim would depend on the number of votes that its constituency MPs received. Consequently, the party leaders were worried they would not get any party list MPs, because PT's total proportional seat claim was anticipated to be lower than the number of its winning constituency MPs.

In order to circumvent this attempt to reduce its number of MPs by stipulating MMP,<sup>6</sup> Phuea Thai chose to establish one major branch party, Thai Raksa Chart (TRC). Other parties connected to PT were Phuea Chart, mainly collecting previous Red Shirt politicians, and Pra-chachart, a group of Muslim politicians who stood in the southern Ma-lay-Muslim provinces. TRC had the task of bringing in party-list MPs by standing in constituencies where PT thought its candidate was not strong enough to win. In practice, this meant that PT fielded candidates only in about 250 of the altogether 350 constituencies. The remaining 100 constituencies were left to TRC. This plan took a decidedly spectacular turn when TRC registered as its prime ministerial candidate none other than the elder sister of the present king, Ubonratana (this could not have been done without Thaksin Shinawatra's leading participation). Technically, she was eligible since she had married an American and had lived in the United States for many years. Thus, she had lost her royal status, in theory becoming a commoner. After her divorce many years ago, she returned to Thailand, received a low-status nobility title, took part in royal activities, was generally seen as a normal member of the royal family and referred to as Princess Ubonratana. She did not apply in person. Her application form, with picture, was brought to the registration venue by the TRC leaders. She declared that she wanted to use her rights as an ordinary citizen.

This happened in the morning of 8 February 2019. It took until the evening when a unique intervention by the king led to the collapse of this attempt to gain electoral advantage. Rama X issued a Royal Command (phratchaongkan), published in the Royal Government Gazette, denouncing the drawing of his sister into politics—when the monarchy should be above politics—as a 'highly inappropriate action.' This prompted

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6 This might sound as if the author is against MMP. I am not. However, I decidedly prefer the German system with two votes, and a threshold. My critical position here is informed by the fact that this constitutional engineering was not used to arrive at the most appropriate and just election system. Instead, the system was used as a tool in the political struggle by the military regime against an electorally superior antagonist.

the Election Commission (EC) to disqualify the princess. Calls for the dissolution of TRC followed almost immediately. These calls were based on Article 92 of the Political Party Act that stipulated, in case the EC had sufficient evidence that a political party acted in a way that could be seen as “being hostile to the democratic regime of government headed by the king,” it must petition the Constitutional Court to dissolve that party. The EC, within a few days, evaluated the TRC’s nomination of the princess in this way and petitioned the Constitutional Court (CC) to dissolve the party. According to the same article of the Political Party Act, the CC must investigate the case, and if it found ‘credible evidence’ of wrongdoing has to dissolve the party and withdraw the rights of the concerned party leaders to stand as candidates in elections. Unsurprisingly, on 7 March 2019, the CC issued its verdict to dissolve TRC (for the central verdict, see Khamwinitchai, 2019). However, since no actual harm had been done, since the party executives involved did not intend to be hostile to the democratic regime and had apologised to the public, and since they professed to support constitutional monarchy, their rights to stand in elections were only withdrawn for ten years (it could have been a life-long disqualification).<sup>7</sup>

As a result, Phuea Thai lost the possibility of fielding candidates in the constituencies previously given to the TRC, because the registration period had already ended. Of course, it also lost the votes that TRC candidates were supposed to gain in order to add to the PT camp’s number of party-list MPs.

## The Democrat Party

The Democrat Party (DP) is Thailand’s oldest political party. It was founded in 1946 with the expressed aim to further the interests of the royalist camp after the absolute monarchy had been overthrown in 1932. Up until today, the DP has a conservative-royalist political orientation, but also follows liberal economic approaches. The DP is member of the Liberal International. The Democrat Party’s leader at the time of the elections was Abhisit Vejjajiva. In 2010, after having achieved the position of prime minister through political trickery and military intervention in 2008, he was politically responsible for using the military to perform a violent crackdown on anti-government (‘Red Shirt’) protesters, costing the lives of almost one hundred people, mostly unarmed protesters. While his military predecessors, who did the same in 1973 (Thanom Kittikachorn), and 1992 (Suchinda Kraprayoon), were socially and politically stigmatised as a result of their actions, it had not been a problem for Abhisit to remain chairperson of the DP.

However, some time before the election, the DP called on all its members to elect a new chairperson rather than having a much smaller circle of leading politicians make the decision. Abhisit prevailed over his main competitor, Warong Dechgitvigrom, who belonged to the PDRC faction of the party. Since this faction was expressly pro-Prayuth, it did not take it lightly when Abhisit, shortly before the election, started a public relations drive in which he declared that with him, the Democrats would never support a

7 For an initial interpretation of the verdict, see Mérieau (2019). Interestingly, she mentions that the Thai CC, in arguing its case against the TRC, had also referred to the concept of ‘militant democracy’ (wehrhafte Demokratie), which was included in the German Basic Law in Article 21 (2).

Prayuth-led government (in fact, this had been his stance since at least November 2018, when he had declared that he would not join the Phalang Pracharat Party in returning Prayuth to the position of PM). Months earlier, Abhisit had already declared that he would never enter into a coalition with the Phuea Thai Party (because, from his perspective, it embodied the corrupt and despised ‘Thaksin regime’), and that he expected the Democrats to win at least 100 MPs. Furthermore, the party would only be part of a coalition government if it could be its core component. If he could not achieve these goals, he would step down from the chairpersonship of the party. Obviously, this was a very tall order. Indeed, this strategy almost necessitated that his party would be in opposition as he had excluded joining coalition governments with both parties that were expected to gain the highest numbers of MPs, PT and PPRP. The Democrats found themselves in a role they were not accustomed to: instead of being a major competitor in the electoral race, the DP had become an ‘also ran’, or, as the Thai press called it, a ‘variable party’ (*phak tuaprae*), meaning one of those parties needed to fill up the numbers for forming a coalition government led by a core party.

As if this was not enough to make life difficult for the Democrats, a new and formidable player appeared on the scene—the Future Forward Party.

### Future Forward Party

The Future Forward Party (FFP) was launched in March 2018 by the scion of Thailand’s largest auto-parts manufacturer, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, a billionaire who had long been a participant in activities dealing with causes of social and political reform. The co-founder was Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, a well-known young critical law-lecturer at Thammasat University, and a key member of the progressive Nitirat group (‘Enlightened Jurists’) at the university’s Faculty of Law (McCargo and Peeradej, 2015). Piyabutr had long campaigned for reforming the country’s harsh lese majesty law, without, for political reasons, pursuing this issue further in the new party. Using European standards, the party’s political orientation could perhaps best be described as liberal-democratic, with a modestly progressive outlook, or somewhat centre-left. The party appealed to the younger and mostly urban generation of people who were fed up with the old political options—including PT, the Democrats, certainly PPRP—and that harboured feelings of “rising discontentment with the extant political order” (Kasian, 2019). Future Forward had a decidedly critical policy platform that could not but anger the powers-that-be, including proposals to abolish conscription, to drastically reduce the number of generals in the armed forces, to roll back policies initiated by the NCPO, and to substantively rewrite the NCPO’s constitution. However, it was for even more fundamental reasons that some observers felt that FFP was a bigger threat to the ruling establishment than even Thaksin, who they had fought for so long. Voranai Vanijaka, a well-known columnist, expressed it this way

“Thaksin’s alleged crime was his attempt to change the power dynamic among the elites. That’s just rich people bickering against each other, while using poor people in the streets. It’s a tale as old as time. Thanatorn’s alleged crime is fermenting a revolution of the mind that could lead to the changing of social hierarchy and traditional

status quo. That ... is what we called a people's revolution. As old as time, it's a tale most feared by the traditional establishment. ... If the people no longer adhere to traditions, then the generals lose control of the hearts and minds of the people. And if the generals lose control of the cultural mindset, then the generals lose control of the country, even if they win the elections." (Voranoi, 2019)

Similarly, columnist Wasant Techawongtham stated,

"The main point that draws the wrath of the junta loyalists is this: Mr Thanathorn dares to challenge the military's historical and present supremacy over Thai society, the bureaucracy's centralised power and the oligarchy's dominance over Thai life and economy. His party's priority aims to restructure the country's archaic power structure. It's something no political parties, past or present, have dared to vocalise or highlight." (Wasant, 2019)

Given this positioning of the FFP, it was unsurprising that, both before and after the elections, the party came under heavy attack by right-wing forces. The FFP leaders were accused of being "hostile toward the country's democratic system in which the King is revered as the head of state", the reason for which TRC was dissolved, (*Bangkok Post*, 6 April 2019), and being "a threat to national security and the monarchy" (Thana, 2019). Prominent critical journalist Pravit Rojanaphruk felt that things had become so bad that they resembled "Witch hunt, paranoia and hysteria," and he warned, "Let's Not Succumb to Political Hysteria" (Pravit, 2019).

However, before the FFP could become the target of widespread hate speech on social media, it had to overcome rather practical electoral problems. In his pre-election assessment of the party's electoral prospects, Duncan McCargo pointed out that the party "lacks local organization, including networks of the vote canvassers (*hua khanaen*) who play a crucial role in mobilizing the electorate at the constituency level" (McCargo, 2018). In any event, it seemed that FFP decided to forgo the use of these traditional means of local voter mobilisation altogether. McCargo also noted that the FFP lacked people "with enough name recognition" (McCargo, 2018). However, as the election campaign period proceeded, the FFP—and especially Thanathorn himself—developed into such a public sensation that one could speak of a "Thanathon phenomenon," or even "Thanathon fever" (*Matichon*, 24 February 2019). The party, especially Thanathorn, gained such an extremely high public media presence that it could mainly rely on it in order to gain votes.

These were the four political parties that received the most public attention during the election campaign, and that were thought to win the biggest portion of MPs. However, there were a number of other, mostly regional or personality-centred parties that were supposed to gain more modest numbers of representatives, such as Bhumjaithai, Chart Thai Pattana, Chart Pattana, Seree Ruam Thai, and New Economy. Some special interest was given to the Action Coalition for Thailand Party, because it was informally led by the former leader of the PDRC, Suthep Thaugsuban and because its main areas of contestation overlapped with the main stronghold of the Democrat Party in the (non-Muslim) South of Thailand. Altogether, a record number of 81 political parties stood in this election, of which 77 received votes (number 77 received 183 votes nationwide).

This high number can be attributed to the new MMP system without threshold. Most of these groups could not really be called political parties. They did not represent any aggregated societal interests beyond the desire of an individual (mostly male) person to be called and treated as a party leader for a few months. These types of parties did not have noticeable political activities before or after the elections.

## The election results

From the perspective of democracy idealists, the Thai voters should have been happy to shake off the yoke of five long years of military dictatorship and decisively reject the candidates running under the banner of the NCPO party, Phalang Pracharat, which promoted military dictator Prayuth Chan-ocha as the future parliament-backed prime minister. However, we knew that, in Thailand, authoritarian political culture did not only have a long history, but also the backing of a large sector of the population. This included a considerable number of civilian experts, who were only too willing to help to actively push the NCPO's 'reform agenda' as members of the junta's various committees, among them, what they pretentiously called the 'National Legislative Assembly'. Nevertheless, it was a bit surprising that PPRP gained the highest number of votes (8,433,137), followed by PT (7,920,630), FFP (6,265,950), Democrats (3,947,726), and Bhumjaithai (3,732,883). The other parties received fewer than one million votes each, with Seree Ruam Thai having the highest number at 826,530 votes (preliminary figures according to an untitled Election Commission PDF file, dated 28 March 2019). The numbers looked somewhat different when we turn to the constituency MPs that the parties won. Here, Phuea Thai won by far the highest number of seats with 137 seats (but down from 204 in the 2011 election), followed by Phalang Pracharat with 97, Bhumjaithai with 39 (up from 29 in 2011), and the Democrats with 33 MPs (down from 115 in 2011). The surprisingly high 30 constituency seats for Future Forward were, in part, due to vote transfers from the disbanded TRC. Since Phuea Thai did not stand in these constituencies, FFP was the next best option for followers of PT/TRC. After these parties, there was a big gap to Chart Thai Pattana and Prachachat that each won six seats, and the Action Coalition and Chart Pattana with one MP each. Since an MMP/MMA system was in operation, these constituency MPs were still to be complemented by party-list MPs.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, things became problematic, compounded by the fact that, in terms of electoral camps, and seats given to 'variable parties', the election did not produce a clear winner. Since Phuea Thai won the highest number of MPs, Thai parliamentary tradition prescribed that it had the first shot at forming a coalition government (although PPRP tried to argue that its highest 'popular vote' should give it this right). To pre-empt any moves by PPRP, PT pressed ahead, and, on 27 March 2019, called a press conference to

8 For some analytical remarks on how the parties fared in Thailand's regions, including maps, see the website <https://www.thaidatapoints.com>, which was operated by Joel Selway and Allen Hicken. At the time of writing (23 April 2019), they have pieces on Phuea Thai, Future Forward, and the Democrats. They also planned to do a simulation of how many votes/seats PT could have gained, had it not established TRC as a separate entity.

present its coalition of six 'pro-democracy' parties to the public, including the signing of a formal accord among those parties (Jintamas and Asaree, 2019). Besides Phuea Thai, these parties included Future Forward, Seree Ruam Thai, Prachachart, Phuea Chart, Phalang Puangchon Thai, and New Economy. This coalition had a paper-thin majority of 253 seats (importantly, this number included the party-list MPs) in the 500-seat House. The PPRP-camp in the narrow sense had only 123 seats, while the 'variable parties' thought to tend towards joining PPRP commanded 70 seats. Consequently, the Democrat Party, with 54 seats, held the key for this camp. If the DP MPs decided to join the opposition in the House, the PPRP could never hope to form a coalition government that had a majority in the House. Yet, the Democrats were divided. Reportedly, perhaps as many as 35 MPs, belonging to the PDRC faction, were prepared to join a Prayuth-led coalition government whereas, after the resignation of party-leader Abhisit, the remaining MPs preferred to regenerate the party while serving in the opposition. At the same time, the New Economy Party's six MPs also showed signs of doubt as to whether they should really be in the PT-led coalition.

As if this situation was not already complicated enough, it was made worse by the unexpected weeks-long debate about how to correctly (with respect to both the constitution and the election law) calculate the party-list MPs that parties should be allocated. This was far from being a merely technical issue. Rather, how it would be resolved would decide if the PT camp still had a majority or would lose it. At the centre of this question were the party-list MPs of the Future Forward Party. In the initial calculation, the FFP had received 57 such MPs, adding to the 30 it had won in the constituency contests. The recalculation obviously favoured by the Election Commission would reduce the FFP's number of party-list MPs by seven to only 50, instead giving those seats to single-MP parties, which would have made the House comprising 26 or 27 political parties, of which eleven would only have had a single party-list MP.

Nonetheless, this would have deprived the PT camp of its majority. At this point, it needs to be added this majority, in any case, would have been largely, but not only, symbolic. As mentioned above, the 250 junta-appointed senators were empowered to take part in the vote for prime minister. And they would certainly have voted for the Phalang Pracharat camp. Since the total number of members of the National Assembly was 750, any House majority that wanted to be sure of forming the government would have needed at least 376 MPs. Phuea Thai and the parties allied with it were very far from reaching this goal. Thus, the main purpose of achieving a House majority was to claim popular legitimacy to form the government. After all, the MPs were elected by the people, while the senators (whose names, at the time of writing on 25 April 2019, had not yet been made public) were products of a closed selection by the junta, basically by a handful of its most influential members, among them Prayuth. So, how could millions of votes cast for a majority of MPs in the House simply be invalidated by such a handful of junta power holders via their senators? Such a situation could only confirm the election was 'rigged', as described in *The Economist* article quoted above (Anon, 2019c). The House majority could argue that the election was 'stolen' by the junta, meaning by its Phalang Pracharat Party, in conjunction with its very own 250 senators (some newspapers had referred to them as the NCPO party). In a political sense, the question would then be whether the people, who had voted for the House majority, could accept being

cast aside by the powers-that-be, making it appear as if they had taken part in a fake election. In a legislative sense, relying on the senators would have created a minority government as far as the House was concerned. This would have made it difficult for the government to pass the national budget (to the point of being unable to pass it at all), as well as ordinary laws, because in these cases senators were not empowered to join the voting. It was for these two reasons that the Phalang Pracharat camp also wanted to have a majority in the House. It would provide its government under Prayuth Chan-ocha as the prime minister with at least a certain appearance of democratic legitimacy, and it would make it possible to handle the legislative process more easily.

Yet, the Election Commission was unable, or unwilling, to come to a conclusion about how the party-list MPs should be correctly calculated<sup>9</sup>. Although a number of academics had presented the commission with what seemed to be calculations that conformed to both constitutional and election law, the commission insisted that its calculation did comply with the election law. However, in so doing, the EC perhaps contradicted the constitution (Section 91 of the constitution stipulated how the calculation had to be done; Article 128 of the election law repeated this Section, though it added one more paragraph). In order to solve this problem (or pseudo problem, as many observers believed), the EC petitioned the Constitutional Court for a decision about this matter. The EC argued that the CC was empowered to do so based on the constitution's Section 210, paragraphs 1 and 2. This is not the place to go into detail about the interpretation of these two paragraphs. Suffice to say, neither seemed to have obvious applicability to the EC's problem (for the EC's position on this case, see *Khao samnakngan khanakammakan kanlueaktang*, 2019).

On 24 April 2019, the Constitutional Court rejected the Election Commission's petition. First, the nine CC judges unanimously decided that regarding the question of whether the Organic Law on Elections contradicted the Constitution, the EC could not petition their court directly, but had to go through either the courts of justice or the Ombudsmen. Second, regarding the problem of calculating the party-list MPs, in a vote of seven to two, the judges were of the opinion that this issue belonged to the duties and responsibilities of the EC. However, its petition did not show that the agency had already acted on its duties, and therefore, a problem in the exercise of the EC's powers and duties had not yet occurred (*Khao samnakngan san rattathammanun*, 2019). Needless to say, these decisions by the CC threw a bad light on the EC's legal competence. Furthermore, the decisions also meant that the EC was on its own in deciding which of the formulas for calculating the party-list MPs it should use, and it would have to deal with any political, public, and academic repercussions. Meanwhile in some constituencies, the EC worked on electoral complaints, the re-counting of votes, re-runs, or even re-elections. Due to these circumstances, even four weeks after the election had been held on 24 March 2019, the final result remained unknown, and therefore it could not yet be said which camp had, in fact, won the election, and how the first post-coup government could be formed, and by whom.

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9 For a critical assessment of the EC's performance in the election, see Khemthong (2019).

## Conclusion

With its five years in power and with the elections, did the NCPO achieve its *raison d'être* to eliminate Thaksin Shinawatra's influence on Thai politics? Prominent columnist Thitinan Pongsudhirak seemed convinced it did, with an article headline declaring, "Election augurs end of the Thaksin era" (Thitinan, 2019a). Moreover, he repeated this in a later piece, headlining it, "Thaksin era fading, but Thailand's troubles linger" (Thitinan, 2019b). Obviously, the Phuea Thai Party did not fare as well as in previous elections. This was partly because of the gamble in establishing the Thai Raksa Chart Party, and the nomination of Princess Ubonratana as prime ministerial candidate having badly misfired. In addition, with the junta's Phalang Pracharat, and with the Future Forward parties, PT had new electoral competitors to whom it certainly lost votes. Thaksin himself made the situation much worse by the fact that the princess attended the wedding of one of his daughters in Hong Kong on 22 March 2019 and was pictured in a very close embrace with Thaksin. The reactions followed swiftly. On 28 March 2019, the military's top brass lined up in a rather theatrical fashion (though some found it to be threatening) to declare that Thaksin "did not know his place," and had "disrespected the high institution [the monarchy, M.N.] and failed to maintain his honour and was deservedly stripped of his armed forces alumni awards" (Wassana, 2019). On 30 March, a royal announcement was published in the Government Gazette: "His Majesty the King has recalled the royal decorations bestowed on former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra" (*Bangkok Post*, 30 March 2019). As Thitinan remarked, "The withdrawal of royal decorations is tantamount to being disowned, a pariah, or *persona non grata*" (Thitinan, 2019a). Therefore, Phuea Thai could be forced to try and stand on its own feet. A long time before the elections, prominent historian and columnist, Nidhi Eoseewong, had urged Phuea Thai to loosen its bond with Thaksin, and stated,

"The obligation of a party that received such overwhelming political success can be nothing else but the commitment it has to the enormous number of people supporting the party, and because of that they must be the frontline in the battle for the rights and freedoms of the people." (Nidhi, 2018)

Under the prevailing conditions in April 2019, a less than 'overwhelming political success' in the elections, a lack of fresh and attractive faces at leadership level, and a small membership basis meant that the repositioning and institutionalisation of the party looked like being an uphill struggle. This would not become any easier if the NCPO managed to put together a government with a majority in the House and stay in that position for a full four-year term. Certainly, the memory and influence of Thaksin would decrease even more.

The other major anti-NCPO party, Future Forward, had a problem that was of a more fundamental kind. As mentioned above, the military probably considered Future Forward a bigger threat to the given political order than Phuea Thai as it presented a new model of political culture to the electorate. However, it was not really a new model. One needs to keep in mind that the Thai political order had long been characterised by two competing models of how this order should be structured. In terms of Weberian ideal types, the hegemonic model had been promoted by the traditional power elite, with the

key components of the monarchy and the bureaucracy in both its military and civilian branches. The highest value of the hegemonic model was the official state ideology of ‘Nation, Religion, King’. This model had a collective and paternalistic understanding of the ‘national good’, emphasising an elite-controlled national unity based on obedient and conformist people. This model had been challenged by an understanding that put the people on top, with the key component of equal citizens, and the highest value attributed to the constitution. This model’s key claim to legitimacy was not the elite-defined ‘national good’, but popular sovereignty determined by individual, pluralistic, and diverse independent citizens in a liberal democracy (for details, see Nelson, 2012, 2016). It was this model that the Future Forward Party emphatically, and with youthful vigour, embodied and promoted. In contrast, the NCPO strictly adhered to the traditional model in its present version of an expansive monarchy in alliance with a military-led state apparatus. In this sense, one could certainly say that the NCPO had failed “to induce political obedience from [a large part of] the people” (Kasian, 2019), although it had certainly been successful in its sustained suppression of open dissent.

From this perspective, the FFP represented a bigger threat to the status quo than did the Phuea Thai Party that represented a mix of loyalty to Thaksin, to personalised constituency-level networks of influence and to democratic values. The FFP were more of a threat because, as Voranai put it above, the party stood for “fermenting a revolution of the mind that could lead to the changing of social hierarchy and traditional status quo” (Voranai, 2019). Its electoral success, especially among the young generation of “voters awakened by forces of political populism” (Kasian, 2019), was certainly a cause for serious concern for the NCPO. Shortly after the election, the junta (that still existed with full arbitrary powers, even after the election had been held) brought charges of ‘sedition’ (which had languished in its files since 2015) against FFP leader Thanathon. These charges stemmed from perfectly legitimate protests against the military coup. The NCPO action was called in an editorial in *The Nation*, “A military assault on a political enemy” (*The Nation*, 16 April 2019). Shortly afterwards, the NCPO also brought charges of “contempt of court and importing information that may undermine national security or public order into a computer system, which is a violation of the Computer Crimes Act” (*Bangkok Post*, 17 April 2019) against Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, the FFP’s secretary general. These charges stemmed from a statement on the occasion of the Constitutional Court’s verdict to dissolve TRC, which Piyabutr had read and distributed as a video clip. Angkhana Neelapaijit, a member of Thailand’s National Human Rights Commission, was in attendance when Piyabutr reported to the police and noted, “those campaigning for democracy are [not] above the law, but the authority should ensure that the treatment was not judicial harassment or a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP)” (Kas, 2019). Both Thanathon and Piyabutr demonstrated what they thought of the NCPO’s charges by raising their arms in the, ‘three finger salute’ – a gesture used to protest against the Thai military junta.

The political divide mentioned in the title of this chapter was therefore about these two ideal types of political order that competed in Thailand: the hierarchical, top-down rule by the traditional power elite, and the equality-based, bottom-up rule by the people in a democratic system of government. In the words of Seksarn Prasertkun, a

prominent member of the Octobrists<sup>10</sup>, there was a 'contested area' in Thai society with two currents of thought, the conservatives and the progressives. Both camps tried to convince the people that their respective political worldviews were correct. The conservatives needed to instil thoughts, beliefs, and values from the past in a society that had changed. The progressives, on the other hand, experienced that bringing ideas from the outside world to Thailand was not an easy task at all (Seksarn, 2018). Unsurprisingly, the election of 24 March 2019 demonstrated that the societal forces representing each of these two models, ideal types, currents of thought, or political cultures—that had previously been involved in the protests of the 'yellow shirts' (on the traditional, conservative side) and the 'red shirts' (on the democratic, progressive side)—still existed. These societal forces had produced an electoral outcome in which neither side could claim to be the clear winner, though an advantage was given to the side of 'Thai-style' or 'electoral' authoritarianism.

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10 This expression refers to those student activists involved in the protests of 1973 that brought down Thanom Kittikachorn, to the massacre of students at Thammasat University by right-wing forces in October 1976, and the subsequent flight of most of these students into the jungle to join the Communist Party of Thailand; see Kanokrat (2016).

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# Building integration platforms in multiethnic Malaysia: A tribute to ideas and contributions of Professor Ruediger Korff

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## A tribute: In lieu of an introduction

Professor Ruediger Korff was Professor for Development Sciences from 1998-2000 at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM, or The National University of Malaysia). However, I have known him and his work from way back in 1988, when I was briefly a Volkswagen Stiftung post-doctoral fellow at Bielefeld University, Germany. Then, Professor Korff was completing his PhD field research on urbanization in Bangkok, Thailand. We share an outstanding mentor, the renown German sociologist Professor Hans-Dieter Evers, who remains until today the *sifu* he is to many others and indeed a permanent academic patron to us researchers at UKM.

It is, should I say, the 'Evers Network' that forms the umbrella within and under which numerous influential ideas, concepts, and analytical tools have been generated in the last 40 years or so, led by Professor Evers and expanded and elaborated by his student researchers and colleagues. Ideas such as social reproduction, strategic groups, urbanism and social space, knowledge governance, and many more have emerged from this network since the 1970s. They have been influential as analytical tools in making sense of the 'society, state, and market nexus' – a sociological nexus I developed as a heuristic teaching device – in particular applied to the societies of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The publications resulting from the 40 years of effort by the 'Evers Network' are too many to list here. Nonetheless, a quick googling of the CVs of both Professor Hans-Dieter Evers and Professor Ruediger Korff would reveal the richness, breadth, and depth of the academic endeavour of the 'Evers Network'.

I am fortunate to be associated with academics who belonged to a 'strategic group' academic study that has scholars from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, and I benefitted greatly from their commitment in an intellectual endeavour that has produced many fruitful contributions. Being an anthropologist, I share many interests with Professor Korff, for example, his 'local and global continuum' interest, in particular his article "Local Enclosures of Globalization: The Power of Locality" (*Dialectical Anthropology*, 27(1)

2003: 1-18). My work has always been about 'Malaysia in the village, simultaneously the village in Malaysia', that is, how the global and local become socially woven, in the context of the 'Society, State and Market Nexus.'

I have learnt about and experimented with ideas and concepts developed by the Germany-based 'strategic group' academic study in the last thirty years. I have used them to try to make sense of the complex, inter-ethnic, Malaysian society and its ability to build and sustain a resilient cohesive whole, which, despite imperfections, has managed to thrive over the last seventy years. I contend that it is less challenging to explain why conflict has occurred and violence has broken out in Malaysia; the harder task is actually explaining why it hasn't happened for 50 years, when most observers, local and foreign, have predicted that the 'ethnic time bomb' shall explode anytime.

The brief essay that follows is an attempt to explain how Malaysia has sustained an admirable level of peace and stability for a long time and, indeed, with improved economic conditions has enabled the people to reject violence altogether. Social mobility has improved and poverty considerably declined. Social safety nets are contributing to this harmonious state of existence in Malaysia. I present this essay to a colleague and friend who has my utmost respect, Professor Ruediger Korff.

## Introduction

Of the many, Malaysia is the only emerging country that had a general election in 2018 without violence and bloodshed. It had one 50 years ago on 13th May 1969. Since then, among the developing countries, Malaysia has been perceived by the World Bank and IMF as a model of peace and stability due to its relatively democratic practice, positive economic growth, improved quality of life, and increased social mobility opportunities.

The question often asked by observers is how Malaysia has been able to manage its multiculturalism, to be more exact, its complex multi-ethnicity. What is the integration approach it has successfully adopted and implemented for the last 50 years? This is a conceptual question of policy, implementation, and practice as well as an empirical one. This essay narrates and analyses the evolution of Malaysian society from the end of the Second World War until recently – from social conflict, to stable tension, to social cohesion.

It begins with a brief historical account of why Malaysia chose integration and not assimilation, as in Indonesia, in managing its diversity. There are historical and demographic reasons for making the choice, but it has rarely been explained and has often been taken for granted by scholars and researchers. Then the essay elaborates on the different stages of this evolution and the content of each stage, with empirical evidence. Integration platforms are the key, whereby the efforts involved in building integration platforms are implemented top-down and bottom-up as well as horizontally among the grassroots.

## Building 'integration to platforms' to deal with diversity

The central sociological instrument that has held Malaysia together so far is known as an integration platform. It is an abstract and physical space where differences among the complex multiethnic community find spaces of convergence at various levels of society. Integration platforms have been created in the political, economic, social, and education spheres, all intricately linked through Malaysia's development planning, consisting of five-year development plans, a policy document, and a governance framework for budget and implementation purposes. In a sense, ideologically, economic development was given priority over nation building. This development had a tremendous all-round impact: on poverty eradication, on the increase of general literacy and education performance, on basic infrastructure improvement, and on providing new opportunities to improve the quality of life and subsequently the chances of social mobility. However, not all is rosy and sweet in Malaysia.

The most challenging task over the years has been building viable integration platforms in the nation-building sphere. In other words, sustaining unity in diversity is most challenging because full national unity is yet to be achieved; the country swings between moments of unit and moments of difference. What has been achieved so far, however, is a strong overall national cohesion. Nevertheless, a number of social deficits have yet to be overcome. What is needed is a thorough multi-level national reconciliation guided by the principles of bargaining.

## The evolutionary path: From social conflicts to stable tension to social cohesion

Since 1969, Malaysia has been predicted as having the potential to suffer from serious, bloody, ethnic conflicts every time an economic crisis occurs in Asia. This viewpoint was widely entertained by local and foreign analysts after Malaysia experienced an open, bloody, ethnic conflict on May 13, 1969; a conflict that was attributed, officially and unofficially, to unresolved economic problems within the country. Indeed, the introduction of the New Economic Policy, 1971-1990, to redress the economic roots of the inter-ethnic problem only reaffirmed this viewpoint.

However, to the surprise of many, especially to the 'prophets of dooms', after experiencing a series of economic crises in the last five decades, namely, the 1986-87, the 1997-98 and the recent 2009-10 economic crises, Malaysia remains politically stable and indeed is enjoying a positive economic growth. Admittedly, localized skirmishes, some inter-ethnic and others between social groups, have occurred during this period. However, they have not led to major bloody conflict outbreaks of a proportion comparable those experienced in Sri Lanka or in some Central African countries, where countrywide violent conflicts have dominated the everyday life of the whole population. In short, the general population in those countries lives in constant fear because of the frequency of the perpetrated violence.

However, this relative peace didn't stop Malaysia's own political prophet of doom, Mr. Lim Kit Siang, from republishing his book ten years ago entitled *Time Bombs in Ma-*

*aysia: 30th Anniversary Edition* (2009, original 1978) as if Malaysia had just had its 30th bloody ethnic riot of the May 13th 1969 magnitude. What many have failed to realize is that all the predictions of the prophets of doom, based on a conflict approach, have not come about. Instead, since the major ethnic riot in May 13th 1969, there has been a consistent, long, peaceful period, punctuated once or twice by ethnic skirmishes. Instead, all the riots and conflict, recently, have been happening in the North, in the once famous peaceful Thailand. This year, Malaysia remembers the 13th May 1969 incident after 50 years in a sober and peaceful manner.

Why hasn't the expected conflict taken place in Malaysia? This has also to be explained.

Perhaps, I wish to argue, it is useful to approach this issue sociologically from a cohesion approach with the assumption that the Malaysian plural society has been, generally, in a state of stable tension; it has been surviving in a situation dominated by major societal contradictions but, nonetheless, longitudinally, remains generally cohesive. In other words, there is some level of social cohesion within these societies, but the journey has not been plain sailing. Often the social cohesion has been punctuated by skirmishes, which were resolved quickly.

In other words, if we were to emphasize the negative aspects of the diversity, which usually involve a small percentage of the population, we are then giving a disproportionate focus to one aspect of social reality. As a result, we miss the larger portion of the positive aspect of diversity that the general population is enjoying. The moot question is how we shall redress this analytical myopia. Perhaps we should study the experience and empirical evidence from Malaysia.

## **The evolution: A brief outline**

I wish to present a brief evolution of Malaysia's socio-political experience, in general, and its inter-ethnic relations, in particular since after the Second World War (SWW), which ended in 1945. In short, Malaysia's experience of unity in diversity.

### **The conflict-ridden era in Malaysia (1948-1960)**

It is inevitable to begin looking at Malaysia from the conflict perspective. The first decade after the SWW was a turbulent period. This critical period was characterized by two opposing trends.

On the one side, there was a near anarchy situation as a result of the war-torn conditions and other negative consequences that developed in turn. On the other, the British colonial state was feverishly trying to rebuild the economy and society through various means, some of which were coercive. Finding a middle path between anarchy and harmony was indeed the most difficult task during this period.

What were the major challenges during this period? What were the solutions? Answers to both questions provide us with some ideas of attempts made to weld some form of multiethnic integration as constructed and maintained in Malaysia. Some of the institutional structures are still here today.

## The four major challenges

The four major challenges to multiethnic integration that the British colonial government and the new multiethnic self-government had to deal with in the first decade after the war (1945-55) were the following: ethnic strife, labour unrest, insurgency and terrorism, opposition to a new system of governance.

Ethnic strife was bloody and tragic, as one could imagine. It went on throughout almost the whole of the first decade after the war, occurring sporadically in different parts of the country. The most severe of the ethnic clashes took place just after the war ended, in August 1945, hardly a week after the Japanese had officially surrendered, and the senseless killing went on non-stop for about two weeks in many parts of the country. Initially, it was between the Malays, who sided with the Japanese, and the Chinese, who fought against the Japanese. Later, the ethnic clashes spread to involve Malays and Chinese who neither supported nor opposed the Japanese. However, subsequent clashes were not as severe and widespread, albeit enough to create similar destabilising effects within the country.

Labour unrest, in the form of strikes and rallies, became a common event, too, after the war, particularly in the first half of 1946. The height of the protests was in early 1947 when there was a countrywide strike and demonstration by the rubber plantation workers union, which was demanding better wages. Increasing violence, especially against European planters, was worrying the colonial government to the extent that it had to impose rules that substantially curbed trade union activities in the country. The protesters were mainly Chinese and Indian workers because they formed the majority of the working class in Malaysia then, with the Malays mostly in the peasant sector.

Insurgency and terrorism were behind the labour protests, led by the illegal Malayan Communist Party (MCP), a largely Chinese-dominated organisation. It had a strong influence within the trade union but changed its political strategy when the unions were reduced almost to welfare associations by the colonial government. The MCP then encouraged the unions to lead the workers "to the road of violent action". Murders and attacks on European estate managers and pro-management workers increased alarmingly such that the colonial government was forced to proclaim a State of Emergency throughout Malaya on 18 June 1948. The Emergency lasted for 12 years, until 31 July 1960. Needless to say, the economy was badly affected during the initial Emergency period, especially the modern rural agricultural sector, namely, the large rubber plantations and numerous tin mines all over the country. The ethnic harmony, especially the Malay-Chinese relationship, was tested to breaking point. Sanity prevailed when the majority of the Chinese decided to support the government anti-terrorism campaign. That is why the claim can be made that fighting terrorism is not new in Malaysia, especially in the context of the September 11 event.

The new governance option, unitary vs. federalism: In 1946, the colonial government introduced the idea of a Malayan Union, a constitutional union on the Malay Peninsula, excluding Singapore, which proposed to confer a common citizenship on her peoples, irrespective of race and origin. This political project was opposed by the indigenous peoples, especially Malays, as a program that would have benefited the immigrant population. Malaysia was threatened yet again by a political conflict. The unitary-state

concept of the Malayan Union project was aborted. It was replaced, in February 1948, by a federalism-based governance called the Federation of Malaya scheme.

In short, for more than a decade just after the war, Malaysia had its share of ethnic strife, near anarchy situations, and socio-political instability. This strife was not dissimilar to the situation experienced by Sri Lanka or Bosnia-Herzegovina.

What was done to bring back the stability and how has it been maintained until today? I offer here my opinions in the form of an explanation about the “three pillars of multiethnic integration” that have successfully held Malaysia together until today.

### **The three pillars of development & growth**

The British efforts at reconstructing the economy and restoring stability could be categorized into three types: to restore peace and security, to create an environment suitable for ethnic relations, to introduce planned change through a five-year plan program. Integration platforms became the instrument that allowed these three pillars to be consolidated and bring about positive impacts.

These initiatives necessitated establishing new administrative instrumentalities. To operationalize most of these efforts, the British felt it was necessary to introduce a number of legislations, not only as bureaucratic guidelines but also to regulate society and defuse any opposition that could destabilise the country. Let us examine each of these efforts in turn beginning with those carried out to create peace and security in the country.

Security was of primary importance because the period immediately after the war was rather unstable in both Malaysia and the region. Indeed, in Malaysia, there was racial strife, labour unrest, and insurgency. A number of draconian regulations were introduced to maintain ‘law and order’ and hence ‘peace and stability’, such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the introduction of a ‘pin number’-like a system known more simply as the ‘identity card’. The whole ‘security’ effort and paraphernalia were built around and anchored in the Emergency of 1948-60. It is significant that Malaysia achieved its independence during the Emergency, that is, in 1957. Instead of the military, it was the police force (uniformed and non-uniformed) that was the central instrument in the overall ‘security’ strategy.

Ethnic bargaining was critical to maintaining some measure of socio-political stability within the multiethnic society. This was conducted mainly through a modern electoral process using an umbrella-like coalition model. We have ethnic-based parties, but from day one the British ensured that the major ethnic parties got together to form a team, hence the birth of the UMNO-MCA Alliance party, which was later joined by MIC. The Alliance, later known as the National Front, has been ruling the country since 1955. This coalition model was also adopted by the opposition political parties, such as by the non-Malay-dominated Labour Party and the Malay-dominated Socialist Party, which formed the Socialist Front in the 1960s. Other loosely-organised political party coalitions emerged in the 1980s.

Development planning, a kind of planned change or social engineering strategy, not unlike the Marshall Plan, was introduced by the British mainly then for the purpose of economic reconstruction and management of war-torn Malaysia. It began with

the Draft Development Plan, 1950-55. Since then, 'development planning' through implementing a series of five-year plans has become a permanent feature in Malaysia's attempt to achieve economic development and create a nation. So, we have had nine five-year plans since 1955. The effort to create each of these five-year plans became an important platform for the 'economic bargain' amongst the different ethnic groups, hence the allocation of resources. Most of the plans were financed by the World Bank and the IMF plus funds borrowed from other sources.

It has been the successful combination of these three important elements that has helped Malaysia tremendously to achieve what it has realized so far in its modernization push, but not without its problems. We are aware of the problems and have to work hard continuously to solve all of them amicably.

### Malaysia, a nation in the state of 'stable tension' (1969-2008)

On May 13, 1969, an open and bloody ethnic conflict broke out in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. Ethnic violence also occurred in a few other locations but away from Kuala Lumpur. Although the conflict was localized and successfully contained, the aftermath was felt throughout the country. It was the severest test of ethnic relations in post-Merdeka (post-Independence) Malaysia. It became a watershed event in the political and sociological analyses of Malaysian society, and in the consciousness of individual Malaysians, because it was so traumatic. It conscientized people and most importantly, it redefined the perceptions of our ethnic relations in our country and changed their dynamics.

Ordinary Malaysians were rudely awakened to the fact that the ethnic harmony they had enjoyed since Merdeka could no longer be taken for granted. The government was quick to mobilize all its resources to find immediate remedies and long-term solutions, both economic and political.

The government declared a national Emergency, and democracy was suspended. A National Consultative Council was set up to seek solutions palatable to all the ethnic groups, especially the Malays. The country was governed by a National Operations Council. A Department of National Unity was established in 1969 as a bureaucratic instrument to keep watch over the state of ethnic relations in Malaysia; in 1972, it became a full Ministry of National Unity.

The New Economic Policy was introduced in 1971 to address, in the short and long term, the intra- and inter-ethnic socio-economic differences resulting from the complex of diversities in the country – ethnic, cultural, religious, regional, political orientation, and economic activity. The *Rukunegara* (National Charter) was created as an ideology to be embraced by Malaysians from all walks of life. The fact remains, however, that ethnic diversity is significantly complicated by other forms of diversities, namely, cultural, religious, regional, political orientation, and economic activity.

Malaysia has since been in a state of stable tension, which means that we have been living in a society dominated by many contradictions but have managed to solve most of them through a continuous process of consensus-seeking, negotiation, bargaining, and mediation. Sometimes the process itself became a solution.

The downside of these on-going negotiation between ethnic interest groups in Malaysia is that the potentially negative and divisive ethnic fault lines, based on significant differences in religion, language, dress, and diet, have become highlighted more so than ever before. To the prophets of doom, notably foreign journalists, Malaysia has been perceived as a society facing an imminent break down for the slightest of reasons.

In general, Malaysians remain more optimistic and believe that they have learnt the bitter lesson that nobody gains from an open ethnic conflict manifesting in violence. But they remain sociologically vigilant and chose consensus, not conflict, as the path for the future. Even though each ethnic group espouses a particular form of 'nation-of-intent', the overwhelming majority seems to have accepted Vision 2020, introduced by Mahathir in 1991, with its aim of establishing a 'united Malaysian nation' or *Bangsa Malaysia* by the year 2020. This remains the main official nation-of-intent.

Nevertheless, Malaysians also realize that sweeping things under the carpet is not the solution. Indeed, they have become acutely aware that contestation between the different ethnic groups will not simply disappear and cannot be ignored.

So, instead of choosing street violence as a solution to settle their differences, they decided that the only rational and reasonable avenue left for them was in the realm of public discourse. Nonetheless, Malaysians do sometimes engage themselves in peaceful street demonstrations. Whenever the authorities have felt that the public discourse on ethnic differences, articulated at times in the form of street demonstrations, was slowly getting out-of-hand, they have been swift to dampen the tinder before it breaks into a fire.

As a result, the public discourse on ethnic differences amongst Malaysians since the burst of public demonstrations in the 2008 and 2013 general elections has become highly sensible and has been handled with great sensitivity. The discourse thus far has been a healthy one, whether it is through traditional mass media platforms or through the channels of the more recent electronic media, such as the internet, blogs, SMS, WhatsApps or Instagram.

### **Social cohesion: The only option for Malaysia and Malaysians (2008 onwards)**

The result of the 12th Malaysian General Elections in March 2008 was another watershed in Malaysian post-independence history. The ruling coalition, the National Front (NF) suffered its worst result in the history of Malaysia's general elections. It lost most of its support, losing for the first time ever its two-third's majority in the Lower House of Parliament. This defeat was partly owed to the NF's decision to unlock the door to openness. It was initiated by the Prime Minister of the time, Abdullah Badawi.

Malaysians rushed out in huge waves to the new-founded openness. In the process, Abdullah got trampled and the NF mangled. If the UMNO, the dominant Malay party within the NF, had just now been released from the emergency ward, then the MCA and MIC would still be in intensive care. The new Prime Minister, Najib Razak, had only two years 11 months left to climb the proverbial perpendicular and slippery political wall in order to reach the victorious top in the 13th General Election in March 2013. For him,

failure was not an option. Pragmatism was the only vehicle available to him to ascend to the top.

Najib introduced the '1Malaysia concept' and the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) in April 2009. The same month he took the nation's helm and announced, in July 2009, six National Key Result Areas (NKRAs), in efforts to tackle matters of concern to the people. These were integration platforms he saw fit to be introduced and implemented for the country.

'1Malaysia' was eventually elaborated as a concept in a booklet distributed to the public and also made available on-line. Though similar in spirit and intention with many of the previous top-down concepts, informed by the reality of unity in diversity, this one, in the Malaysian context, is truly Najib's choice. Like other '1Something' slogan around the world, its application in Malaysia fits into and certainly provides the much-needed rhetorical umbrella for the overall pragmatic approach he adopted to survive past March 2013.

Literally, everyone could relate to 1Malaysia, many with hope, some with scepticism, others with cynicism; a few reject it totally, and one or two are just happy to ridicule it. In short, 1Malaysia is a contested concept. As a much-needed PR exercise, 1Malaysia, despite being a contested concept, has successfully occupied the national mass media space, almost daily, hence the all-important rakyat's mind, too. Later, the appearance of slogans such as 'Middle Malaysia', said to have been introduced to rival '1Malaysia', has given further political mileage to the latter.

In January 2010, to give substance to his pragmatic approach based on the 1Malaysia slogan, Najib finally launched the GTP with each of the six NKRAs elaborated.

The NKRAs were reducing crime, combating corruption, improving academic performance, raising the living standards of low-income households, upgrading rural basic infrastructure, and improving urban public transportation. Although, in the long term, the GTP was aimed at realising the Vision 2020 set by Mahathir, everybody knew that the short-term and pragmatic objective was to deliver victory to the Barisan Nasional government in the next general election, due in 2013, and ensure that Najib's position was secure.

However, what was absent in the GTP launch exhibition was the elaboration of the 7th NKRA – '1Malaysia and Unity' – which should have been the outcome of the deliberation conducted non-stop for six weeks in Lab No. 7. Perhaps the issue of '1Malaysia and Unity' was not, in the first instance, seen by the Malaysian public as a problem like crime or corruption or urban public transportation.

Malaysians probably should be happy that '1Malaysia and Unity' is not a problem but a concern, of a broader and deeper kind, ever present in our daily existence.

It clearly endorses the fact that Malaysian society, in general, has enjoyed cross-cutting social ties and existed in a state of social cohesion, sharing values, norms, and many other things for many decades.

But rational Malaysians also recognised that, while we enjoy a certain positive level of social cohesion, it is not all plain sailing. It has been punctuated by problems, contradictions, and conflicts of various kinds while being held together by the willingness to negotiate continuously to maintain consensus, peace, and stability. We know well that Malaysians have many grievances and are not afraid to air them publicly, whether

they originate from ethnic, class, religious, or many more roots. This publicity gives outsiders the impression that we are in a state of constant conflict.

But when we have moved around the country at any time of the day, everyday and every year over the last 40 years, we could not help but notice that conflict is missing because everyone continues to conduct their everyday life, even in times of fierce competition, in a socially-cohesive manner, without being threatened by open ethnic conflict. Malaysians therefore “talk conflict, walk cohesion.”

In this context, the ‘1Malaysia’ concept views and accepts differences and grievances among Malaysians, especially its ‘talk conflict’ behaviour, as something based on a rational choice and not an emotional one. The same rational choice underpins the ‘walk cohesion’ behaviour pattern. Indeed, 1Malaysia is a reminder of sorts to all Malaysians that we are different in so many ways but had lived, crossed various social boundaries, and survived in a socially cohesive and unity mould much respected and admired by other countries.

The 14th General Election in May 2018 brought the biggest change in Malaysian political history when the NF, the ruling party for more than six decades, lost to Pakatan Harapan, a coalition opposition party led by Tun Mahathir, the 4th Prime Minister who helmed the NF government for 22 years. The loss surprised everyone in Malaysia and around the world. What was significant was the fact that the political transition was smooth without any sign of violence or open conflict. A credit to all Malaysians who saw that their future existence was based on bargaining, negotiation, and mediation with integration platforms continuing to be the vehicle.

It is now one year since the change of government. We have a strong open debate in the press and social media about the performance of the new government, which has been judged by many as failing in its promise to fulfil what was listed in its election manifesto. The public is becoming more critical of the government’s performance as the cost of living rises and old problems remain unresolved. It is obvious not much could be achieved by a relatively new government in one year. But the advent of rising expectations before the election has become the rise of frustration afterwards. However, the ruling government is managing things, if with difficulty, reasonably well.

## Conclusion

Through the case study of Malaysia, we could clearly see how the conflict situation of post-SWW has been transformed to one of a stable tension and, eventually, to a sustainable state of social cohesion. Theoretically, therefore, we have to be vigilant of the internal changes that have taken place over the years within Malaysian society. To make sense of the whole post-SWW Malaysia, it is not sufficient to remain theoretically conservative, indeed lazy, to apply only the conflict approach or worse still the time bomb perspective employed by the Malaysian opposition politician Mr. Lim Kit Siang. The conflict approach is too simplistic and distorts the empirical reality of Malaysia and renders the ethnically diverse Malaysian population an unthinking lot.

It is imperative for us, therefore, to be more analytically sensitive to the ontological circumstances and recognise that Malaysians can think and decide for themselves, de-

mocratically, what they prefer and the kind of political choices they are ready to make, as the 12th General Election of 8 March 2008 results began to show and the peaceful opposition takeover in the 14th General Election of 8 May 2018 have shown. The old and the new government seem to survive on building new integration platforms for macro and specific purposes.

There is always a need for analysts on Malaysia to adopt a theoretically and conceptually rigorous and up-to-date approach to provide true-to-the-situation analyses of Malaysia's unity in diversity experience. The danger facing scholars studying plural societies, such as the one in Malaysia, is the risk of the ethnicization of knowledge, meaning the promotion of a particular knowledge perspective not motivated by seeking truth but rather by the agenda of a particular ethnic group.

The imminent danger facing scholars studying plural societies, such as the one Malaysia, is the risk of the ethnicization of knowledge, meaning the promotion of a particular knowledge perspective not motivated by seeking truth but rather by the agenda of a particular ethnic group.

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# Engaged Anthropology and an Ethnographic Approach to Community Development: A Case Study from Tamil Nadu

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## Abstract

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the literature on engaged or public anthropology. Moreover, definitions of engagement have opened up to include a multiple number of ways and forms that anthropological work can be engaged in community development—ranging from direct activism and critical deconstructions of dominant categories, to teaching. The scope of engagement in socio-cultural, economic and political issues dealt with by anthropologists has increased relatively in pluralistic societies such as India. The extent of what counts as engaged scholarship, moving towards an epistemic understanding that leads to relationships between subject knowledge and action/application, could be inherently politico-legal most of the time.

In India, attention is drawn to such engaged scholarship of cultural anthropologists. They contribute through their ethnographic writings about the communities and their contemporary changing identities. Such alternative realities, open-ended epistemology and theoretical practical interpretation of ethnographies about marginalized communities, social identities and the claims made by those realities were jeopardizing Indian hierarchical society. The communities and their self-organizations protested against the government and sought privileges that could be provided constitutionally. Most of the time, the issue revolved around their claim about the 'community name' and nomenclature. The requests submitted to the authorities were negotiated, contested and ultimately required legal interventions. Since the issue is all about culture and social identity, the court regularly seeks anthropological inputs such as theoretical practices, reflexive discourse and more subtle or virtual form of intervention.

This article attempts to shed light on the need for rejuvenating our understanding of the concept *engaged or public anthropology*, application of the basic ethnographic approach at the empirical level and other related concepts. The analytical interpretations were arrived at by taking the cases brought to the District Vigilance Committee and State Level Scrutiny Committee of Tamil Nadu constituted by the appellant judiciary intervention at the national level.

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the literature on engaged or public anthropology; moreover, definitions of engagement have been opened up to include a multiplicity of ways and forms that anthropological work can be seen to be engaged in, ranging from direct activism, to critical deconstructions of dominant categories and teaching (Checker et al., 2010; Brondo, 2010; Mullins, 2011; Lamphere, 2004; Lassiter et al., 2005; Peacock, 1997; Hale, 2008; Speed, 2008).

Anthropology of Development is a broader category than the applied term Development Anthropology. It includes work on the ethnography of developmental organizations and institutions, as well as critical work on development as a system of ideas. Most importantly, the new anthropology of development needs to move beyond narrow definitions of development and its specialized institutions to encompass a new vision of development as the wider struggle by people and governments to combat poverty and inequality (Gardner and Lewis, 2015).

The stronghold of this universal statement and its acknowledgement by many theoreticians means that the scope of engagement in socio-cultural, economic and political issues dealt with by anthropologist has increased in pluralistic societies such as India. The scope of what counts as engaged scholarship, moving towards an epistemic understanding that leads to a relationship between subject knowledge and action/application, could be inherently politico-legal most of the time. This definition means moving beyond an intellectual recognition of the political nature of the relationship between knowledge and action to a more thorough and practical understanding of the ways in which critical, intellectual and theoretical work, including analysis, deconstruction and critique, are themselves material and potentially politico-legal practices.

The contribution of cultural anthropologists through ethnographic writings about the communities and their contemporary changing identities draws attention to such engaged scholarship in India. Such ethnographic output should be perceived beyond intellectual understanding. The empirical understanding reflected in Michal Osterweil's article (2013) published in the journal *The Society for Cultural Anthropology* made an argument drawing on ethnographic research with activist networks of the Italian alter-globalization movement with the 300,000-person strong 2001 protest against the G8 in Genoa, often known as 'Movimento die Movimenti' (MoM). Central to this movement were a series of material practices involving analysis, deliberation, research, investigation, questioning, thinking and theorizing what Osterweil called "theoretical practices" done through the production of texts, reflexive discourse and more subtle or virtual forms of intervention. A great deal of contemporary activism is constituted by experimental, reflexive and critical knowledge practices, all of which are meant to reflexively, and even recursively, develop better or more effective politics. This development is achieved largely through producing subjectivities that know, think and do differently (Osterweil, 2013; Casas-Cortés et al., 2008), often through what might be thought of as a non-dual or open-ended epistemology in which process and resonance are as important as, if not more important than, truth, objectivity and end-points.

Such alternative realities, open-ended epistemology and theoretical practical interpretations of ethnographies about marginalized communities' social identities and

their claims were jeopardizing traditional Indian hierarchical society. The communities and their self-organizations protested against the government and sought privileges provided for them constitutionally. Most of the time, the issue revolved around their claim about a community name and its nomenclature. The current nomenclature used for tribals in India is either Scheduled Caste (SC)<sup>1</sup> or Scheduled Tribe (ST)<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes people are placed in one category when they, according to their traditions and social identity, belong in another category. Since government-provided aid is dependent on nomenclature, correct identity is essential.

The requests submitted to the authorities for proper identification were negotiated, contested and ultimately required legal interventions. Since the issue is all about culture and social identity, the court sought anthropological inputs such as theoretical practices, reflexive discourse, and more subtle or virtual forms of intervention. Such engaged activities of anthropology are becoming more crucial and recursively developing 'better' or 'just' society.

Such community studies often follow a stereotypic review of literature. More specifically the monographs, gazetteers, ethnographic profile of the marginalized communities and their identities as understood by academicians have been put into reflexive discourses in contemporarily changing societies, and more so in developing countries. There is an increasing recognition of the need to understand systems of oppression and colonization that were unintentionally harming the marginalized communities' within which anthropologists are working (Hale, 2006, 2008; Speed, 2008a, 2008b; Schepher-Hughes, 1995). Ethnography matters for contemporary societies; it matters for democracy. Such a claim derives from the very activity of the ethnographer—a presence both involved and detached, inscribed in the instant and over time, allowing precise descriptions and multiple perspectives, thus providing a distinctive understanding of the world that deserves to be shared (Fassin, 2013: 462-63). Such ethnographic studies about the vulnerable communities were periodically conducted and published in India. These documents were used by the researchers and administrators for references, and their interpretations about the community identity were applied according to the professional perception. Variations in such interpretation based on theoretical practice sometimes led to confrontation not only at the academic level but also at the politico-legal level, although an anthropologist's role in engagement demanded objectivism. The call for engagement has enlisted anthropologists with varied understandings: from those arguing that anthropology requires a rethinking of its methods and modes of writing to create a postcolonial relationship to its subject, to those committed to finding a non-imperialist political stance and, even further to those working to formulate a new way to work collaboratively rather than hierarchically with communities. All of these forms of engagement contribute to a rich panorama of anthropological work in the public. Today, as anthropologists are still engaged in justifying the centrality of locally detailed

1 Scheduled Caste (SC) – The untouchables who constitute the lowest segment of Hindu social hierarchy have been grouped as 'Schedule Caste' in caste-based Indian society.

2 Scheduled Tribe (ST) – A different India term for Tribes (Adivasi, Vana-jati, Primitive Society, Simple Society, Indigenous People etc.). The term Tribe is commonly used as an administrative term in India.

ethnography, and even in debating the legitimacy of the discipline itself, ethnography's exact definition and its relationship to the history of colonial power and its contemporary permutations remain unresolved (Clarke, 2013).

The present article attempts to shed light on the need for rejuvenating our understanding of the concept engaged or public anthropology and how applying the basic ethnographic approach and other related methods has led to some positive outcomes and some outright errors in the process of identifying the community. The analytical interpretation is based on the empirical understanding of the anthropologists (member) of the District Vigilance Committee and State Level Scrutiny Committee constituted by the Government of Tamil Nadu with the result of appellant judiciary intervention, in a specific judgment (Kumari Madhuri Patil Vs-Additional Commissioner, Tribal Welfare Department, Maharashtra Government).

The role of anthropologists and their expertise in the scientific understanding of culture and contemporary community identity has become recognized by the administrative, legal and applied development field. The anthropologist's intervention and knowledge have been considered crucial in interpreting community identity, more specifically for the SC and ST who had obtained or possessed the community certificates and were claiming their 'genuine' identity status. The basic theoretical understanding is challenged by the variation in empirical understanding, by different anthropologists providing an ethnographic detail about the same community and the same cultural pattern and by variation in interpretation. These differences allowed for mistakes in proper community identification. Hence, an open healthy debate on these issues for specific practical/epistemic purposes is required. Our major concern in this paper is to point out what we take to be some of the insights and errors, and to me, most of the errors resulted from some crucial ambiguities in ethnography and interpretation; until these are distinguished, it is impossible to its evaluate intellectual recognition or move on.

## Theoretical and Methodological Impression of Anthropology

Anthropology is a relative late-comer in the process of growth as a scientific discipline. When anthropologists started studying people using qualitative tools, they were looking for patterns in the day-to-day life and way of living of those they were studying. The emphasis was on the enormity of cultural variability while at the same time looking at universal similarities among the cultures of the world. This research resulted in anthropological theories. While analyzing the anthropological theory, Manners and Kaplan (1968) confirmed that anthropologists use the term theory in a variety of ways almost whimsically—as a synonym for a concept, or as a synonym for inductive generalization or as one for a model (often itself a term used in a number of different ways) and sometimes merely to lend tone or dignity to the obvious.

Anthropologists also believed that part of the reason for this widely different usage was paucity of 'authentic' anthropological theory, as well as the uncertainties about the use and meaning of the term itself. These came about, ironically enough, from the discipline's emphasis on field work. Field work is not only the device used by anthropologists to provide the discipline with its empirical materials; it has become much more than

that. It is a kind of touchstone of adequacy, a *rite de passage* prerequisite to membership in the profession. Thus, fieldwork has become a slogan, and the focus of anthropological research is to rush to relatively isolated communities and start applying the anthropological tools in an attempt to understand the culture of simple communities, following an ethnographic approach. The tribe or relatively isolated communities and the related writing ethnographies have been the special interest of anthropology right from the beginning.

Contemporary anthropology explores the interface of anthropology and development with a particular focus on how anthropologists working in the field use, apply and merge theory and practice. With the recent transformations of development cooperation in line with the Paris Declaration and anthropology's decreasing influence within the development sector, it has become particularly important to describe, analyze and reflect upon anthropologists' experiences of being practically involved in development work; anthropological knowledge and perspectives continue to be critical in improved development practice (Hagberg and Quattara 2012). The fact remains that the fluidity of the anthropological concepts is justified as we are dealing with the dynamic aspects of culture.

Anthropology of South-East Asian communities addresses the issues of social and cultural life, and the change in development more in regional terms, and, like Burling's *Hill Farms and Paddy Fields: Life in Mainland South-East Asia* (1995), has claimed that South-East Asian communities demonstrate certain region-wide cultural themes and have adopted regional parameters in drawing ethnographies (King and Wilder, 2003).

While setting out the agenda for Public Anthropology, (Griffith et al., 2013: 125-31) said that "it moves beyond the proliferation of terms (applied, activist, feminist, engaged, critical medical, community archaeology) to lift up the best of each, dealing with social problems and issues of interest to a broader public or non-academic collaborators yet still relevant to academic discourses and debate". Anthropologists have been involved in public affairs and development co-operation using anthropological theories, methods and ethnography. They have extensively taken part as major stakeholders in mega development projects. Their major contribution was more that of contributing qualitative data in understanding the local people, their cognitive perspectives and their culture as a whole or of involving themselves using participatory approaches in social-assessment studies. At the same time, the basic anthropological concepts, particularly the ethnographic approach that has been taken as a basic premise by contemporary practicing/applying anthropologist, require both a certain consensus in application and regional variations. As a result, such engagement by the anthropologist may not reflect paradoxical viewpoints.

## Ethnographic Practice in the Development Process

The major contribution of an anthropologist is in providing an ethnographic description of various tribes/simple communities of the world. Geertz's (1973) characterization of "inscription" as the core of ethnographic "thick description" and Gusfield's (1976) dissection of the rhetorical underpinning of science provided seminal statements in the

1970s. Subsequently, Clifford and Marcus's edited collection, *Writing Culture: The poetic and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), Van Manner's *Tale of the Field* (1988) and Atkinson's *The Ethnographic Imagination* (1990) have advanced the considerations of ethnographic writings.

Further work has been influential in this area. While exploring the issues related to ethnography, Hammersly (1992) suggested that social and cultural anthropology of the Chicago School follows the predominant model of ethnography and treats it as a pure rather than an applied research area. As result, the impression was created, and it was taken for granted, that there could be variations in ethnographic results. Anthropology went to the extent of not claiming to produce an objective or fruitful account of reality but aiming to offer versions of an ethnographer's/ practitioner's experience of reality through ethnography. Sarana (1989) used the term 'reinterpretation' instead of 'restudy' and clarified the rules of ethnography. He further emphasized that, in ethnographic reinterpretation, the anthropologist does not deal with the items of a living culture directly but is concerned with searching for and assigning new meanings to cultural data recorded in particular ethnographies. Geertz (1973) also maintains that the aim of 'interpretivism' is consistent with science—to understand the function of meaning in human culture in a systematic manner based on particular ethnographic experiences. As anthropology became more enamoured of postmodern literary approaches to analyzing ethnographies and cultures, the text became the sole focus of its work. Since all text is conceived and written and therefore made up by someone, reality has become more and more tenuous because anything can be written (Kuznar, 1997). In light of these theoretical understandings, it is clear that there is nothing called 'the ethnography'; it is only possible to be ethnography'.

Understanding the interface between the three components, namely theory, method and ethnography, in the context of applied anthropological experience in contemporary development practice is crucial. The problematic relationship between academia and applied anthropology has been debated for a long time (Pink, 2006), and the status of applied anthropology seems to vary in different national contexts (Baba and Hill, 2008). Evans' Pritchard (1946) had labelled such anthropological contributions as "the non-scientific field of administration". But still the conventional classifications of 'anthropology of development' and 'development anthropology' have given certain theoretical clarification to all the stakeholders involved in the process of development.

The idea that applied research is atheoretical – either does not use theory or does not lead to theory—weakens the discipline of anthropology. Yet the infertile dichotomy remains of an anthropology of development that aims at understanding development as a set of power principles and practices to be subjected to anthropological scrutiny on the one hand and 'development anthropology' that aims at applying theoretical and methodological concepts and tools to actively promote social change on the other (Hagberg and Quattara, 2012).

The pristine region-specific, socio-cultural and legal issues require scientific anthropological contributions in a more holistic, comprehensive and multifaceted perspective in a bridge between the dichotomy of anthropology of development and development anthropology. As Jean-Pierre Oliver de Sardan (2005) diagnosed, certainly the anthropologists are expected to deliver report and recommendations in a much more rapid

and accessible manner. Furthermore, that manner can be scientific but still simple and communicable. Hence the purpose of anthropological intervention would be more relevant, problem solving and less criticized.

Charles Hale's (2006) term 'activist research' perceived anthropological research as a method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organized group of people in struggle and allow dialogue with them to shape each phase of the process and dissemination of the result (2006: 97). To explicate these points, Osterweil (2013) further discussed the "activist research vs. cultural critique" debate on engagement. He says a good deal of work done by social movements can be considered theoretical, analytical and critical—mirroring many academic practices and values—and the divide between academia and activism blurs, creating a novel space for rethinking the boundaries of engaged or political or public anthropology, in turn broadening our views of efficacious political action.

## Plurality of Culture and Ethnography

The most legendary Indian historian Romila Thapar (2014), while exploring the society in ancient India during the formative period, identified two sets of concrete evidence, namely archaeological and literary. She mentions Pre-Harappan cultures, Harappan cultures, Post-Harappan cultures, Sothi culture, Gandhara Grave culture, Banas culture, Copper Hoard culture, Northern Black Polished Ware culture and so on. While understanding the variation in culture, she further analyzes the Indian social structure and postulates the importance of redefining the existing social relationships among the communities and the need for alternative interpretations. She rightly perceived,

"[t]o see caste only in terms of the four-fold *varna* does not take us very far. One would like to know how tribes and social groups were adjusted into the caste hierarchy and assigned a caste status. The theory that the caste structure was initially flexible, but gradually become rigid and allowed little mobility, is now open to question. There is enough evidence to suggest that, in all periods, there have been deviations from the theoretical concept of caste. We also know there was a continual emergence of new castes for a variety of reasons" (Thapar 2014).

These historical realities prove the cultural variability and the emergence of various communities in India and caste/tribe predicament in India. It has been estimated that there are over five thousand different cultures in the world today. The Anthropological Survey of India has identified 4635 communities and documented their brief ethnography in India. With such enormous cultural variability in the world, particularly in India, understanding culture using a holistic, ethnographic and anthropological approach has been severely criticized and underestimated particularly in the fields of development anthropology, anthropology of development and public anthropology. Redefining and rethinking the existing ethnographic profile of communities has become much needed in the process of public anthropology as it has a direct impact on the community identity in the process of utilizing the benefits of the Positive Discrimination Policy in India.

Ethnography is an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society. It has been practiced for a long time by anthropologists. Many ethnographers have emphasized the central place of writing ethnography in recent times too. The major contribution of anthropologists in India is in providing ethnographical descriptions about various communities. As a result, the variations in ethnographic results have been accepted as pure and less pure. There is no claim to produce an objective or fruitful account of reality but instead an attempt to offer versions of ethnographers'/practitioners' experiences of reality through ethnography. The more recent trend in engaged anthropology also requires sufficient investigation of the alternative narratives and such thinking may bring more information about the spiritual characteristics of Indian communities.

### **Clarification of the Term Tribe/Community**

Anthropologists have been studying the concept of race since the beginning of the field back in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, a focus began on evolutionary theory and looking for the origin of the species. In the twentieth century, the focus changed to debunking racial heritability theory (that is biological) and promoting population genetics, clines and genetics. The most significant accomplishment of anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century as Kroeber has said, "has been the extension and clarification of the concept of culture" (Manners and Kaplan, 1968).

The evolutionary school of thought looked for cultural survival in these primitive societies, which helps them understand their own society, defined by territorial state, monogamous family and private property. It was the discipline's main subject matter until 1956 when Redfield broke this monotony by studying peasant societies. The term tribe has been defined by many anthropologists and contested by even more. They have been referred to by different names by different people – autochthons, indigenous people/communities, tribes, aboriginals and Adivasis – these communities, which practiced and are still trying to practice an alternate way of life and had, and still have a different and distinct world view, are under serious threat to their identity/survival.

In 1998, the World Bank decided to re-examine its policy on indigenous peoples issued in 1991 as Operational Directive (OD 4.20). One of the objectives of this process of revisiting the policy was to gather a much wider set of views from governments, civil society, academics and indigenous people themselves about what should be the rules of the game for interaction between indigenous groups and the World Bank's assisted development interventions.

In India, the study of tribes began with the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1874. From then on, scholar-administrators wrote general works on the land and people of different regions, in which references were made to caste and tribes (Xaxa, 2003). Various criteria have been taken into consideration namely, racial, language, ecological habitat, size, mode of livelihood, degree of incorporation into Hindu society and many combinations of one and all of the above criteria (Xaxa, 2003). These variations emphasized diversity within these groups and also the cultural understanding and interpretations by the anthropologist.

India has the second largest concentration of tribal populations, after the continent of Africa. The Anthropological Survey of India has enumerated 461 tribal communities, of which 174 have been identified as subgroups (Singh, 1994). The ST population in India stated in the 2001 Census was about 8.08% of the total population of 1,028,610,328 in the country. "Etymologically, the term tribe derives its origin from the word 'tribes' meaning three divisions" (Verma, 1996). For Romans, the tribe was a political division. In the western world, as in India, the term tribe had totally different connotations than what is prevalent now (Verma, 1996). In India, the term has been used in day-to-day life, and special privileges have been given to them in the name of 'Positive Discrimination Privileges'. The beneficiaries were issued ST caste certificates to show their identity and gain benefits in education, employment and political participation. Still the term tribe has not been defined anywhere in the Indian constitution. That constitution states in Article 342 that the ST is tribes or the tribal communities or part of the groups within tribes or tribal communities, which the President may specify from time to time by public notification. As these communities are presumed to constitute the oldest ethnological segment of Indian society, the term 'Adivasi' is used to designate them. The International Labor Organization Convention 107, held at Geneva on 5th June 1957, classified them as indigenous. The term "indigenous" is a misnomer and bound to be problematic in India if attempts are made at defining it. This debate or terminology is not necessary as the Indian constitution has already scheduled communities/groups of people as ST. However, the constitution gives no clear definition of a tribe. Although certain criteria are prescribed for communities to categorize them as "tribes", the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of such a group have not been prescribed. Moreover, the term has evolved over time from animist religion to forest dwellers to tribe to ST. It is recognized that some tribal groups/communities in all Indian states have not been included in the list of ST categories, while some non-tribal groups have made it into the ST category. In spite of these anomalies, the term tribe (ST) is appropriate in the Indian context for the application of Positive Discrimination Policy. However, application in any given context should involve local consultation and expert assessment, with importance given to the criterion of self-identification.

Each state in India has its own ST list besides the central list, and the states issue ST certificates to these people. There is inconsistency between both lists. In addition, the civil society of India have comforting and amazing myths about the tribes such as the tribes being primitive, simple, cheerful, colorful, having exotic dance, music, free sex and youth dormitories. Heart-breaking poverty, ignorance, disease, exploitation, land alienation identity crisis etc. are the bitter realities that stand silently behind these myths.

Community is the term which is more familiar in the development discourse. With the growth of participatory research approaches, the effect of participation on community members and the involvement of community members in the ongoing development project or action-oriented project becomes a subject of theoretical and of empirical importance as it gives space for testing and helping the stakeholders to move into reality. According to Govinda and Diwan (2003), community is obviously not a homogenous notion. It is either various communities unequally and differently placed within a society or various groups in a community unequally placed. Community could be viewed in two

different perspectives: (1) local class-caste composition and (2) elected representatives, where their class composition influences the nature of involvement as well as the nature of conflict arising from such involvement. By implication, community participation has also to be viewed in a localized manner (2003, 14). It is acutely important to note that often what is considered a community is composed of hierarchically placed unequal groups. Special provisions and safeguards for SCs and STs have been guaranteed constitutionally using the word community liberally in all the constitution's articles. The certificate issued to the individuals who belong to these communities is also known as the community certificate in administrative records. These certificates are important to avail of government programmes and benefits.

### Community Nomenclature and Legal Implications

Attempts were made over a period of time by certain persons belonging to nontribal communities to claim tribal status, on the assertion that their community is synonymous with a tribal group specified in the notification or that their tribe is subsumed in a tribe specifically notified. The nomenclatures of the communities of such applicants were similar to those of designated STs, often with a tribal prefix or suffix. Decisions of the Supreme Court, in this regard, laid down that the entries contained in the SC or the ST order have to be taken as they stand and no evidence can be put forward either to interpret or to explain those entries.

A community not specifically listed as an ST cannot lay claim to inclusion, either on the basis of a similarity of nomenclature or by contending that the tribe in question is subsumed within a designated ST. In the State of Maharashtra, the State Legislature enacted the Maharashtra Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Denotified Tribes, (VimuktaJatis), Nomadic Tribes, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Special Backward Category (Regulation of Issuance and Verification of) Caste Certificate Act, 2000. The act has now made statutory provisions for the verification and scrutiny of caste claims by competent authorities and subsequently by Caste Scrutiny Committees. It creates offences and provides for disqualifications and for the withdrawal of benefits granted on the basis of false caste certificates.

The Supreme Court issued directions in Madhuri Patil's case, laying down the procedure that must be followed for the issuance of caste certificates for their scrutiny and approval. The Supreme Court directed the constitution of a committee and included an anthropologist who has an intimate knowledge in identifying tribes and tribal communities. The Supreme Court further provided for the constitution of a Vigilance Cell. The vigilance inquiry entails a visit by the Inspector of Police attached to the Cell to the original place from which the candidate hails for the collection of all relevant data along with the anthropologist. When a section of the society has started asserting themselves as tribes and tried to earn the concession and facilities reserved for the STs, the tricks are common, and inclusion, therefore, must be judged on a legal and ethnological basis. Spurious tribes have become a threat to the genuine tribes.

The Cell should also examine the parent, guardian or the candidate in relation to their caste etc. or such other persons who have knowledge of the social status of the

candidate and then submit a report to the Directorate together with all particulars as envisaged in the pro forma, in particular, of the STs relating to anthropological and ethnological traits, kinship structure, deity, rituals, customs, mode of marriage, life cycle ceremonies, method of burial of dead bodies etc. by the castes or tribes or tribal communities concerned etc. These directions clearly establish that the nature of the inquiry in regard to the claim of a candidate to belong to a ST is not merely to be confined to an examination of the birth and the school records and of documentary evidence but would involve an investigation of the affinity of the candidate with a tribe, or as the case may be, tribal community.

Thus, the process of verification of caste and tribe claims governed by the judgment of the Supreme Court in Madhuri Patil involved an inquiry not merely into the documentary materials on the basis of which the caste claim is founded but equally on verifying the claim with reference to the affinity of the candidate with a designated ST. The inquiry would comprehend within its purview anthropological and ethnological traits. The Committee would be entitled to inquire into whether the applicant has established an affinity with the tribe. The affinity test that comprehends all these aspects is, therefore, not extraneous to the process of identifying whether the applicant is a genuine member of a tribe or an impostor fraudulently claiming the benefits of a reservation to which s/he is not entitled. Benefits secured on the basis of a false Caste Certificate are to be withdrawn.

The Caste Scrutiny Committee is a quasi-judicial body. It has been set up for a specific purpose. It serves a social and constitutional purpose. It is constituted to prevent fraud on the constitution. It may not be bound by the provisions of Indian Evidence Act, but it would not be correct for the Superior Court to issue directions as to how it should appreciate evidence. Evidence to be adduced in a matter before a quasi-judicial body cannot be restricted to admission of documentary evidence only. It may be necessary to take oral evidence. Moreover, the nature of evidence to be adduced would vary from case to case. The right of a party to adduce evidence cannot be curtailed. It is one thing to say how a quasi-judicial body should appreciate evidence adduced before it in law but it is another thing to say that it must not allow adduction of oral evidence at all.

In the compilation that has been placed on record by the state government, reliance is placed on the written work of anthropologists in support of the submission that the application of the affinity test is an invaluable aid in determining whether an applicant belongs to a ST. A monograph by Prof. R. K. Mutatkar (2019), Honorary Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pune, entitled '*Tribal Identity: Policy Issues*' is instructive. The monograph states that government of India has recommended that the following broad parameters be applied in determining tribal characteristics:

- I. Primitive traits;
- II. Distinct culture;
- III. Geographical isolation;
- IV. Distinct dialect;
- V. Animism;
- VI. Clan systems;
- VII. Shyness of nature; and

VIII. Backwardness. In socio-economic terms. This is defined by poverty, social status and access to resources.

The monograph notes that due to contact with the outside world and the effort to draw tribal communities into the democratic political process, movements towards acculturations have been taking place. However, the author states that “acculturation does not destroy the hard core of culture which is manifested in their rituals, beliefs, ceremonies and festivals, in the dialect, and in music and dance.” Prof. Mutatkar says,

“When a nontribal group or a caste group with similar nomenclature or with tribal suffix or prefix to their name claim tribal status, they are not only harming the interest of a tribal group with whom they are trying to identify by putting up a tribal claim, but they are also harming the interest of all tribes in the State and the country, since the benefits of Scheduled Tribe are bestowed according to the generic category of Scheduled Tribe and not according to a specific tribal group. The pseudo tribal group, therefore, nullifies the constitutional guarantees of all the Scheduled Tribes in a State and the country.”

Though the legal intervention proposed theoretical practices done through the production of texts and reflexive discourse, a great deal of contemporary activism is constituted by experimental, reflexive, critical knowledge practices, but application at the ground level has not percolated in this direction. Monotony has set in, keeping the above traditional anthropological approach. The contemporary tribal issues need application done largely through producing subjectivities that know, think and do differently.

### **State Level Scrutiny Committee and District Vigilance Committee in Tamil Nadu: A Case Study**

Pursuant to the orders issued in Civil Appeal No.5854/94 dated 2.9.94 of the Supreme Court of India in Kumari Madhuri Patil and another –Vs- Additional Commissioner, Tribal development and others, all the State Governments have constituted District Level Vigilance Committees and State Level Scrutiny Committees to verify the genuineness of the Community Certificates issued to SC/ST and Other Backward Class and issued guidelines for the functioning of those committees.

In order to protect the welfare of the genuine SC/ST people from the false claimants, the governments have been examining the matter to frame suitable guidelines based on the guidelines issued by Supreme Court of India to suit the conditions prevailing in Tamil Nadu, so that it could work in a systematic manner without facing any difficulty in its implementation. In supersession of the orders and guidelines issued on the subject, the government decided and ordered a modification the constitution of the above two committees as well as their functions periodically through many Government Orders (G.O.s).

Keeping the Supreme Court direction, the state government coordinated with the then Head of the Department of Anthropology, University of Madras and requested it nominate an anthropologist to function as a member in the committees. Expertise in

the subject and the anthropologist residing within the state were taken as major criteria, and names were recommended to the government. To begin with, it was considered a great privilege for the anthropologist, and it was considered an honour to the subject as a whole, but the amount of work or pending cases was underestimated by the academician. No doubt it provided great space for engaged anthropology by providing theoretical practical knowledge.

Anthropologists were using their understanding about the culture of various communities of Tamil Nadu and played a crucial role in determining the community identity. The entire process of work also required some strong basic knowledge on Positive Discrimination Policy, caste structure and stratification principles, constitutional categorization of communities and cultural understanding of the local people.

The chairman of the committee mostly depended on anthropologists and provided a great space to them in the process of identifying genuine beneficiary. However, at the same time, the traditional anthropologist who believed in intensive field work objected to the process and wanted to convert the work to project mode. The enormity of the pending files in all the districts and cases before the court of law for its final judgments, caste politics and ultimately the administrative pressure forced the authorities to clear the files at a maximum speed.

To begin with, the District Vigilance Committee (DVC), consisting of the District Collector as a Chairman, the Adi-Dravidar Welfare Officer as a member secretary, and the anthropologist as a member, was authorized to take up both SC and ST cases at the district level. The State Level Scrutiny Committee (SLSC) has been kept as the appellant committee and given some space for the aggrieved and those classified as not genuine members to lean to before seeking legal help. Later, due to intervention of Madras High Court, the G.O. was modified and laid down new classifications to avoid certain problems. All the SC cases were dealt with by the DVC, but court cases coming to government before the 9th month, 2007 were asked to clear by the DVC. The G.O. has been interpreted differently and created some confusion at the district level. Once again, new G.O.s clarified everything, and this clarification activated the DVC to finish all the pending cases. These two committees created greater impact in state affairs and discussed its modalities with high level administrative committees all the time. Importance was raised, and the state government wanted to update the process and constantly assess it. This pressure ultimately led to more opportunity for anthropologists to intervene in the process of identity through culture patterns.

The Supreme Court of India found in *Kumari MadhuriPatil and another -Vs- Additional Commissioner* case that there were no guidelines for issuance and verification of community certificates. The Supreme Court has therefore given 15 guidelines for issuance and verification of community certificates. In those guidelines, all the state governments should formulate State Level Scrutiny Committee (SLSC) and District Vigilance Level Cell (DVLC). The government of Tamil Nadu formulated SLSC to verify the genuineness of issued community certificates from the revenue authorities to the ST community. Similarly, DVLCs in all districts should verify the genuineness of issued community certificates from the revenue authorities to the SC and OBC communities. In both committees, the chairman and the member secretary verify the documents and the anthropologist verifies the cultural aspect of the community claim.

Anthropologists were nominated by the then professor and head of the Department of Anthropology, University of Madras, in 2005, as a member to DVC. Later during 2008, I was nominated to the SLSC as a member by the state government and a government order was passed. Participating in the committee and interviewing the respondent had given me a great understanding about existing community problems, their cognitive perception about identity and the attitude of our administrators, particularly the community certificate issuing authorities in Tamil Nadu. The total SC cases so far handled by the committee throughout the districts of Tamil Nadu were nearly 3000 from its inception in the year 2005. Similarly, the total ST cases would be not less than 2500. The qualitative data received from the interviewees helped me to draw some broad interpretations.

The major complaints or complications for the SC communities were conversion and inter caste marriages. In Tamil Nadu, Dalit convert to Christianity or Muslims are treated only as Backward Class (BC) and are not allowed to enjoy the reservation benefits assigned to Hindu SCs. Coming to the most crucial aspect of the paper was the problem of STs. The Tamil Nadu government has identified some of the ST communities as 'Controversial Communities' as their cultural identity has not been justified with the existing documental evidence. On the other hand, their identities have hardly been documented either administratively or academically. The nomenclatures were wrongly documented in the administrative records. The anthropological interventions were given at two levels. One is at the individual level where the anthropologist sits in the committee and facilitates the committee in supplementing cultural factors in identifying the person as 'genuine'. The second one is asking the anthropologist to do a spot enquiry after receiving an ethnographic profile of a community. Such reports played a major role at both the administrative level and the legal level. At the same time, slowly, they were subject to criticisms due to variations in writing and the final decisions.

## Case

The community by the name "Kurumans" and the association fought for about two decades to prove their identity. The name is included in the state list of STs. The task has been assigned to many anthropologists who were playing a role as a member in DVC and SLSC. Some categorised them as a tribe and some as a caste. Different interpretations reflected an impact on the community and forced the people to seek legal and administrative intervention. Finally, the following empirical interpretations substantiated the argument to prove the community as an ST.

- It is to be noted that a community KURUMBA is included in the list of Backward Class (BC) throughout the state of Tamil Nadu and KURUMBAR in the list of Most Backward Classes (MBC) throughout the state of Tamil Nadu and the KURUMANS in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tamil Nadu are one and the same.
- Again, it is also to be noted that popular ethnographer Thurston and Rangachari (1909) stated that advanced KURUMBAS are usually shepherds and weavers of coarse woolen blankets (from the hair of sheep). Further, E. Thurston also

mentioned that the KURUMANS were originally identical with the shepherds KURUMBAS and their present separation is merely the result of their isolation in the vastnesses of the Western Ghats, to which their ancestors fled, or gradually retreated after the downfall of the KURUMBA dynasty.

- The above-mentioned statements and arguments reveal the truth that KURUMBA or KURUMBAR are the synonym names of the KURUMANS. Throughout Tamilnadu, as Dr. Jakka Parthasarathy, Director Tribal Research Centre, Government of Tamil Nadu (31st December, 2001) observed, there are no separate communities in the names of KURUMBAR or KURUMBA. He further stressed the important observation that the KURUMBAS/KURUMBA (S) of Nilgiris District are ethnographically different from KURUMBA, KURUMBAR and KURUMANS.
- Some of the male members of the KURUMANS in the districts of Vellore, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Salem and also in the taluk of Thirupattur had the habit of suffixing the title, GOUNDER to their names. K. S. Singh (1994: 662) has aptly mentioned that 'the term KURUMAN means one who tends sheep. Gounder is an honorific title which they have adapted in recent years'. For this reason, the Kurumans are also referred to by others as KURUMAN GOUNDER.
- KURUMBA GOUNDERS are different when compared with KURUMAN GOUNDER. KURUMBA GOUNDERS are Tamil speaking cultivators, usually found in the Kongu Nadu districts of Tamil Nadu such as Erode, Coimbatore, Karur and Tirupur in Tamil Nadu. They do not have any marital relationship with KURUMANS of Tamil Nadu. KURUMBA GOUNDARS have affiliation with KONGU VELLALAR Community, categorized in 'OTHER BACKWARD CLASS (OBC)' of Tamil Nadu State.
- The ethnographic study on the community names such as KURUMBAN and KURUMBAR cannot do separately because they are synonym names to KURUMANS. Hence that KURUMA, KURUMBA, KURUMBAR, KURUMAN GOUNDAR are the synonym names of KURUMAN or KURUMANS (No. 18 of ST list of Tamil Nadu) a Scheduled Tribe in Tamil Nadu.

The following anthropological interpretations were accepted by the SLSC and the process of identity took place accordingly. The Kurumbar and Kurumanare one and the same and their culture is very much tribal in nature. The above experience is evidence that anthropologists are involved in different forms of engagements. They seek to play a normative role by following basic anthropological thinking and not crossing basic boundaries that understands the culture holistically, using the appropriate methodological tools and analytical approaches.

Thus, what we see is the expansiveness of these processes of reclassification becoming increasingly aligned with new domains of neoliberal power, requiring us to develop innovative approaches towards understanding the complexities through which various modalities continue to be negotiated within domains of personhood (academician) and power (administrators). Anthropologists are expected to deliver reports and recommendations in a much more rapid and accessible manner. Furthermore, those could be scientific but still simple and communicable. As a result, anthropological intervention could be more relevant, problem solving and receive less criticism. Such engaged anthropology creates an obligation of a particularly pressing sort of on the spot decision

ons and could be termed as beyond an intellectual recognition in the process of identity claim. The process expects to deliver the outcome on a genuine or not genuine claim and is of open-ended epistemology.

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# Continuity and change: Transformations in the urban history of Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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In simple terms, transformation is the process that occurs when something changes from one state to another. Irrespective of the definitional nuances in urban and rural research, there is consensus that such events are complex and ongoing. To disentangle the factors and drivers from the outcomes and features, this paper's conceptual approach differentiates between the transitional process, or the “flow”, and the “status”, which refers to the existing state of affairs at a specific time in the past. My historical analysis, however, in the guise of snapshots, presents several in-between stages in Phnom Penh's urban development status with particular reference to its urban morphology.

This angle prioritizes long-term historical and slowly evolving structures as *longue durée* over a big leap forward into Modernity. This priority also seeks to counter the identification of continuity rather than change – a widespread occupational hazard to which historians are prone. Empirical evidence mostly points to persistency and resilience; consequently, if changes do occur, they do not necessarily reflect progress but modifications at best. Implicitly, however, “transformation” is still associated with *progress* (development, growth, evolution, improvement or forward-movement), which is the paradigm of *modernization* as a model of an advancing transition from “pre-modern” or traditional to “modern societies” (Knöbl, 2003).

The path Phnom Penh – Cambodia's current capital – took to *modernity*, understood here as our contemporary (hyper)modern times, was neither a history of progress nor straight forward (Eisenstadt, 2003; Chandler, 2000). Events, whose scope was unprecedented, triggered profound changes, altering both the urban landscape (the physical side) and the urbanity (the urban life) of the Lower Mekong metropole. Not only the vicissitudes of Phnom Penh's relatively short 150-year history, but also Cambodia's general settlement history raises the question: What is rural and what is urban? This question is especially relevant for one of this collective volume's guidelines, namely providing a regional framework. “Western” scholarly concepts of “the city,” particularly the sharp contrast between urban and rural areas, are often not appropriate for Southeast Asia. Historically, this academic binarity is used in terms of rural transitions, which

are repeatedly compared to the economic transformation from agricultural to industrial economies as witnessed in many parts of nineteenth century Europe and across Asia and Latin America in the twentieth century. In view of the ever-intensifying links between urban and rural areas in contemporary Southeast Asia, the question needs to be raised whether a centrifugal, outward-bound urbanization sprawl or a centripetal inward-bound “ruralization to semi-urban space” is at work – or even both trajectories simultaneously. To understand the region's complexities and long-term evolutions, one needs to take a step back to the heydays of the Khmer Empire.

### **Before Phnom Penh: Angkor and wandering residential towns**

Recent comparative archaeological research revealed that “Greater Angkor, at its peak, was [...] the world's most extensive preindustrial low-density urban complex” (Evans et al., 2007: 14280). Between the ninth and fifteenth centuries AD, a vast cumulative settlement landscape emerged north-east of the Tonle Sap, the great nutrition-rich inland lake in the Cambodian lowlands.

Two concomitant changes gave rise to a polynuclear settlement pattern covering approximately 1,000 square kilometers: the largescale rice agriculture and the implementation of a sacral kingdom as the realm's political frame. Canals crisscrossed this landscape dotted with water reservoirs, which also had intensifying and extending settlement areas. Greater Angkor was a *hydraulic city* designed to attract as many settlers as possible through its wide-ranging irrigation works that allowed stable agrarian production around residential complexes containing palaces and a temple mountain as the spiritual center. Angkor Thom (literally the “Great City”), with its central, late twelfth century temple district of Angkor Wat, was the last and most enduring walled capital in the history of the Khmer empire (Higham, 2001; Coe, 2003). Time and again, the great kings relocated their royal residence to renew their symbolic power and to expand their network of local temples, ponds, and durable agricultural space with symmetrical moat-and-mound complexes as the distinctive spatial structure. Despite all these man-made irrigation efforts, the local agriculture's backbone is still to this day low-density, rain-fed rice growing in small bunded fields (paddy-rice without irrigation), with dry rice (or upland rice) used as a supplement, as well as flood-retreat and floating rice farming (Delvert, 1961; Martin, 1981; Grubauer and Golzio, 2008). The design and construction of this kind of extensive (agri)cultural environment did not – and still does not – require centralized planning under the guidance of a masterplan that an elite-appointed authority implements. By adapting to the microgeographical conditions and involving the local traditions, Cambodia's rural-urban agro-landscape evolved bottom-up and at a local level rather than top-down. This persistent structure of small-scale farmers and labor-intensive production made modernization difficult. Today, high investment cost and the abundance of “industrious hands” are impeding mechanization while the traditional practice of planting gluten-rich paddy rice prevails. Most Cambodian farmers are smallholders with less than two hectares per household, of which 75% is devoted to rice. A slow transformation only takes place in fertilization and diversifying crops (high-

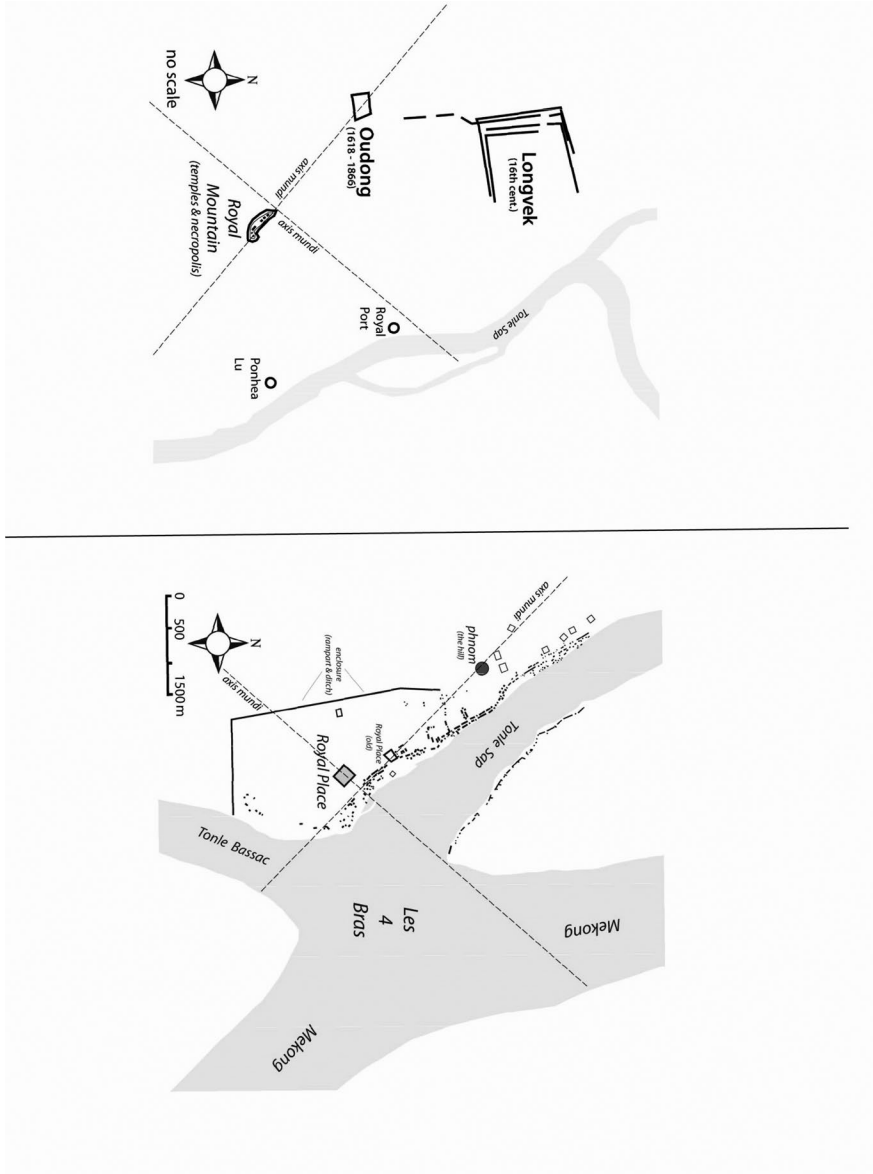
yield rice varieties or vegetables, see Eliste and Zorya, 2015). Technically speaking, little has changed in the rice farming communities since the days of Angkor.

Whatever caused the demise or collapse of the old Khmer empire (there is as yet no ultimate explanation), the reasons were definitely not monocausal. It is generally accepted that, in the sixteenth century, the Khmer kings left the Angkor region due to political and socio-economic reasons. Their motives included the cyclical rise and fall of competing regional overlords and grandee families, who vied with the central kingdom to control the labor and the ongoing conflicts with neighboring powers (i.e. Siam, Champa, and Dai Viet). Ecological impact and shifts in global trade are also frequently mentioned. New capitals were founded farther south-east: Basan/Bashan (in Chinese sources) was the capital between 1431/34 and 1525/30, followed by Longvek (1525/30-1593), Srei Santhor (1594-1620), Udong, twice (1620-58 and 1794-1863/65), and other short-lived ones like Bâ Phnom (*Caturmukh* – literally the “four faces” in Khmer), including a brief return to Angkor. Phnom Penh (from 1865) was the last in this series of capitals (Khin, 1991; Golzio, 2007, 2011; Wolters, 1966).

When the Khmer court moved to the south-western part of the lowland, the king's residence also reproduced the cosmic geography, but on a much smaller scale. Its location at the confluence of four rivers and the associated phenomenon of the Tonle Sap River's annual reversed flow made the place a holy site. While it is difficult to always reconstruct the exact location and timeframe, historical records (some of which are fictitious) point to at least four royal residences located around this exceptional site: Lovea Em, Koh Slaket, Koh Khlok (whose position was more upstream along the Mekong), and Phnom Penh (Mak, 1995). After each of these relocations, the royal capital needed to be re-rooted. The palace and royal *wat* (Buddhist temple) were placed at the crossing of two visual axes, which determined the world's symbolic focus, with a third, the spiritual cosmic axis, raised to connect Heaven and Earth. Similar to a village headman leading his clan to establish a new settlement, the king too had to delineate the royal domain and erect his palace. Topographical considerations and ceremonies performed by the divine monarch (*devaraja*) and by commoners influenced the location of the built environment at sites with good practical and spiritual energy. On these grounds, the perfect spot for a royal residence, which a ritual specialist determined, could become the entire state's political gravitation point. This *galactic* or *solar polity* represented the geometric connection between the microcosm (city, temple, home) and the macrocosm (the eternal) in cardinal orthogonality. Space, especially the urban form, was designed to mimic the cosmos as a hierarchical example of the secular order on earth (see Figure 1).

These royal towns were river-port polities, similar to other land-locked port cities of peninsular Southeast Asia, such as Ayutthaya and early Thonburi/Bangkok (Kathirithamby-Wells and Villiers, 1990). Like these cities, the Cambodian post-Angkorian emporia were created to secure more effective control of local and long-distance trading patterns, small-scale production, monopolies, and taxes. The significance of the single Central Place (the royal residence) as the political, cultural, economic, and military center of the kingdom remained unchanged, but the port cities lacked a wider rural hinterland and the old Khmer empire's centripetal force. There is also evidence that both the central and the local plans continued to shape the residential areas' building activities and the hard infrastructure, which refers to

Figure 1: Locating the right spot for the royal capital; Left side: Location and approx. outline of the early post-Angkorian capitals (O) Udong and Longvek North-West of Phnom Penh. The Holy Mountain represents the spiritual navel of the world. Right side: Phnom Penh in the 1860s at the Les Quatre Bras (Caturmukh), the confluence of four river arms. The monsoon regime causes the annual flow reversal of the Tonle Sap River.



Source: Author's own draft based on Mikaelian (2009) and plans of the National Archives of Cambodia

the fundamental facilities that allowed these capitals to function. If Angkor's urban complex could be said to feature the "designs of kings and farmers" (Hawken, 2013), then Phnom Penh tells the construction history of kings and farmers, colonial officers and "colonized" city dwellers, "irrealsocialist de-urbanizers," and, more recently, of politically well-connected developers, squatters, and urban newcomers (Kolnberger, 2014a, 2015a; cf. Mikaelian, 2009; Tambiah, 1977; Malville and Gujral, 2000; Népote, 1973).

## Phnom Penh and French rule

In 1863, the kingdom became a protectorate of France. After the court's move from Udong to the "quatre bras" (four arms in French) in 1865/66, Phnom Penh became the king's (re)new(ed) royal seat. In general, royal Khmer cities of the post-Angkorian time had two distinct major morphological districts: the palace quarter and the civil town. In and around the palace, the king's extensive family and his retainers formed a royal household and royal administration housed in a compact and concentric arrangement of buildings. In contrast, the commoners settled in linear-type "civil lines." In Phnom Penh, the civil town stretched mainly along the banks of the Tonle Sap River. Various social mechanisms and the physical characteristics of the plots of land buttressed the royal town's dual character. Royal rule and sovereignty were based on a physical inner circle, with the king as the *pater familias*: one could gain – or lose – everything by being close to the king.

To create an appropriate space, ditches, drainage canals, and retention basins ensured that the palatial-sacral complex's location was flood-proof, which provided valuable building lots. The "civil town" housed the commercial district – "Cambodia's bazaar," as visitors disparagingly described it. A compact formation, similar to that of the palace, emerged around the main market. In this perennial town concept, there was no strict division between the urban and the rural. Agricultural production surrounded radially the small urban core and most houses along the river front(s) had kitchen gardens and smaller (horticultural) provision grounds (*chamcar*) (see Figure 2). They provided the local markets with victuals and other goods (e.g. silk or spices). Cambodia's once single urban area not only serves, but also relies on its proximity to rural production. This pattern of cultivation in concentric rings or belts around a single city center recalls a tropical version of von Thünen's model, which is based on agricultural land use and transportation cost. As was typical of a royal residence and its function as a center of consumption and redistribution, the workshops of craftsmen, who were purveyors to the court, were concentrated here, close to a high density of regular customers.

In the 1860s to 1880s, the town remained a very modest settlement, despite being the Protectorate's capital and royal residence, consisting mainly of two long rows of wooden dwellings (the *Grand Rue*) along one of the two parallel NE-SW-routes, which merchants and the king's followers mostly used. Phnom Penh's urban landscape had a pronounced elongated layout with liminal-aquatic characteristics. The houses, most on stilts, were lined up on natural or artificial elevations and causeways, surrounded by flowing or standing (or stagnant) water. Annual changes in the monsoon climate

were responsible for an extreme hydraulic regime, causing the periodically rising or falling profile of a typical tidal town and its urban wetlands (Kolnberger, 2014a: 49, 92f.; Molyvann, 2003).

Figure 2: House plot and rice fields: topographical land use map and terrain profile (ideal-typical)



Source: Author's own draft

*Legend:*

**(A)** the phum or village, a Khmer expression which designates any inhabited land regardless of size, form or ethnic composition, is aligned along an all-weather road with ditches. Houses are not to be sited on the centre of the plot (i.e. the “navel of the land” or phchet phum) for (a) ritual precaution and for (b) practical reasons because constructions need to be above the seasonal high flood of running and standing waters. The linear drainage of the road provides some additional protection.

**(B)** the wat (the Buddhist temple and monastery) with a beng (pond, natural or artificial) and its sacral enclosure.

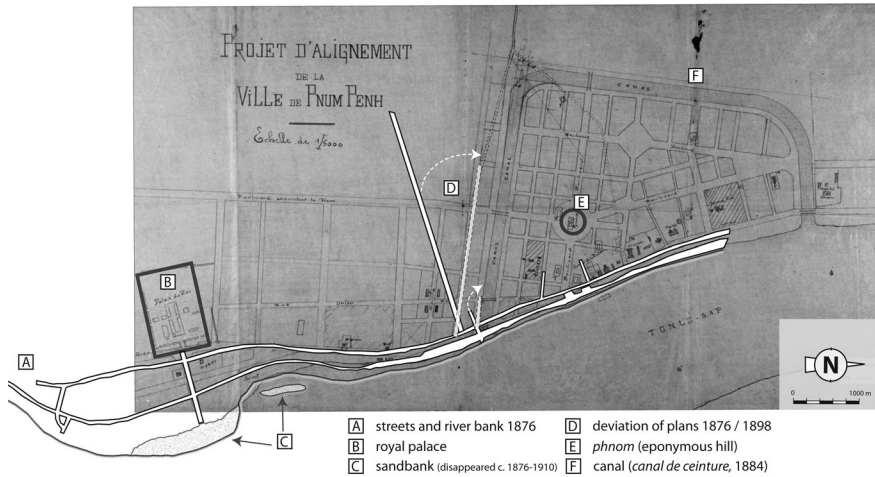
- (1) the rice fields (sre) along a prek riverbed that seasonally fills and flows after sufficient rain fall and/or after overflow water has entered from the main riverbed. Here, the village people have extended this prek with cut-off canals for better irrigation.
- (2) the house plot east of the road offers terrain for riparian market gardens (cham-car), eventually, or small rice fields (flood-retreat farming). Hand-irrigation during dry season (monsoon low tide) is facile. For this reason, the plots west of the road are disadvantaged during that season.
- (3) secondary dirt roads and foot trails
- (4) the all-weather road bordered by ditches for drainage. Rural road networks are the life-lines for the country side. To border on a segment of it is like having a shop window for displaying goods and services (often an extra vendor hut is set up beside the road).
- (5) a prek is in most cases a human-made canal, having been dug by locals (here with high and low watermarks) to extend the annual inundation in a controlled manner.
- (6) the river with high water and low water level and flooding zone.

Over the next decades until the years between the World Wars, the kernel of a compact city with a denser and more rectilinear layout began to emerge (see Figure 3). The river-banks were stabilized to secure the waterfront, thus creating a straight-lined building frontage, a main causeway, and a river harbor site, while land reclamations progressively formed a flat, artificial platform, used as a site to build a tropical French town. “Polderization” – the complete drainage of square-shaped fields, unusual in the Khmer building tradition, provided more building sites. This land was porous enough to absorb heavy precipitation, which the paved surfaces that the colonial power had started constructing, could not (Pierdet, 2008). From the mid-1880s, the French colonial administration planned and executed hydraulic modernization by digging a U-shaped canal (the “Canal de P[h]nom-Penh” or “Canal intérieur” completed in 1894, but, like most of the inner-city watercourses, only filled later) around the northern part to demarcate the “white” colonial city. Most of the colonial administration’s buildings and the civil ones were concentrated here. This quarter also housed the “respectable” part of the European colonial society. Typical of Western colonialism, Phnom Penh became a dual city with two urban foci: the palace and the “white” administrative town. In between, a third center emerged – the market area.

To the south, a trench separated the well-designed central market area. Fueled by capital and investment from Indochina and other parts of Asia, this market became the pulsating economic heart of the city and of the Protectorate. Inhabitants with a Chinese background dominated in this quarter, whereas, further south, a mixed court society of – in the ethnic nomenclature of the period – “Cambodians” (meaning ethnic Khmer; “Cambodia” is an anglicization of the French “Cambodge,” which in turn is the French transliteration of the Khmer-word “Kampuchea”), Sino-Khmers, Europeans, Chinese (all southern Chinese dialect groups), Vietnamese (“Annamites”), Siamese, Filipinos, Laotians, and Cham-Malays built their settlements around the king’s palace.

The percentage of Europeans never surpassed 1.5% of the urban population. Phnom Penh, with its approximately 30,000 inhabitants during last two decades of the nineteenth century, represented a somewhat *plural society* by encompassing different communities with unrelated cultural backgrounds in a dual colonial city, whose marketplace

Figure 3: The “rectification” of a Khmer royal city



Source: Author's draft based on National Archives of Cambodia (NAC), Résident Supérieur du Cambodge (RSC): *Projet d'alignement de la Ville de Pnum Penh*, NAC/RSC 24126, 1898 and *Avant-projet de protection des berges du Tonlé Sap – Défense de la rive droite au droit du Palais du Roi*, NAC/RSC 10246/2-4, 1876.

grew into the dominant organizing force for the division of labor (Furnivall, 1980; Muller, 2006: 59). Notwithstanding this diversity, common bonds did exist and the French began a process of social engineering by restructuring the Khmer regime's urban foundation as a new French colonial one. In keeping with the zoning plans, Phnom Penh and the other sub-central places of colonial Cambodia (residences of the district administration) were planned as compact cities with an orthogonal layout, a high residential density, and mixed land uses (Sreang, 2004). Nations can be “imagined”, states cannot; the state had to be materially engineered. To improve the colonial presence, a city-cum-roads scheme was launched in Phnom Penh and later expanded to impose a physical French presence on the entire Protectorate (Edwards, 2006; Del Testa, 1999).

### The equifinal layout of the colonial capital

On paper, French municipal authorities planned as they did in France. In Cambodia, the French urbanization process was Janus-faced. On the one hand, the colonial government turned a blind eye to some spontaneous, “illegal” settlements, also deliberately refraining from developing specific spaces. On the other hand, other areas – especially the inner-city parts – were closely monitored. Two planning agendas were at work: (1) spontaneous building, which aggregated into a morphological order similar to the (2) French officials' mapped city planning. Together, these agendas formed an orthogonal city tissue. However, the spontaneous (indigenous) building activity “from below” excluded, directed, and partially impeded the (French) plans “from above”. Capi-

tal-intensive engineering (e.g. canals, large-scale landfills, and drainage) that the very same town authority had provided, ensured an attractive building site for spontaneous settlements.

Development costs played a major role, because construction work was difficult and expensive in swampy areas; however, the people who had lived there for years or decades greatly facilitated the city's official extension. The French authorities could not forgo these half-ready prepared grounds and decided to specifically develop these areas in order to save infrastructural costs and to demonstrate order by rebuilding quarters that had originally been considered out of reach. The reality of Phnom Penh's street morphology emerged from two contingent practices in an equifinal way to form a slightly irregular checker-board composite.

By establishing zones of higher or lower control, the French reproduced their patchwork of direct and indirect rule over the colony on a smaller scale in Phnom Penh. Their colonial government only shared overlordship with the Khmer king at the very beginning, before mounting a colonial *coup d'état* by threatening military action in 1884 (Osborne, 1997). The timing of this coup was no coincidence, as France – the colonial homeland – witnessed a concurrent shift to even more direct state rule, also using land registration to achieve this. Before the French intervention, land had formally belonged to the king as the “lord of all the lands and water”. However, the people could enjoy the right of possession if they publicly demonstrated that they were cultivating the adjacent land, building houses, fencing off plots, and generally occupying the land continuously and peacefully. In contrast, in the French period, all immovable property had to be registered in the cadastre in order to be legal (Kleinpeter, 1937; Land Law of Cambodia, 2003; Hel, 2008). Spatial micromanagement became a key factor in the enforcement of government power while land and concessions became the key-resource in the colony's urban economy (Slocomb, 2010) – and part of the kingdom's contradictory modernization (Korff, 2010a).

### **“Perle de l'Extrême-Orient”: Independence and the reign of Sihanouk (1953-1970)**

In colonial times, Phnom Penh was unquestionably the Protectorate's primary city, although the town only ranked as a secondary metropole within French Indochina's urban hierarchy. On becoming the capital of an independent nation-state in 1953/54, Phnom Penh's domestic position as the disproportionately largest and most important municipality in the kingdom increased rapidly. Typical of newly decolonized metropolises, the city's (regular) population peaked after a sharp upswing at more than half a million just 20 years later. During the 60-year French colonial era, the population growth had been slow and only very gradual as Phnom Penh's population was around 42,000 in 1904, rising to approximately 100,000 in the last years before independence in 1953/54. In the 1950s and 1960s, Phnom Penh also became more *khmerized*, due to the growing share of native Cambodians – mainly the influx of newcomers from the countryside – which increased from 46% in 1912 to 62% in 1959. The 20% Chinese (28% in 1912) and 17% Vietnamese (24% in 1912) formed the next two largest ethnic urban groups (Koln-

berger, 2014a: 534; CAS, 2009). Phnom Penh's expansion was, however, an indicator of the continuous imbalance in the country's development; in other words, the persistency of a single, progressive/privileged urban core and a lagging rural periphery. Over 90 percent of Cambodia's total population (5.7 million in 1962) lived in the countryside. A similar persistence also applied to the urbanization: The resumption of the French *grand* scheme characterized the urban planning "polderization", especially the waterfronts of the Tonle Sap and Bassac Rivers, on one hand, and the spontaneous and planned building activities that extended the existing street grid, on the other hand. During the first Sihanouk (1955 to 1970) administration decades, known as *Sangkum*, Phnom Penh changed its appearance significantly from a "vegetal" to a "mineral" city. Reinforced concrete (a French invention) became the construction material of choice, while the Cambodian version of the Chinese shophouse (narrow, multi-storied buildings, facing the main streets with a single multifunctional room for business on the ground floor) became the center's dominant residential building type.

The building-obsessed king Norodom, abdicating the throne and his sacral office to become the politically more active prince Sihanouk and flamboyant head of state (1955-70), improved and beautified his capital with representative edifices and monuments such as administrative buildings, a new palace (the extensive *Chamkar Mon Compound*), and a landmark-building at the river crossing *C(h)aturmukh*. This catch-up development of a self-determining state gave rise to a particular modernist-vernacular style, currently called *New Khmer Architecture* (Grant Ross and Collins, 2006), as the tangible part of Cambodia's Cultures of Independence (Daravuth and Muan, 2001).

With some justification, it can be argued that the French cultivation of a Cambodian nation in the long shadow of Angkor's unique heritage and in ethno-political demarcation from their Thai, Vietnamese, and Laotian neighbors, continued as a nation-building exercise under the aegis of a charismatic leader. After a hopeful start, however, things turned sour. Despite notable achievements, particularly in respect of infrastructures – 225 km of streets in Phnom Penh alone (Uk, 1975) – and education, the Sihanouk government failed in one sensitive key-area: providing sustainable economic growth for the broader redistribution of income and wealth. As in other postcolonial administrations in Southeast Asia, Sihanouk had to rally as many retainers behind him as possible, which inevitably provoked conflicts between rent-seekers and modernist technocrats (Korff, 2010b). In this crisis, a nepotistic *crony socialism* (Khatri et al., 2005) emerged, and Sihanouk rewarded his most loyal retainers with privileges and income, especially from the pool of lucrative state monopolies. Vann Molyvann's famous housing projects at the Bassac River Front, for example, were primarily earmarked for state and city employees. This socio-political drift was an eerily similar historical *déjà-vu* of the merging of state, bureaucracy, and economy under one umbrella – the precolonial palace economy. The unanswered question is still whether this development, if it had overcome the structural and financial, fiscal and commercial calamity, could have led to a Cambodia as a newly industrialized country. In retrospect, Sangkum-Cambodia was running out time – the Vietnam War was increasingly dragging the kingdom into its destructive orbit.

## The besieged city and refugee camp (1970-1975)

The First Indochina War (1946-1954) spared Cambodia. This war of independence against the French colonial power was mainly fought in Vietnam and decided in the northern part of the country. The Second Indochina War (Vietnam War, 1955-1975) was different. Its main theatre of war and insurgency moved to the south and closer to Cambodia – too close for a non-aligned country to maintain a sideshow position (Shawcross, 1979). Ultimately, Sihanouk's seesaw policy between "pro-US" and "pro-Viet Cong" forces within his country and in foreign politics was unable to keep Cambodia out of the conflict. In 1963, the Prince – now head of state, after abdicating the crown in 1955 – cut the considerable American subsidies (USAID) – the last financial lifeline – which worsened the political and economic crisis. A palace revolution-cum-military putsch was launched, which deposed Sihanouk, who left the country. The new self-proclaimed Khmer Republic (1970-75), realigned with the United States, was short-lived and ruled over an ever-shrinking territory. In the end, it only held Phnom Penh, which fell on April 17, 1975 to the Khmer Rouge. During this time, the urban population of Phnom Penh had more than doubled from around 630,000 in 1969 to around two million in 1975. The city had become a large refugee site. The only government-initiated construction measure of this time worth mentioning was a circum-urban dam and causeway, which defined the municipality's new outer periphery. It also served as a trench and military demarcation line. The space within its perimeter soon filled up with refugees from the countryside fleeing the advancing Khmer Rouge and the US carpet bombing devastation. Paradoxically, bomber fleets designed to turn cities into rubble now turned the flat agrarian countryside virtually upside down (the total payload dropped over Cambodia in order to stop the advance of the Khmer Rouge-guerilla, made Cambodia the probably most heavily bombed country in history). In the capital's deceptive safety, the evacuees and displaced persons practiced dispersed urban self-settlement in open spaces and, in the center, used the built-up area's interstices. These people also set up self-settled camps or formed grouped settlements in concentric densities within the urban fringe, replicating an entire support system in a makeshift economy. Nevertheless, this last island was finally over-run by the Khmer Rouge, led by the general secretary of the Communist party of Kampuchea (Cambodia), Pol Pot.

## The end of the "city of parasites"

Contrary to the commonly held belief, the Khmer Rouge were neither anti-urban per se, nor did they practice *urbicide*, which "entails the destruction of buildings as the constitutive elements of urbanity" (Coward, 2008: 43). Phnom Penh's physical substance (and that of the other towns taken) remained untouched with two exceptions: the Catholic cathedral destroyed as an ideological and anti-colonial statement, while the explosive charge used to provide entry into the National Bank vault was poorly calculated, damaging the building beyond repair. On the other hand, urbanity, urban life, was brutally halted. Within days, two million refugees and original residents were forcefully evicted and systematically dispersed over the countryside for the following two reasons.

First, the relatively small guerrilla force could neither control nor provide for a million-strong group of people concentrated in one place. Second, besides such practical and security-related considerations, ideological motives justified the “evacuation”. The Khmer Rouge leadership thought of this urban population as parasites and the enemy of the real people. After the final “reboot” of the society, the Khmer Rouge aimed to re-inhabit the towns with ideologically purified people. “Let’s turn the countryside into a town [...] and] he who has rice possesses all” (Locard, 2004: 96; 227) are the two Khmer Rouge mottos that, besides echoing thoughts of Mao Zedong, encapsulate the crux of their plans: forced ruralization and the abrupt modernization of agriculture to create a solid base for the extra great leap forward to socialism, industrialization, and unimpeded progress. The “irrealsocialist planned economy” with collectivization, dam, and irrigation projects failed miserably. People starved, died from diseases, and exhaustion, which aggravated and intensified the ongoing Khmer Rouge *politicide* (Clavero, 2008: 113ff; see Kolnberger, 2014a: 305ff; cf. Locard, 2004; Kiernan, 1996; Bultmann, 2015; 2017).

As for Phnom Penh, following the occupation the urban territory was divided into zones of influence under various Khmer Rouge fractions, which was never as tight and streamlined an organization as the Viet Minh/Viet Cong. This initial division was short-lived, perhaps only existing on paper, and the guerilla movement’s most brutal dog of war, Ta Mok, and his “Nirdey” (the group of the North-West Zone) took full control. They protected Pol Pot and the inner circle of the new regime’s residence and headquarters. Phnom Penh as capital of Democratic Kampuchea – the new official state name – was never completely abandoned, but heavily extensified. According to various estimations, between five and 20 thousand people remained to maintain the basic infrastructure, form a garrison, and work at some of the production sites (Martin, 1983). The regime’s most infamous and important “interrogation center”, the Tuol Sleng-Security Prison (S-21), a transit station to death for more than 18,000 “convicts”, was located in the southern part of the city and was another reason for people remaining (Chandler, 1999). Finally, the town functioned as a Potemkin village, the representative stage of the regime for its very limited diplomatic exchange and carefully selected visitors.

## The garrisoned town

The poor supply situation and paranoid purges ravaged the Khmer Rouge’s own rank and file. Their hypernationalistic ethnic cleansings, particularly against “Vietnamese colonizers”, and their plans to reconquer the Khmer Krom’s historical settlement area, although they were then living in the south-western part of Vietnam (*Cochinchina*), led to a complete political break with Hanoi. After multiple border skirmishes, troops of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (since 1976) launched an invasion against the Pol Pot regime. They liberated and occupied most of Cambodia in a swift military operation during the dry winter monsoon of 1978/79 and pushed the Khmer Rouge, and the population still under its control, into the highlands. The proclaimed People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK, 1979-1991) became a protectorate of communist Vietnam, while the Khmer Rouge reverted its tactics to guerrilla warfare once again (during the Cambodian-Vietnamese War as part of the Third Indochina War, 1975-1989). Following the Vietnamese occupa-

tion, a half-crescent semi-urbanized ribbon of refugees and military camps formed along the Thai border. During the 1980 and 1990s, the population of these sites, perhaps 300,000 people, constituted the power base of the various civil war parties opposing the new regime in Phnom Penh (Thibault, 2005). Hostility to the PRK-government, protected by Vietnam and sponsored by the Soviet Union, was the only common denominator of the probably weirdest coalition at the end of the Cold War, including the genocidal Khmer Rouge siding with the imperialistic USA and 'the West'.

Selected urban spaces and their initially hand-picked population were also the main resources of the nascent PRK government in Phnom Penh. In support of this original accumulation of political power, the supreme administrative authorities of the People's Republic established their headquarters in the former government district close to the riverside. Some of the reasons for this move are obvious: the buildings were originally constructed for such a purpose and the site was also the former prestigious heart of the city as it included the adjacent National Museum, Palace, and Silver Pagoda (Wat Preah Keo). It is no coincidence that the most influential figure in present-day Cambodia and the longest-serving head of government, Hun Sen, picked a house facing the much-admired Independence Monument. Other motives for the choice may be linked to exception and martial law governing the state. First, the district offered ample scope for gated communities, which could support each other during a siege or Khmer Rouge counteroffensive. Second, short distances facilitated communications and minimized the leaders' risk of exposure during their meetings. Third, the rest of the slowly resettling city formed a security buffer against the outside, while the inner kernel of political power became a high-security zone – which is currently still in place. The various ministerial compounds became trading grounds for loyalty, which turned them into gravity fields for socio-political networks. Initially, the government monitored the repopulation closely, but the process could not be hindered and the capital's population increased exponentially from several thousands in 1979 to about half a million in 1988.

With the end of the Cold War, the support for the anti-communist coalition, including the Khmer Rouge, vanished. The Vietnamese left in September 1989. With peace in sight, and after a transitional phase supervised by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC, 1992-1993), the communist economic system was dismantled in favor of the principles of a free market economy in progress. The monarchy was restored in 1993 (second reign of Norodom Sihanouk), however as a ceremonial kingdom only. The concentration of power in the office of the king was confined and all authority remained in the hands of the government established after the UNTAC sponsored elections. The early 1990s became a period of strategic exploitation and valorization for reasons of profit, and all social strata, from the smallest to the largest businesses, became involved in the capitalization of landed property. As the direct successor of the Communist Party, the CPP (Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party) was the big winner, particularly after the political clashes in 1997. Its property, initially all its urban real estate, was officially "privatized" and the party's capital has surpassed that of all its political contenders ever since (Kolnberger 2014a: 325ff.; 2015b; Luciolli, 1988; Gottesman, 2002; Slocomb, 2002; Carrier, 2007).

## Developer playground and the return of the infamous “One Percent”

Cambodia's endless international and internal armed conflicts had an exceptional social levelling effect with the state failure, mass mobilization, civil warfare, the Khmer Rouge's transformative revolution, the abolition of private property, the Khmer Rouge's *politicide*, ethnic cleansings, and mass starvation effectively deurbanizing the population and degrading education. These events made the surviving population more homogeneous and *khmerized* than ever before. Income inequality was specifically reduced (Scheidel, 2017: 231f.). With the need to “camp-in” and share billeted living space gradually diminishing, the Socialist moral economy mutated into quick money politics and political family business, ensuring the hegemonic status of the very few. In the early 1990s, the (re)privatization of property and profits from collective resources separated the wheat from the chaff in terms of political connections. State and town authorities had already undertaken a first wave of eviction in the late 1980s, which resumed in waves in the 1990s and 2000s. According to the UN World Urbanization Prospects (2017), urban space has become ever scarcer and more valuable, with the population increasing fourfold from the 1990s to reach 1.9 million in 2018.

The considerable damage to the infrastructure (especially flood control on the river embankments) and housing, due to neglect and small-scale vandalism during the Khmer Rouge era and subsequently during the first years following their reign of terror, was repaired and upgraded, mainly during and after the UN-peacekeeping mission. Since then, the face of the city has changed considerably. Capital has visibly returned to Phnom Penh. As in other Southeast Asian capitals, small was, architecturally speaking, replaced with big, timber with cement, tiles with glass; the vernacular style with various *khmerized* interpretation of post-modern architecture. Topographically speaking, the flat town gained height when skyscraping started in the mid-2000s, superelevating the (four-faced) tower of the throne hall in the royal palace compound, the unwritten benchmark for building height since French colonial times. Morphologically speaking, the gridiron concept has been extended. However, an increasing number of satellite cities with mixed residential and business use are being constructed around the historical kernel, giving Phnom Penh's urban agglomeration a more polynuclear character. Economically speaking, Phnom Penh has a low-density industrialization, with garment (manu)factories mushrooming on the periphery (since 2006 the Special Economic Zone). In 2017, Phnom Penh's bicycle assembling-industry, fueled by Cambodia's duty-free access to Europe, surpassed Taiwan as the EU's top bike supplier. Investors, predominantly of Chinese origin and owning 90% of the foreign capital, take advantage of the low wages and social standards, as well as the favorable terms of trade with preferential market access to the EU and the US markets. As the kingdom's largest export earner (78% of the merchandise in 2016), the textiles and shoe sector is the main non-agrarian employer with over 600,000 workers in more than 600 factories.

Hydrologically speaking, the city is now drained, and nearly all inner-city swamps, wetlands, and (ephemeral) watercourses have disappeared, providing terrain for housing and industrial estates. As a kind of urban micro water management, traditional Khmer planning needed to be loose and open, a concept that Vann Molyvann, Cambodia's foremost architect and planner of the Sangkum-era (1953-70), adapted

successfully to create the first modern Phnom Penh. In terms of the human capital, the universities and colleges of various standards established for a young generation of city dwellers are booming. Regarding the material culture and consumption, Phnom Penh is now definitely part of the modern world, having been transformed from a city of pedestrians, bikers, and motorized two-wheelers into a city that favors four wheels and has to deal with congested traffic in public spaces (Shatkin, 1998; Kelly and McGee, 2003; Osborne, 2008; Nam, 2011; Paling, 2012; Kolnberger, 2012a, 2012b; Percival and Waley, 2012; Fauveaud, 2014).

## Conclusion

Since French colonial times, Phnom Penh has been the pivot of Cambodia's history. Aside from its disproportional size and its political and economic influence, its role as the country's primary city has taken precedence in respect of all other aspects too, such as it being a media, culture, education, and internal migration center. There was a change from a *galactic* to a more centralized polity: from a core and a loose enclosing space arranged around a center (mandala pattern) to a more centripetal pattern. In Cambodia, this development was initiated by the colonial authorities, nationwide infrastructure initiatives and the hard border-policy of the French. Sihanouk continued to implement modern state-principles. In one way, Cambodia's nation-building project was very successful. The Khmer-Cambodian national identity (around 98% of the population of 16.5 million in 2019) became firmly rooted in the minds of elites and ordinary citizens alike. Linguistic and religious homogeneity and the experience of enduring a troublesome past are further favorable conditions for the potential "take off" to become a modern state. However, the current government's prestige of bringing peace to the country as the once most desired public good is running out: the promise of political participation and equal access to resources is broken. Today, there is also a clear bias in public goods provision between city and countryside, which was hampered not only by the lack of institutional capacity but also by the resurgence of clientelism. Phnom Penh has also remained the unchallenged main trading ground for patronage, as well as for a "culture of corruption and impunity" (Osborne, 2008: 195). This is the dark side and the price that apparently needs to be paid for peace and stability after the recent nightmarish past. Corruption is also the consequence of the city's social (dis)organization, which resulted from the struggle for scarce urban resources, particularly housing. The role of location, the socio-spatial organizing of the city into preferred neighborhoods close to orbits of political power cannot be understated nor underestimated. However, the city's unchallenged command and control function, and, therefore, that of the country's elite, is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain given the growing and diversifying young population and their expectations for a fair future.

Cambodia's urbanization rate of 23% (2018) is still comparatively low (e.g., Laos 35%, Vietnam 36%, and Thailand 50% according to The World Bank). Currently, only four other municipalities surpass the population mark of 200,000 by contrast with the more than two million in the capital. Urban economic growth stimulated by a population increase and foreign capital, cannot, however, endure indefinitely. The development of

Phnom Penh's urban growth has attracted capital, some of it of very dubious origins, looking for short-term profit – and a reserve army of labor to fill the factories. This influx and tourism stimulated the demand for construction, while the poverty-ridden countryside has to struggle with inadequate basic infrastructure. So far, most of the foreign aid and NGO investments and projects have been concentrated on Phnom Penh. These diverging trends recall the old urban studies question: Is the primate city parasitic? (London, 1977; Gottdiener et al., 2016).

Phnom Penh's generative function in terms of the rest of the country is and was low. The heralded benefits of modern urbanization, such as the agglomeration of human capital and economic benefits have coincided with higher housing costs, marked disparities in living conditions, a widening gap between rich and poor, and higher risks of crime or congestion. From a historical perspective, it is clear that two rural transformations reinforced this development. First, the French colonial intervention put an end to the overlapping margins of sovereignty that characterized traditional rule in Southeast Asia (Matras-Guin and Taillard, 1992). Hard borders and less soft boundaries began to define the making of the Cambodian territoriality, both externally (in relation to the neighboring polities) and internally (in relation to the political administration and land property rights). Today, Cambodia's foreign policy focuses on establishing friendly borders with its neighbors, while remaining very rigid in terms of domestic real estate issues. Second, Cambodia is in the middle of a transition from a land of abundance to a land scarcity (Rigg, 2003, 2013). The land no longer belongs to its tiller as traditional occupational rights were lost. In other words, the country has lost a historical "social safety valve". This second factor leaves much of the rural population with, more or less, just one option – migration either to Phnom Penh or abroad in search for work.

As Stanley Tambiah (1977) once commented the change in Thailand "from a *galactic* to a more centralized *radial* polity that is by no means modern in the Western sense", this could also be said of Cambodia's more recent history, which is an example for a genuine path into *Modernity* as a multiple phenomenon. Phnom Penh's morphological trajectory and urban development proves the case.

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# From Rangoon College to University of Yangon - 1876 to 1920

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*Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam (Passau)*

## Introduction

2020 marks the centenary of the foundation of Yangon University. It is expected to be celebrated in grand style, as much or more than the 50th and 75th anniversaries in 1970 and 1995. For the 50th anniversary a huge 3-volume Memorial edition of memories and reminiscences by former teachers and students was published, and the Diamond Jubilee in 1995 was marked with the construction of Diamond Jubilee Hall in the University campus (Yen Saning, 2013). The university has a turbulent history, not only because of many years' closure under the military government and strictly limited access to the premises, but because the very month of its foundation provoked conflicts in the shape of student protests and a lasting boycott that are seen as defining for the struggle for national self-determination.

In this article, I look at the early days of colonial education planning and preparations for the establishment of the university which tell us much about colonial ideology and education objectives as well as how these were negotiated and undermined by the ruled.

Rangoon University was established fairly late, in the twilight of empire, so to speak. Universities in India - Calcutta and Madras - had been founded already in 1857, at the height of British imperial power and national self-confidence: The 'Indian Mutiny' had been successfully crushed, the British government had taken over from the EIC, and the British Raj was born. 1877 Queen Victoria became Empress of India. Educational institutions in Rangoon were affiliated to Calcutta university from the 1880s.

By 1920 the situation had changed decisively. In contrast to the decades before, a separate university for Rangoon was now thought advisable, detached from Calcutta and particularly Bengal, which were seen as a hotbed of anti-British rebellion and sedition (Nyi Nyi, 1964: 12).

It was not altogether easy to find literature on the development of the university. Student activism and student protests, both in pre- and post-colonial times are comparatively better covered, less so the events that led to the foundation of the university. But

these are particularly interesting to analyse British colonial and education policy. There are the felicitation volumes, some short studies and a few publications from the 30s (Pearn, 1939; Peacock, 1934: 283-284; Aye Kyaw, 1993). Maung Htin Aung, the first rector of Rangoon University after independence, has some remarks about the student boycott of 1920 in his *History of Burma* (Maung Htin Aung, 1967), and Alicia Turner (2014) looks at the significance of the student boycott. Boshier (2018) discusses the connections between BRS and Rangoon University. After the university reopened in 2012/2013, a number of articles about it appeared in Myanmar newspapers and on the web (Maung Thet Pyin, 2018).

I shall look not so much at the Yangon University of the present, but at its antecedents to trace the pre-history of the University. Efforts by both English and Burmese intellectuals combined to bring it into existence, an event welcomed by students and educated citizens, but at the same time leading straightaway to conflict and boycott, a defining event for the anti-colonial struggle. I look at the significance of education both generally and in a colonial context. But first, a short description of the campus as it presents itself nowadays, still much the same as that constructed between the wars.

### **In lieu of a frontispiece: The campus (Yangon University 2019)<sup>1</sup>**

“Maung Thet Pyin, who now has passed his mid 60s, would love to see his Alma Mater turn 100 in 2020, which is just a couple of years away. May be he would be one of the more fortunate alumni to be able to participate both the 50th and 100th anniversaries. But that would be moving too much ahead.” (Maung Thet Pyin, 2019)

“Yangon University is one of the most complex and contested spaces in Yangon, one of immeasurable political importance for the history of the city. It is where successive generations of the country’s brightest minds have come together to imagine a better future for themselves and their peers. For that reason, it was also the theatre of many moments of upheaval during Myanmar’s fraught 20th century.” (Yangon University, 2019)

The campus is typical for British-built university campuses from the late 19th and early 20th centuries: It resembles the British red brick universities, less the small university towns in England or the earlier Indian (1857) universities which had imposing grounds, but were - and are - dispersed over a larger area. University Madras, e.g. dominates a large stretch of the waterfront in Chepauk, Chennai. In a way, these universities may be compared to ‘total institutions’ or a ‘gated community’, secluded and secure, but also isolated. This shows clearly in the guard houses and barriers at the main entrance,

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1 Information for this and the following paras is also taken from personal observations.

with the difference that entrance and exit are less controlled.<sup>2</sup> Certainly nowadays nobody checks who enters and leaves the campus, but until 2012 this was quite different.<sup>3</sup>

The campus was constructed from 1922-1932, the Convocation Hall was inaugurated in 1927 (Pearn, 1939: 281; Saw Mra Aung, 2019: 8-9). In 1931 the whole campus was officially opened (Peacock, 1934: 283-84). It is a kind of quarter circle between the southwestern bank of Inya Lake (formerly Victoria Lake) and a long stretch of Pyay Road, situated in the Kamayut township, immediately north of Golden Valley, a residential area north of the former cantonment and developed from 1907 for the colonial civil service and well-to-do Burmese (Pearn, 1939: 276). It is nowadays a prime piece of real estate just about eight kilometres north of downtown Yangon. A former student has described the lively time during the construction of the Inya Lake campus when students shuttled between campus and lecture halls (Nyi Nyi, 1970: 2). Teaching was conducted in town, where University College and Judson College were located, viz. on Commissioner (today Bogyoke Aung San) Rd. and Kyemendine Rd. At that time, the campus was still located on the fringes of the settled area, very much removed from the hustle and bustle of the town, a place of retreat, but also of isolation, near the town, but not of the town. In fact, it was largely still a jungle teeming with wild life and mosquitoes and filled with fruit trees (Saw Mra Aung, 2019). As late as 1927 and 1928, wild boar and hog deer were said to be encountered and killed (MNN, 1955-57: 181). Halls of Residence (student hostels) were only opened from 1925-26, until that time, students were housed in dormitories downtown (Saw Mra Aung, 2019).<sup>4</sup> The gravest danger apart from man-eating mosquitoes were thieves from Kamayut village who at night would steal the students' belongings. University Avenue and Inya Road were sandy footpaths or waterlogged ditches at most, made into proper roads only from 1928 onwards (Saw Mra Aung, 2019). Nowadays, the campus is still a place of retreat, but certainly no longer isolated. All around traffic roars through the intersection of Insein and Pyay roads, and the hustle and noise of nearby Hledan market, the favourite shopping place for university teachers and staff, is ever present.

The main entrance to the campus is on University Avenue. From other roads of the quarter circle - Pyay Road, Inya Road, mostly forbidding walls, fences, and much greenery are visible, but the initiated know the many side and back entrances and the secret paths into and out of the campus. Judson chapel, an integral part of the university, yet apart from it in its own grounds (again, the initiated know the shortcut from there into the campus) is accessible from Pyay Road.

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- 2 Something the military government tried to change in the 60s when it (re-)introduced strict curfew times for students in the hostels and even had the doors locked after 6 p.m. (Yen Saning, 2013). The article claims this contributed to further student protests.
  - 3 I remember vividly how in 2012 our colleague celebrated in this volume and I innocently walked into the campus in search of the rector's office with the explicit permission of the Director of Higher Education. We were harshly stopped by an individual on a bicycle barking at us where we were thinking we were going. Only after the pro-rector had been called and ascertained from the DHEL that we were there legitimately, were we allowed to proceed instead of being unceremoniously marched off the premises.
  - 4 The warden of one of them, Pyay Hall was B.R. Pearn, who in the late 40s became a trustee of the university and was the author of the very comprehensive History of Rangoon.

The campus is - like much of Yangon - still green and pleasant even in the heat of the day with huge trees lining Adipati street and the side roads and lawns.

An alumnus of the university, Maung Thet Pyin (nom de plume of U Thiha Saw, executive editor of the Myanmar Times) called his alma mater Mya Kyun Nyo Nyo in a recent article in the Myanmar Times.

Literally, Mya Kyun, in Myanmar, is an emerald island, or rather a green island. Nyo Nyo, could mean many things, including, a grove of trees. Indeed, it is still a very green campus and the university itself is old enough, much older than Maung Thet Pyin, to witness historical events and upheavals the country underwent in the last 140 years (Maung Thet Pyin, 2018).

As a residential university, the campus contains not only the convocation hall and lecture halls, but also a number of dormitories and sports facilities (Yangon University, 2019). Pegu Hall, where reportedly Aung San stayed during his study course, still stands nearly unchanged and untouched from the 1930s as well as Taungoo Hall and several hostels for female students, who were admitted to the University from the start, though in much smaller numbers than males. Besides, faculty and staff also were provided free accommodation on the campus in the shape of spacious and comfortable bungalows. Only the space of the former student Union building on the right just after the entrance and dynamited in the 60s lies still empty and overgrown.

It was on this spot that RASU students built a tomb for U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations until 1971, to honour him, but the tomb was destroyed by the military troops and local authorities on December 10, 1974. The impressive Central Library<sup>5</sup> is on the right just beyond the hostels.

The most iconic building on the campus is certainly the Convocation Hall, which since its completion (Yangon Time Machine, 2018) has hosted the annual graduation ceremonies and many important speeches. It is the first building one sees when entering through the main gate, since Adipati Road runs straight towards it. It has hosted visiting world leaders for speeches, notably former US President Barack Obama in 2012 and in the Diamond Jubilee Hall in 2014 (Yangon Time Machine, 2018).

Judson Chapel was built in the early 1930s. Its tall tower is the university's other main landmark. It is named after Burma's first Baptist missionary, Adoniram Judson (Yangon Time Machine, 2018).<sup>6</sup>

If one ventures into the side streets away from Adipati Road one reaches more hostels and residential buildings, but also little open-air canteens dotted round the campus and the lecture halls and offices of the Arts and Humanities faculties: Taunggoo Hall, Vaisali Hall, Ramanna Hall, surrounded by trees and with easy access to Pyay Road. A brand new mess for the Arts Faculty has been donated by the Koreans, the KIS building.

Staff, students and alumni are very proud of their campus and are happy to see it filled with life again since 2012 after so many years of enforced silence.

5 The funds for which were donated by Raja Reddiar in the 20s (Peacock, 1934: 284).

6 John D Rockefeller, Jr. donated 100,000 rupees for the chapel's construction.

## The Significance of Education

In ancient times, education was the leisure pursuit of an elite that had no need to work with its hands for its livelihood, that could indulge in 'unproductive' activities like reading, writing, philosophy, mathematics, and religion, in other words, speculation about the origin and meaning of life. It was possible only when there was a productive surplus that could sustain unproductive parts of society like religious specialists and the idle educated. Education for a long time had no meaning for 'real life', but was nevertheless thought to be part of a rounded personality. Universities that were established in Europe in the early middle ages were places for religious and theological instruction. In mediaeval Europe, learning was imparted by religious specialists, learning that was eventually put to use also for the administration of (church) property, or pronouncing on legal and administrative questions. In Myanmar, like in most Buddhist countries it was the monks who not only meditated on the meaning of life and on matters of religion, but also provided education for the bulk of the population, education that went beyond training for survival. Till today, the Myanma term for university is Tekkatho, a word harking back to ancient Takshashila (whose ruins can be seen outside the borders of Islamabad till today), reputedly the earliest seat of Buddhist learning.

With the start of industrialisation the function of education in Europe and later in the colonies changed. Education became a filter that divided the mass from the selected few (Rothermund and Simon, 1986: 1-12). It sorted people according to social status, ability and economic need. To operate machines (whether looms or weapons) and for many other activities in industry one needed more than labourers performing stereotypical functions. Education became necessary to keep the country and the economy running, and thus streamed people into their social, but crucially into their economic places in life: Basic three Rs (Reading, Writing, Arithmetic) for the masses, secondary education for specialised workers and technicians, higher education for the thinkers, inventors and the leisured class. Modernity required everybody to read, write and do arithmetic. And in some contexts practical knowledge acquired a prestige it had not had earlier. Education became a necessity to be able to work and earn one's livelihood. This made more acute a problem that had existed before, but now became threatening: Formerly, the educated elite could be relied upon to affirm, confirm and legitimate the ruling elite and to work hand in hand. People questioning the existing conditions were quickly eliminated, though their ideas often lived after them (Socrates, Galilei, Copernicus). Education was a double-edged sword, but since few people had access, it could be controlled and a certain amount of academic liberty and freethinking retained.

With the spread of literacy after the reformation in Europe this kind of control became more difficult, and once general schooling became compulsory, the 'great unwashed' could not so easily be kept in their ordained place. The government tried to ordain what was taught and how much, in order to prevent protest: school curricula were fashioned according to the specifications of governments. In higher education, this control was less strict, there the freedom of science was supposed to apply, but only up to a certain limit: education should create obedient subjects at all levels. And the subjects with higher education were expected to justify the political and social status quo to the lower

orders and teach them their place. Gramsci (1932) called these intellectuals organic: they were part of the elite and supported its interests.

Again, there was a problem here: the organic intellectuals did not always conform to their assumed task, and the masses rebelled. Friction at the edges led to changes, and even only basic education did not always create obedient subjects. Knowledge itself created doubts, and people who asked questions. So one had to balance the amount of education provided with the danger that it could spin out of control. Even if the government limited the content of education, a literate public could access information beyond it. In other words: educated people and especially students are a dangerous social group.

## Education in a Colonial Context

How did the role and filter function of education play themselves out in a colonial setting? The problem posed itself even more acutely here. Once the colonial rulers had conquered a region or a country, they had to make it pay, and that meant they had to administer it with as little expense as possible. And for that they needed personnel and staff, preferably from the region, because personnel from the motherland would be too costly. And even if they ruled with people of their own country, they had to communicate with the local people somehow and get them to cooperate in a rudimentary fashion to prevent unrest and revolt. Colonial education had to be geared to a limited objective, viz. to raise loyal staff on the lower administrative levels from among the local population.

Monastic education that had always been there to provide people religious knowledge and a rudiment of literacy, was initially sought to fulfil that function, but quickly turned out neither willing, suitable nor sufficient. The British relied on another religious corporation, the Christian missionaries. The big advantage was that they had been there even before the conquest of Burma was begun and/or completed. They had been coming since the 17th century and set up schools for the newly converted. The British employed the products of these schools for their administration before eventually setting up their own.

The missionaries had realised an important fact very early: if you want to work with the local people and create loyalty, you must know something about their culture and society first. The famous American Baptist Adoniram Judson had been in Burma since 1813, trying to convert people from Moulmein to Mandalay with very indeterminate success. Still, he managed to create a small Baptist congregation in Rangoon and founded a school in 1830. More significantly, he was the first to translate the Bible into Burmese and edited a Myanma-English dictionary still in use today. Missionaries were not necessarily the servants or knight-errants of the colonial powers. Often it was quite the opposite: they tried to learn the people's language (admittedly in order the better to convert them with). And they got acquainted with the people's literature in order to better argue against it. But this gave them a much more equivocal view of the colony than the rulers and often an appreciation of local culture which the government lacked. They were the first to provide modern secular instruction both in the people's language

and in English. The rulers, while often denigrating the missionaries' effort, still drew on this and often left education in the hands of the clergy, because it was cheaper. There were civil servants (the 'Orientalists') that went along with the missionaries' views advocating a study of local culture and conditions and teaching in the local language, but from about 1835, a view propounded by Macauley (1835) became more influential: he thought little of indigenous languages and literature, and wanted instead to make all the ruled into little 'brown' Britishers.

Yet even the Macauleyists could not completely ignore local culture and traditions. The late 19th century was the height of Imperialism and of the alleged civilising mission of the British. But it was not so easy to claim barbarity for a people that had ruled mainland Southeast Asia for many centuries and boasted a culture and religion much older than the western one. The solution was to proclaim local culture and history merely an inferior forerunner of Western, i.e. British history and culture, or claiming that the present condition of the country was a decline from ancient greatness. The aspect of interpretation was here important: who had the power to interpret history had also the power to control the past and by extension present and future. As an Indian colleague of mine put it many years ago: today it is not the future that has become unpredictable, but the past. Collecting 'historical texts' and editing them thus became a means to achieve this control of the past. To stand in a line of legitimate rulers conferred power and the right to rule, which showed most clearly in India where the British took on the role of the legal successors of the Moguls.<sup>7</sup>

Knowledge and control of the past had been always important for indigenous rulers as well in the shape of inscription and chronicles. Under Myanmar's Konbaung dynasty this attained new heights: the rulers collected chronicles and tales of Myanmar's past from all over the country and had them brought to the capital in order to streamline and unify them to get a 'correct' picture of the country's history and commissioned new chronicles. This was done to find some defence against the onslaught of the colonising powers.

Though this proved futile in the end, because it could not prevent the conquest of Burma, the colonial government likewise started to collect information about the people's history, often in the shape of commissioned chronicles, e.g. the Portuguese and the Dutch in Ceylon. In Burma, civil servants and academic amateurs with an 'Orientalist' bend founded the Burma Research Society in 1910 accompanied by a journal in which European and Burmese scientists wrote about and translated Burmese history and philology, inscriptions and chronicles. The journal survived until 1980 and was then superseded by the Bulletin of the Burma Historical Research Commission founded in 1955. Like the missionaries, the BRS did not always conform to the expectations of the rulers either, they were impressed with the high civilisation and impressive history of Burma (Boshier, 2018: 236-237), which sometimes countervailed the Imperial Idea (see below).

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7 One of the reasons for the eternal problems between India and Pakistan is one of legitimacy. At independence India took on the role of the legal successor of the British Raj and thus of the Moguls. Pakistan has never forgiven India for this, because it considered this role its natural right.

This constellation highlights the ambivalent function of education in a colonial setting most clearly: The British needed docile subjects to work in their administration, but these subjects should at the same time be qualified and able to act autonomously within limits. To some extent they could achieve this with personnel imported from India, but this did not work indefinitely. By the start of the 20th century, one needed Burmese personnel on a near equal level with the British. So in this very idea of local education, the anti-colonial protest was already contained, because once people were educated like the British, they wanted to be treated like the British.

## Universities as places of control and protest

What then is so important about a university, both as a physical place and an institution of learning as compared to a school? There is no better place to control the past and legitimate the present than institutions of education and learning. Universities are crucial places where information about the past is collected, controlled, and imparted.

While a university is a place of education, it is also one of discussion, debate and analysis. In other words, it is not only a place of learning, but also of thinking. But secondly, it is for this reason also a place a step away from 'real' life, a place of freedom and even experiment. Being 'a step removed' may give one a clearer view of things and an incentive to act. At the same time, 'a step removed' means also place of isolation, never more so than when it is constructed as a total institution. It is a place to create organic intellectuals. Again, this is more stark in a colonial setting.

The British established institutions of higher learning in their new possessions with the intention to teach the subjects the right topics and the right history, viz. that of the rulers, of England and Empire and that of the subjects according to the view of the rulers: a history of former greatness and current decline. They wanted to present themselves as the bringers of a new civilisation. People were supposed to learn their own history through the eyes of the rulers. In this way, the British hoped to legitimate their rule and to create acquiescent subjects who worked in its service.

For a while, the subject people accepted the new system and the new language, because it seemed to provide a way to jobs, upward mobility and eventually equality with the rulers. They sent their children to missionary or government schools teaching in the rulers' language and acquired the new knowledge. The government tried to keep this development under control by limiting access to educational institutions: there was the eternal fear of a 'glut' of unemployed English-educated who might create unrest (PRHM, 1934: 65-66; Aye Kyaw, 1993: 8-9). The objectives of education were rather different for rulers and ruled, but even in the government they were often vague and paradoxical. These were objectives difficult, if not impossible, to achieve, as much later the military government of Myanmar realised to its - and the students' - dismay: if you train qualified people, they might easily qualify against you.

## Antecedents of Rangoon University

Rangoon University illustrates this paradox in an exemplary fashion, not least because it emerged as discussed above, in the twilight of empire. As Jan Morris (1983: 104) puts it in *Stones of Empire: The Buildings of the Raj*:

The greater universities established by the British in India, notably those in the Presidency towns, deliberately set out to transfer British ideas and values to the Indian middle classes, if only to create a useful client caste. Their curricula were altogether divorced from Indian tradition—no more of those thirty-foot kings—and their original buildings were all tinged somehow or other with architectural suggestions of Cam or Isis [these are rivers flowing through Cambridge and Oxford, respectively; the authors].

This notion easily applies to Rangoon University too.

Schools on Macauley's principles were established very soon after the second Anglo-Burman war 1852/53 for English and mixed children. Missionary schools served the same children and children of Burmese converts. Some Buddhist parents sent their children to these schools as well (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 8-9). A department of education was founded in Rangoon in 1868, and entrance examinations to the University of Calcutta could be held there (Aung Kin, 1970: 51), but until 1874, only elementary schools existed.

The better ones of these were then converted into high schools (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 9). In the same year, the Government High School in Rangoon opened (Aung Kin, 1970: 51). In 1876, this High School began to offer secondary courses. Until then, pupils had only been able to finish Middle School. From now on, they could sit for the entrance exam of Calcutta University at the school. Since 1878 college level instruction was offered at the Government High School (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 9). Some sources therefore date the opening of Rangoon College in this year. However, the college department proper was only opened in 1880. Students were able to sit for the F.A. (First Arts) exam of Calcutta University. In 1881, an Education Syndicate was formed to represent the educational interests of Burma. It was an autonomous body looking after curricula and standards of examination. In 1883, Rangoon College was affiliated to Calcutta University and students could study up to the B.A. degree. However, until 1889, only very few students graduated from this and other colleges, mostly in Law (Aung Kin, 1970: 53). From that time onwards, however, both the number of students and that of Burmese students increased considerably until 1912. They could take English, Maths, Chemistry, Pali, Philosophy, Physics, Logic and Law for the F.A. or B.A. and B.Sc. exams (though the latter was intermittently discontinued) (Aung Kin, 1970: 54; Nyi Nyi, 1970: 12).

Alongside the secular establishments, the Baptist Cushing High School was founded in 1872, which opened a college department in 1894. It was also affiliated to Calcutta University up the First Arts standard and was called Baptist College, renamed Judson College in 1918 (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 9). The idea of a University for Burma was mooted by the syndicate already in 1892 (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 58; Aung Kin, 1970) and again in 1901, though nothing came of it at the time (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 10), because the government of India did not favour it. Instead, in 1904, the Government retook control of Rangoon College, which had been under the syndicate since 1885, and renamed it Government

College. It was hampered in its development because it was affiliated to Calcutta only for English, Vernacular Composition, Maths, Chemistry, Physics, and Baptist College for English, Vernacular Composition in Burmese, History, Philosophy and Pali (Aung Kin, 1970: 54).

But the idea of a university was pursued regardless, both by British educators and leading Burmese citizens, who wanted to end the affiliation to Calcutta University and have an establishment of their own, rather than just a college. A preliminary Act for establishing a university was drafted by government and reviewed by the syndicate 1909-10. A meeting was called by the syndicate in 1910 with a few Burmese members also attending and which discussed the university question in a lively manner. It was finally decided that the two colleges, Rangoon and Judson College should be combined to a teaching university with a network of hostels. The proposal was submitted to the government, but until 1912, there was no reaction. This was actually the year of the visit of King Edward to Burma, and the YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association)<sup>8</sup> took the opportunity to demand a university in their felicitation address to him (Aye Kyaw 1993: 11). In the same year, the Indian government allotted a budget for the establishment of the university (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 12-13).

Again it took several years until the plans took shape. For some years controversy raged over the location of the university - at that time still planned in today's downtown area. But already then, alternative plans to house the university in a campus and buildings of its own were put forward (Aung Kin, 1970: 56). However, with the outbreak of WWI, all plans were more or less suspended and only resumed in 1917.

By this time, not only local citizens, but also the colonial government were firmly in favour of a local university; however, the reasons for this demand and the ideas about the shape of the institution differed widely. The war had brought forth clearly the desire of the colonised peoples for self-government and independence, and the British, while conceding some of these demands, at the same time tried to hold on to their rule (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 16). The affiliation to Calcutta now seemed distinctly disadvantageous (Nyi Nyi, 1970: 12).

The local citizens, on the other hand, and particularly the college students had their own reasons for desiring a university for Burma. They wanted more from it than just a good education and good job prospects. While not yet actively clamouring for independence, their educational aspirations were mixed with political ones. They were in favour of a local university teaching in English, separate from Calcutta and implicitly, with more Burmese instead of Indian teachers. The young students, moreover, had been influenced by liberal and anti-colonial thinking that spilled over from India and were well-informed about the political reforms (Montague-Chelmsford reforms) in preparation there. They were angry that Burma was not granted similar reforms. This constellation was prone to conflicts. This was not the middle of the 19th century, when universities in India were a demonstration of British superiority, but the sunset of empire. The YMBA again came to the fore regarding the university, when its General Council visited Calcutta to meet Montague and Chelmsford in 1917 and put the demand for a university before them. Finally, in 1918 a committee made up of English government

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8 An organisation founded in 1906 on the model of the Young Men's Christian Association.

officers and academics and a number of Burmese members from the Burma Education Society, Burma Reform League and later also the YMBA (Aung Kin, 1970: 56), was tasked to formulate a plan for the establishment of Rangoon University and to draw up study courses. The committee's recommendations were based on the report of Calcutta University (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 16). It was planned as a self-governing academic body under the protection of the government. However, in early 1919 leading Burmese citizens and scholars strongly criticised the plan, pointing out several defects in the University Draft Bill (Maung Htin Aung, 1967). The British favoured a unitary university, the Burmese a federal one - with affiliated colleges. It became quasi-federal only on the pressure of Washington which wanted to keep the American founded Judson College autonomous (Nyi Nyi, 1970: 13). A major complaint was the compulsion for the students to stay on campus which would be very expensive,<sup>9</sup> another, that no affiliation of colleges outside Rangoon was planned (according to the Boycotters' memorial of 17 December 1920 as related by Lu Pe Win (1970: 7, 43). The biggest complaint which was also widely discussed in the papers was that regarding entry qualifications. Honours students who had passed their matriculation must show proficiency in English and one other subject in the entrance exam. If they failed in this, they were required to undergo another year preparatory coursework before entering the university (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 17). This was seen as a requirement primarily affecting Burmese students and thus discriminatory (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 7).<sup>10</sup> In fact, it was a measure to limit the number of Burmese entering the university (Maung Htin Aung, 1967). Other criticised clauses concerning the time allowed for an Honours Bachelor's or Masters's etc. (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 8) The demands to abolish these clauses were mixed up with political ones clamouring for reforms similar to the Montague-Chelmsford measures in India.

The government disregarded the criticisms and went ahead with its plans. Therefore, in early 1920 a meeting was held by Burmese demanding the postponement of the University Bill until the critical points had been remedied. An additional point this time was that the governing bodies of the planned University had only very few Burmese members and were thus not representative (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 18). Despite Burmese opposition, the bill was approved by the legislative council and became the University Act in mid-1920. It came into effect on 1st December 1920, and thus the University was constituted with Rangoon - now University - College and Judson College as constituent members. The Inauguration was planned for December 7, but that plan came to naught because the students boycotted the inauguration.

While the colleges had only offered a limited range of subjects (see above), the university in addition offered Oriental Studies (Pali and Burmese), history, (especially Far Eastern history and History of Burma) (Peacock 1934: 284), Biology, Economics, Geography, Geology, Forestry, Education and Engineering (Nyi Nyi 1970: 14). Luminaries like

9 Peacock (1934: 284), gives a sum of £ 2/month for board and lodging in 1932.

10 What was not clearly spelt out here and elsewhere, but was the main point of the criticism was the fact that the British demanded a high standard of knowledge of English to enter the university. So students who had passed all their exams, but not the English one, had to go to remedial classes. This was severely resented. Lu Pe Win claims that even the High School Exam had a success rate of only 15%.

D.G.E. Hall, Gordon Luce, C. Duroiselle, and John Furnivall were teachers at the university (Anon, 1970: 20).<sup>11</sup> A medical college was attached in 1924. The university offered degrees up to B.A., M.A., B.L. and MBBS (MNN 1970: 113).

Only in 1941, the department of Oriental Studies was renamed Department of Burmese language and literature, with the father of current President U Htin Kyaw as principal. The 75th anniversary of the department was celebrated in December 2016 with the President as chief guest (New Light of Myanmar, 2016).

All subsequent institutions of higher learning founded by the British were under Rangoon University's administration until 1958, when Mandalay College became an independent university (University of Yangon, 2018). In spite of the early boycott Rangoon University became one of the most prestigious universities in Southeast Asia, attracting students from across the region.

## Imperial Objectives of Colonial Education

By opening the university, the government hoped to provide education oriented to the West and geared to English requirements (Boshier, 2018: 237). In the 1920s, this did not mean any longer just to train loyal government servants, but it was meant to inculcate in them an active consent to and affirmation of, the Imperial Idea (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 13; Boshier, 2018: 239-241); of the greatness of empire, the superiority of British civilisation and thus the legitimacy of British rule. University education demanded that the students subscribe to the idea that the fate of their country and their success in life were tied to British rule. The Imperial idea was to be spread with songs, flags, articles, and through university education (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 14-15). The Imperial idea also showed in the discussion about the university when it was declared a British gift to the Burmese people (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 9).

The University Act provided control over the University and to some extent academic content to the government (the Governor was ex officio the chancellor like in India until today), contradicting the claims that it would be self-governing and academically autonomous, and it limited access to the university through fees and tight entrance regulations. Its curriculum gave rise to protest because it provided education geared more towards interests than Burmese requirements: knowledge about British and Western history and literature (and by implication, British greatness), was privileged over local history and literature. To be sure, Pali was taught in colleges and university because it was considered a classical language (Turner 2018: 129), yet there existed government high schools where Latin and Greek were still compulsory subjects.

The location of the new campus was geared towards isolating the students, with tight regulations for appearance and behaviour that could serve to alienate them from the rest of the population. Simultaneously these regulations should create a feeling of belonging to a separate class, being part of an elite. In exchange, one belonged in the

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11 This source claims that the boycott in total lasted about four years. Aye Kyaw (1993) gives the title as First and last years. He claims the author was the well-known Indian lawyer N.C. Sen.

select few and even was granted a certain amount of academic freedom and behavioural licence.

The imperial idea immediately encountered the nascent or no longer so nascent nationalism and the demand for independence. The students rejected and counteracted its implicit assumptions. They retreated into their Burmese and Buddhist identity and self-image and from there drew the confidence to challenge the educational authorities. Once the boycott was decided upon, they withdrew to religious premises, the Shweda-gon and adjacent monasteries, to continue their struggle (Boshier, 2018: 240-41).

Not even all of the English teachers and members of the BRS subscribed to the Imperial idea. They endeavoured to give Burmese history and literature its due place in education. Gordon Luce, D.G.E. Hall and John Furnivall belong prominently in this category. Luce, moreover, was a rather unsuitable model for the Imperial idea: he was ostracised by the British community and denied the position of Head of the History Department until the late 20s, because he had the impudence to marry a Burmese wife, succumbing to 'Burmanisation', something that was simply 'not done' among English teachers and civil servants (Boshier, 2018: 235). This reaction showed the sheer meretriciousness of the Imperial Idea's claim to justice and equality. The local people, however assimilated, would forever remain the house elves of the ruling magicians.

## The Boycott of 1920

So, no sooner the University was established than the students who had newly been admitted to enter the university started to protest. They had attended Government or Judson College while still affiliated to Calcutta and were thus well-informed about the issues surrounding the birth of the university and the foregoing discussions. And they were very much against the University Act. Therefore, on 3rd December, they decided to boycott classes, the exams on 5th December and the inauguration planned for 7th December. In a meeting deciding on the boycott, an Indian student, N.C. Sen, - later a famous lawyer - advised to send a memorial to Reginald Craddock, the governor and chancellor, before taking any action, but this suggestion was rejected. Such a memorial, it was argued, would vanish forever in some drawer and never be answered one way or the other. The Principal of Rangoon college, Matthew Hunter, begged the students to return to classes. The answer was that they did not object to their teachers, but to the University Act (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 22, 24; Lu Pe Win, 1970: 3-4, 44).<sup>12</sup> They referred to the discussions and criticisms of the university committee which had not been remedied, and demanded the annulment of the University Act, nothing less. One sore point was the prohibition for external students (from colleges outside Rangoon and vernacular schools) to take the entrance exam, another one that the vice-chancellor was chosen unilaterally by the governor, and not, as originally assured, from among a number of

12 In fact, students seemed to respect and like their English teachers and principals, some criticisms notwithstanding, which still comes through in the article by Saw Mra Aung (2019), which does not mention the boycott at all, but with a certain nostalgia describes the early years of the 'infant university'.

individuals suggested by the university members (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 23). The language of instruction being English did not provoke protests at all at this time, it was rather the standard of English required, which was seen - rightly - as limiting the number of students allowed to enter university. To sum up, it was not the establishment of the university that was resented, but rather the way it was constituted and the regulations governing it.<sup>13</sup> The demands were eventually laid down in a public memorial to Governor Craddock on 19th December 1920 demanding the annulment of the University Act.

The university authorities threatened expulsion of the students for the rest of the term if they did not return by 23rd December, which the students countered with withdrawal notices. The deadline was extended to January 5, 1921 (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 29). A Boycotters' Conference subsequently took place at the end of December with lively participation of the women students. It passed 15 resolutions, some of which differed somewhat in their thrust from the demands in the memorial of 19th December: one of these confirmed that the students would not rejoin government schools, that the rules for European and Anglo-Vernacular schools were not suitable for Burmese, that Burmese students should be allowed to wear Burmese footwear and that they should be allowed to read newspapers on campus (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 31). The demands might seem only relevant for education - the requirements for English competence, the compulsion to live on campus, the cost of education - and sometimes even banal - the rules about footwear and the prohibition to read newspapers on campus. But these were issues that determined life chances and the chance for an autonomous life. And particularly the last two demands are illuminating. They concerned issues that defined Burmese identity: slippers were the normal footwear of the Burmese, and of course much more suited to the climate than shoes. Questions of footwear had been sensitive, moreover, at least since the de-shoeing controversy of 1906 (Turner, 2014: 139; Thant Myint-U, 2008: 205; Aye Kyaw, 1993: 20, 28). The prohibition to read newspapers on campus, on the other hand, interfered with the claimed academic freedom of the university: was knowledge and information only to be provided in the classroom? These rules show the tight control the authorities tried to exercise over the Burmese students both physically and mentally, and to make them conform to British norms of appearance and demeanour.

The Burmese public supported the rather esoteric and elite boycott to an astonishing degree. They sent food and other necessities to the students encamped in the Shwedagon. Governor Craddock tried to dismiss the boycott as the action of young boys and girls who had been seduced by agitators and politicians. He claimed that for the students the whole thing was nothing more than a big prank. The English press followed his argument and denounced the boycott as manipulated by interested circles (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 8).<sup>14</sup> The Anglo-Indian students and the Anglo-Indian press joined the chorus, but MP Colonel Wedgwood, from the far left wing of the Labour Party (and grandfather of Tony Benn) who visited Burma at the time cautiously supported the boycott in a public address on 12th December (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 27).<sup>15</sup>

13 The resolutions and demands are listed in Nyi Nyi (1970: 51-52).

14 He states a bit later, (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 17), however, that in his report to the viceroy, Craddock termed the students' movement a 'terrible threat to the authority of the British crown in Burma.'

15 Lu Pe Win (1970: 13-15, 31), from 1923 Lecturer in Oriental Studies, puts the matter a bit differently. He says in the meeting with Wedgwood, the latter asked the students if they would return to clas-

The issues at stake might have appeared insignificant and purely educational, but they had political repercussions of identity and respect beyond that. This showed in the simultaneous establishment - or renaming - of vernacular schools into national schools, and eventually the foundation of a national university. Some of these schools were earlier run by the YMBA, which now opened their doors to the strikers and even offered them teaching assignments. These schools taught in Burmese and on Burmese issues and were considered to be more attuned to Burmese requirements (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 24).<sup>16</sup> The emergence of these schools was not at all liked by the government, and it accordingly tried to hamper their functioning by centralising high schools and school policy. This was eventually unsuccessful because once dyarchy was introduced in Burma as well education came under the purview of a Burmese Minister of Education. Therefore, after U Maung Gyi had been appointed Minister of Education in 1923, he had the University Act amended in 1924. Students from external and national schools were now allowed to take the entrance examination (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 59). Vicariously the boycott also led to endeavours to read and translate foreign literature into Burmese and thus to the famous Nagani club.

The protest of 1920 more or less petered out, by January a third of students had returned on the pressure of parents (who often were civil servants) and teachers (Lu Pe Win, 1970: 17). But the rest continued and were even publicly supported by the All Indian Congress Committee (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 32). The boycott went on until April 1921 with even High School students joining. Examinations were held in March 1921 regardless (Anon, 1970: 19). After six months, most of the boycotters had returned to school and college, even those who had started to teach in the national schools, though remnants of the boycotters held out until 1924 (Lu Pe Win, 1970a: 58).

The boycott still counts as the first big national protest movement in Burma, a forerunner of the more political boycotts of 1936 and 1938 (Nyi Nyi, 1970: 19; Aye Kyaw, 1993: 67-68). In the late 1920s and 1930s a large number of future political and intellectual leaders of Burma until the 80s and 90s were educated at Rangoon University: Aung San (father of current State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi), U Nu first Prime Minister, Dr. Ba Maw (Prime Minister under Dyarchy and during World War II), U Kyaw Nyein (member of APFL and minister under U Nu), U Thant (the first ever Asian who became the Secretary General of the United Nations in the 60s), U Thein Pe Myint (renowned author and journalist) and dozens or perhaps hundreds more as detailed by Lu Pe Win (1970a).

## Conclusion

“They focused on discipline. They didn’t give the students freedom,” said Khin Zaw. “Freedom comes first in a democratic system, and then discipline follows. So they controlled [the students].” (Yen Saning, 2013)

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ses if he accompanied them and endeavoured to redress their grievances. The students rejected this, to which he said that a boycott would only be successful if they all stood firm till the end.

16 He claims Burmese was taught in University College only from 1924.

This is not a quote regarding colonial administration, but the military government of Burma after 1962. It clearly demonstrates the ambivalence and the risks for colonial and/or authoritarian governments of providing education. The knowledge and expertise and, most importantly, the support of an educated class are needed for the functioning of the administration, but it is this very class also that poses the greatest danger, because they so easily can get out of control. Their loyalty is always fragile, never guaranteed; they can simply refuse to accept the ideology of the rulers. The aims of education under these circumstances are not only contradictory, but irreconcilable. The fate of the Imperial Idea could serve here as a dreadful warning: As already Alice in Wonderland realised: two into one won't go. Rangoon University with its protest and struggle right at its birth is a prime example for this dilemma: it was meant as a gift to the ruled, but the subjects refused to accept this sign of generosity of a benevolent government. They saw it for what it was: a Trojan horse.

The remedy sought for this dilemma was twofold: one, construct a secluded and circumscribed space to prevent too much communication with the outside and thus prevent protests. Yet the spatial isolation in a 'total institution' intended to keep the students apart from the people in the end enabled resistance. Students could get together, communicate and plan. And the isolation was never as total as desired. The university eventually became the centre of a web or network of connections formed by parents, BRS teachers, politicians, workers, and students which spurred the latter to action (Boshier, 2018: 233). The military junta many years later seems to have realised this fact: it gave up the isolation of the campus (by closing it for years on end) for the segregation and even atomisation of students in far away new universities or by forcing them into distance education. Precisely the communication the physical presence on campus enabled was thus cut off and made student action so much more difficult.

The second part of the programme was a variation of the Imperial Idea: create a group (client caste) that perceives itself as belonging in an elite: if you join the university, you may eventually join the heaven-born, the select few who joined the ICS. You will be part of an elite, removed from the mass of the people, an elite endowed with privileges and liberties. But being part of this elite carried a price: you had to conform to strict rules and regulations of appearance and behaviour. You had to assimilate eventually giving up your identity and accepting British superiority and dominance. It was expected that parents, who wanted jobs for the boys, would exert this pressure to conform. Except that the boys refused:

An English education was accepted as necessary to get a job and earn one's livelihood (Anderson, 2006: 20-21, 41-49). It was at most a working language, not more (though most of the products of Rangoon University wrote and spoke a standard of English that one can only weep over with envy in the face of the English proficiency of today's graduates). Only the required standard of English was questioned as a limiting device for educated Burmese (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 20; Nyi Nyi, 1970: 15; Lu Pe Win, 1970: 10). Similarly, the opening of the university was welcomed: had Burmese intellectuals not clamoured for it for years? But they wanted it not as a gift, but on their own terms. The students wanted more from an education than being made fit for subaltern jobs, an education geared towards Burmese requirements, instruction in their own history and literature, an affirmation of their own identity. The researchers of the BRS supported

and confirmed them in this objective emphasising the importance not only of Pali, but of Burmese language and history, something that would give them not only knowledge of the past, but control of their present and future (Boshier, 2018: 238). Once the promise of Macauley that if people became little Britishers they would attain equality had been shown as fraudulent eventually even the dominance of the English language was questioned: the national schools taught in Burmese. The junta later ordained instruction exclusively in the mother tongue with no English at all.<sup>17</sup> Whereas the British had hesitated to sacrifice quality to control and had limited access to education instead, the military junta did the opposite: if one could not reconcile quality and control, quality would be sacrificed because quantity, the number of students in higher education, was considered a sign of success.

The boycott of 1920 highlighted the paradoxes of education in a colonial setting in an exemplary fashion. When the university was founded British power was waning, the civilisatory mission had lost its shine and was recognised for the lie it was. The students realised they would never fully belong in the elite and even for a partial belonging, the cost was too heavy. Equality was a promise never fulfilled. This made the boycott of 1920 more than an educational protest and created a legacy of politically aware and active students. Students, as mentioned in general are an extremely dangerous social group. They challenge the powers that be by their mere existence despite or because of the powers' need for them.

The British knew this and accordingly tried to denigrate the boycott as either a prank or as an attempt to get good jobs (though what would be damnable in striking for better jobs?). But it was more than that, it was a political and anti-colonial beginning. The public realised that issues beyond just education and jobs were involved and supported the strikers, and Myanmar National Day still commemorates the event (University of Yangon, 2019). The significance still connected to the boycott shows clearly in the fact that a monument commemorating the 11 students who started it was erected on the terrace of the Shwedagon after independence (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 49). It can now be visited again after having been blocked off by the junta after the protests of 2007. The British were unable to enforce the rules, and so was - eventually - the military.

Before ending, one last consideration: while the boycott of 1920 was the start of a national and political campaign, questioning of British educational policies and standards had occurred long before that: when in 1882/83 Rangoon College was affiliated to Calcutta University, that was precisely when demands for a local university were voiced for the first time (Aye Kyaw, 1993: 10).<sup>18</sup> This university should be able to teach, set and conduct exams independently from outside agencies, be they Oxford and Cambridge

17 And then with an ingenious twist: if you did not have teaching material in the native language, you just abolished the discipline, as happened to IR in the 60s.

18 In the same year the government for the first time conducted official examinations in Pali in an attempt to create sympathies for its rule among important Buddhists. These examinations subsequently turned out very popular, though they did not much to enhance the prestige of the colonial government (Turner, 2018: 129).

or Calcutta.<sup>19</sup> Burmese educated and intellectuals voiced these demand requesting the upgrading of the College to a University independent of Calcutta.

By providing wider access to education for Burmese and by 'donating' a university, the British hoped to blunt the edge of the protests, but achieved exactly the opposite. That then is the paradox of education: if you start teaching people to think, they will think, and that might lead to quite unforeseen consequences.

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19 Compare this to Malaysia where children took the Secondary exam in the schools according to Cambridge specifications until the 70s.

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# The Changing Social and Religious Role of Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar: A case study of two nunneries (1948-2010)

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## **Abstract**

Communities of nuns have been a feature of life in Buddhist societies since early times. The nuns in present-day Myanmar consider themselves descendants of Nuns Mei Kin and Mei Nat Pay who were royal teachers during King Mindon (1853-1878), who held the Fifth Buddhist Council. In this paper, I discuss how the religious and social standing of nuns in Myanmar has helped to empower women by the pioneer work of the respected nun Daw Nyanacari. She established a Buddhist nunnery in 1947 that has developed an outstanding reputation for theological academic excellence and acts as a role model for other nunneries. The monastic community is pivotal for the socio-religious life of the Buddhist population, operating through a network of monks, nuns and lay supporters extending to the remotest villages. Nuns are looked upon as actors who do Buddhist missionary work as well following the legacy of Daw Nyanacari.

From the time of the State Peace and Development Council (1997-2010) and even more since the transition of 2011/12 a major change has occurred in that nuns increasingly turned to social welfare types of activities for the underprivileged in the community whereas before, they mostly taught Buddhist scripture to nuns and a Buddhist lifestyle and meditation to women. These new activities are quite unique, and in some ways resemble convent or missionary schools run by Christian establishments. I argue that social welfare activities conducted by nuns in Myanmar can enhance their social and religious capital and are thought to bring religious merit. I examine this change with the example of the Shwemyintzu nunnery founded in 1993 in the legacy of Daw Nyana-cari, but taking a somewhat new path by venturing into more secular and educational social work.

## Introduction

Nuns, commonly referred to as *thila-shin*, meaning “owners of virtue”, were addressed by several names in late 20th century Myanmar history. A *thila-shin* is regarded as a daughter of Buddha in Myanmar. Their lifestyles are a shaved head, monastic robes, and codes of ethical discipline. They dress in pink and brown cotton robes, live on alms food donated by the lay community, and refrain from taking solid food after midday. The central ethical principles they live by are the precepts common to all Buddhists: to refrain from taking life, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants. In contrast to lay Buddhists, however, Buddhist nuns take a vow of celibacy. This voluntary decision frees them from many of the typical responsibilities of household life. Some Buddhist nuns focus on solitary meditation practice, while others run busy temples or keep international teaching schedules. Unlike most monks, not all nuns receive a formal Buddhist education; some, however, hold PhDs. According to the Ministry for Religious Affairs there are around 6,000 *thila-shin* in Myanmar. But their actual number is several times higher since many women join the religious life for a short period, most preferably during the summer holidays between March and May.

Buddhist nuns hold an ambiguous position in Myanmar society. They are not recognized as *śrāmanerika* (novice nuns), due to the lack of *bhikṣunis* (full female equivalents of the monks) to ordain them.

During the period from the ninth to the eleventh century AD Theravada Buddhism was introduced by the Pyus to the Mons and by the Mons to the Barmars of Bagan. Female members of the Order, descendants of the Pyu Period, were probably equally engaged in the promotion and propagation of Buddhism in the Bagan Period. But only the significant monks' names are found in the Bagan stone inscriptions. Yet the term *Samgha* means an aggregate and denotes both *bhikkhu* (ordained monk) and *bhikkhuni* (ordained female members of the Order). Therefore, going by the stone inscriptions, we can assume that *bhikkhunis* also existed in the Bagan period between the 11th and 13th centuries (U Ni Tut, 2003).

In the Inwa period, female members of the Order were called *Thadin Thone* (U Kala, 2006: 313). *Thadin Thone* (*Thiddin The*) means a female spending her days observing the precepts. They came to be known as *Thila* in the Nyaungyan period (U Tin, 1976: 226). In the Konbaung period they were referred to as *thila-shin* (Nuns).

The organisation of *thila-shin* in Myanmar was acknowledged by both the kings and the people under the reign of King Mindon (1853 to 1878). King Mindon had requested the nuns Mei Kin and Mei Nat Pay to come to the capital city Mandalay and instruct his queens into the monastic order as *thila-shin* after meeting Nun Mei Kin (Yawei Tun, 1998: 82-85). It seems to me that the female members of the Order were most respected during the rule of King Mindon.

In the monastic hierarchy in Myanmar, there is a clear status difference between those who engage in *Pariyatti* (teaching, learning) and those who engage in *Patipatti* (practicing meditation) (Yawei Tun, 1998: 42). Nuns, like monks and novices, engage in the learning and teaching processes of *Pariyatti* (teaching) and *Patipatti* (practicing). Some nuns established education centres (nunneries) for nuns where they teach *Pariyatti* literature. They aimed at propagating and promoting the *Sasana* (teaching of Buddha).

Therefore, nuns' involvement in teaching was considered to have higher importance than their practicing meditation. The first independent nunnery school was founded by the above-mentioned Nun Mei Kin in Gutalon Gyaung in the mid-nineteenth century. Nun Mei Kin taught Myanmar language and Buddhist scripture to village girls who had little opportunity to access any form of education. Her nunnery school produced many prominent disciples who later continued her lineage through their academic achievements (Saw Mon Nyin, 1999: 308). This went in parallel with a general shift - furthered by the actions of King Mindon - that took place in the social attitudes of Myanmar people who no longer subscribed to the view that women do not need education (Hiroko, 2013: 163). In the colonial period, (1886-1947) new nunneries emerged especially in the Sagaing hills. Nuns of the Sagaing Hills have played important roles in the *Pariyatti* education of nuns during the colonial period<sup>1</sup> (Yawai Tun, 1998: 240-265).

In spite of this nuns faced many challenges in their *Pariyatti* education which they had to receive from monks. For example, some abbots laid down a rule at their monasteries that monks should not teach *Pariyatti* to nuns and women in general. U Nanda, Shankalaykyun Sayadaw (1810-1858), did not even teach Buddhist scripture to his younger sister, Nun Mei Kin. U Devinda, Taung-bi-lu Sayadaw in Sagaing, did not refuse to teach nuns and laywomen, but he always kept a curtain between himself and the students (Daw Kuslavati, 2008: 114-115). Therefore, it was not as easy for nuns to learn *Pariyatti* as it was for monks. Those who have excellent knowledge in *Pariyatti* literature have usually been monks. However, only few of them<sup>2</sup> thought that nuns should be educated in *Pariyatti* up to the highest level. But with some educated monks supporting nuns and the nuns themselves persevering in their attempts to acquire a religious education, finally the educational standard improved (Myanmar.cm, 2016) since 1945.

## Short overview: historical and legal positions of nuns

Nuns engaged exclusively in two religious activities: *Pariyatti* and *Patipatti*. They did not get involved in secular activities or establish any secular association or organisations, but neither did monks before 1954. This created difficulties when the 1953 Land Nationalisation Act was enacted. The nun community needed to get particular recognition from the State as a religious organisation with a claim to religious lands. In 1954, legal

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- 1 Some significant nunneries of Myanmar in the Colonial Period were; Ambaramra Nunnery (Shwe-daung), Ariya Maggin Chaung (Mingun), Ate Tawya Nunnery (Yangon), Aye Myo Chaung (Sagaing), Aye Nein Yeiktha Malarama Nunnery (Yangon), and Aye Nyein Chaung (Sagaing), Dhammika Nunnery (Pyay), Gugalay Chaung (Religious Retreat) (Mingun), Guni Chaung (Sagaing), Ingyin Myaung Nunnery (Pyay), Khemarthaka Thikshin Taik Nunnery (Mawlamying), Khemesakka Nunnery (Monywa), LediDhammaMedani Nunnery (Monywa), LediDhammeSaka Nunnery (Monywa), Maggin Nunnery (Pyay), Myan Aung Nunnery (Monywa), Nibbanda Chaung (Sagaing), Nibbanda Nunnery (Pyay), Samiddodaya Teaching Nunnery (Sagaing), Shamin Chaung (Mingun).
  - 2 Htootkhaung Sayadaw (1798-1880) was one of the first monks who supported higher *Pariyatti* education for nuns. Masoeyin Sayadaw (1879-1975) supported the idea that higher *Pariyatti* education was a necessity for nuns. Mahagandayon Sayadaw (1900-1977) accepted the nuns to teach *Pariyatti* Literature. At present time, Pali University is teaching both monks and nuns *Pariyatti* in the same classroom only keeping a curtain between two groups.

disputes arose over the nationalisation of religious lands (burmalibrary.org, 2016). The Land Nationalisation Act stipulated that areas that were known to have been donated by Burmese kings for religious purposes were exempted from nationalisation. Monks were officially recognised as religious personnel but nuns were not officially recognised as religious members of the Order (*Samgha*), so the nunnery premises were claimed not to be exempted. This came to light in the legal disputes in 1954. Here the argument was put forward that nuns were not members of the Order. The nuns were much more indignant about the claim that they were not members of the *Samgha* than about the prospect of the nationalisation of their religious lands. They argued that, since they were not engaged in lay affairs, they were members of the *Samgha*. As religious personnel both monks and nuns had no right to cast their votes in the Parliamentary Elections, but monks were recognised as religious members whereas the state regarded nuns as non-religious members.

In the light of these developments, nuns established their own associations to engage in Government and social affairs when their religious interests demanded it. The first of these associations, Myanmar Nun League of Sagaing Hill Ranges was formed in 1954. Some years later, in 1961, Sasana Hitakari, Nun League of Myanmar, was formed in Yangon (Yawei Tun, 1998: 271-274).

In the early 1980s, an organisational framework for the monastic community was implemented nationwide. The National Committee of Supreme Samgha Council was created. Meanwhile, registration for both monks and nuns was made compulsory in 1981, essentially requiring them to possess a monastic address. Since then, Myanmar Buddhist nuns are no longer entitled to hold National Registration Cards like laywomen. They are given *thila-shin* ID cards which are neither like a laywoman's nor like a monk's. The membership cards are to be issued only to permanent nuns aged twelve and above. The leader nun must endorse the academic career in the records whenever a nun moves from one nunnery to another.

Myanmar nuns initially became incorporated into the State Samgha Organisation<sup>3</sup> when the Council for Buddhist Nuns was established in 1982. The State Samgha Organisation became the highest decision-making body for the *Samgha* in discussing and making decisions on monastic affairs. This was meant to consolidate the state organisation and also stipulate a legal framework for nuns, operating as the highest representative body for Buddhist nuns in Myanmar (Thilashin Ahpwe-asi Achekhan Simyin, 1981: 3) In the structure of the *Samgha* organisation the highest organisation for nuns is at the state and division level. They have permanent organisations only at the divisional or regional levels. Nuns like monks are subjected to civil laws as well as regulations set up by the State Samgha Committee. Township and divisional executive nuns' organisation committees settle disputes among nuns. In case of any dispute, nuns can turn to the nun organisation in the respective township. If one of the sides is not satisfied with the decision made by the organisation, they can move the case to the township or divisional Samganayaka committee to solve the problem. The respective Samganayaka committee examines the cases forwarded by the two sides. Then, they hand the case back to the nun organisation with guidelines and suggestions on how to proceed. If the

3 It was established in 1974 led by monks and the State. It is called Samghanayaka.

case concerns or involves secular authorities, for example if the disputed persons need to be arrested, the nun organisation has to cooperate with the local authorities (Interview with Ma Kusalanyani, 2016). In the State Samgha Organisation the top position is occupied by monks. Nuns have decision making power only at the divisional level.

## Nuns and voluntary social work

Since the majority of Myanmar citizens are Buddhist, they abide by the moral codes taught by the Lord Buddha. These moral codes oblige society to show empathy, and provide charity towards their elderly parents as well as to old people and disabled persons, in general. According to the law of *kamma* in Theravada (an impersonal, natural law that operates in accordance with our actions) present deeds determine the future life of each individual. Therefore, Myanmar people including the ancient kings performed meritorious deeds in the hope to get a better life in the future. In this context, social service is considered meritorious.

Although the members of the Buddhist monastic community have renounced the worldly life, they still have an important contribution to make to the welfare of the society, since the rule of *kamma* and merit applies to them as well. Traditionally both monks and nuns have inter-acted with society in ways similar to those of social workers and counsellors. Myanmar nuns actively engage in domestic activities such as cooking for alms-giving occasions, organising catering services at religious occasions, and basic services for the community. These activities are thought to bring meritorious return (Interview with Ma Kusalanyani, 2016). Nowadays, in the Buddhist religious community in Myanmar nuns are increasingly recognised as ritual specialists, educators and propagators of Buddhism. They have detailed knowledge on every ceremonial procedure so that they complement the monks in Buddhist ceremonies.

On the other hand, and somewhat contradicting the above, Buddhists in Myanmar commonly upheld a view that monastic members should not intervene in secular life, which often involved wasting time filling forms and dealing with corrupt officials. In their view social work is actually a poor diversion from what monasteries and nunneries should work for and, for that reason, it has become disputed, as if it was a disruption for monks and nuns (Hiroko, 2013: 47)

## Monastic Education

Since the colonial period and before, social work was to a large extent in the purview of Buddhist missionaries, monasteries and Buddhist lay voluntary organisations. After independence, the state took over welfare tasks to some extent in cooperation with religious bodies. The Ministry of Social Welfares established in 1953 with the advice of United Nations should carry out social services more effectively. Alongside, the government established a Mass Education Council under the Ministry of Social Welfare with the intention to educate the people in rural areas. This was considered one of the most relevant sectors. Since the time of AFPFL (1948-1962) government joined hands

together with monks and nuns to provide primary education. The objective of the Monastic Education Plan (medg.org, 2016) was to provide primary level education to the children of rural areas<sup>4</sup> before implementing the Act of Primary Compulsory Education System in 1950 (Than Htut, 1980). Under this system, monasteries and nunneries taught from kindergarten to fourth standard in remote regions where there were no state schools. Nuns worked on this primary education plan as part of their religious work.

After the military coup of 1962, welfare and social services by religious bodies were curtailed. Only from 1997 onwards was it again possible to work in this direction (see below). Some nunneries then took up social welfare for underprivileged girls. Since these nunneries were considered secular charity organisations and not religious bodies, they had to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare Relief and Resettlement.

Today some Nunnery Education Schools still follow the model of Monastic Education Schools. Nunnery Education School called Zambu Ushaung Thilashin Sarthintaik in Yangon Division. Nunnery Education School Shwe Sin Min Thilashin Women Parahita Pannyaye School in Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Division under the headship of Daw Nandasingi, and Aye Yeik Mon Nunnery in Mandalay all provide free education for students from primary level to grade eleven. The first mentioned school accommodates nuns who belong to different ethnic backgrounds such as Rakhaing, Pa-O, Palaung, Shan and Mon. All also serve as orphanages where orphans and especially underprivileged girls from these ethnic regions receive education and vocational training (Htay Hla Aung, 2013: 39). The nunnery organises short-term meditation retreats in the summer holidays as well (Kyaw Zin, 2012: 17).

The nuns of the last-mentioned school are struggling hard to feed more than two hundred orphans and send them to school. It would be imperative to introduce innovative practices such as environmental work and new teacher training techniques to make progress and improve Myanmar's educational standards. Some nunneries also work as Learning Centers for nuns and girls, providing cultural and academic education for children and adults to improve their lives until they return to their home (mandalay-projects.net, 2016).

## Missionary Activities

Buddhist nuns focus on teaching lay people moral lessons as taught by the Buddha. Their most important duty is to encourage people to understand the teaching correctly. They also go to remote areas and deliver the messages of the Buddha to people living there. One special component of nuns social work is therefore missionary work which has become popular and developed vigorously in the image of Christian missionary establishments. Therefore, Missionary work is an important task of Buddhist nuns in Myanmar. The efforts of Daw Nyanacari disciples (see below), frontier missionary worker Daw Dhammacari, Daw Weijesi (B.A), and Daw Pannacari of the Mawlamyine

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4 To assist in providing basic education needs of the country especially for children from needy families and orphans — filling the significant gap in the education system.

Khema-rama nunnery are worth mentioning here. Daw Dhammacaryi, a native of Myeik in the southernmost part of the country went as far north as Putao, Kachin state to carry out missionary work there. Except for some Buddhists, Putao and its surrounding area was inhabited by Ka-chins, Shans, Rawans, Lisu and Danu indigenous races who profess Christianity or Spirits worship. The ethnic minority Buddhist community there had founded a Dhamma Centre and a religious propagation group, which needed a missionary nun.

Daw Dhammacaryi, accompanied by another nun, went to Putao in 1964 to fill the gap. She explained the *vippassana* in a simple manner to male and female yogis, i.e. those practicing religious meditation. At the same time, school education up to the seventh standard from primary to middle school levels was provided for these people, just as the Christian missionaries did. In a similar manner, nun Ma Weijesi, at the Sasana Beikman on the Sagaing Hill range, had Palaungs, Shans, Kayins, and Kadu girls trained for the nunhood along with Myanmar novices. Daw Weijesi had even more ambitious plans for the propagation of the Buddhist faith which included the opening of Buddhist missionary schools where lay youths as well as nuns could get a modern education. The ultimate aim was to educate nuns in both secular and religious studies to enable them to head Buddhist missionary schools in the near future. The success of such endeavours as that by Daw Weijesi would enhance the missionary work by Myanmar Buddhist nuns in general.

To further this aim, the Sasana Hitakatari League of Nuns opened a *Thalashin Tekatho* (Advanced Study Centre for Nuns) in 1969 at the Mawlamyine Nunnery, on Boundary Road in Yangon. Nuns who had passed the *pahtamapyan* (senior standard exam), and those who held the *dhammacariya* (Teacher of the Dhamma) *Pali paragu* title, were accepted at the centre. The subject components included both religious and secular subjects, e.g. Mathematics, and History, Geography etc. as minor subjects. Some controversies arose over the teaching of secular subjects like English to women who were supposed to have left the worldly life behind, and consequently, teaching of secular subjects ended after four years in favour of teaching Buddhist treatises. Nevertheless, the nuns who graduated from the *Thilashin Thekatho* were well qualified for missionary work.

## Contemporary Changes

In the wake of nationalisation policies of the military government in 1964,<sup>5</sup> social service was monopolized by the Ministry of Social Welfare. From 1962 to 1988, Myanmar practiced socialist policies and the state did not encourage and even hinder private volunteer work including nuns' missionary work. After the army-staged coup of 1988 and the formation of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in 1989 internationally enforced sanctions affected Myanmar people's social and economic life negatively. To lessen the country's economic and social hardship, the State Peace and

5 The military government took power in 1962. It wanted to move the country forward according to the 'Burmese Way to Socialism'. So in 1964 all private sector enterprises were nationalized by the Burma Socialist Programme Party.

Development Council (SPDC, 1997-2010) loosened some of the central controls on the economy and made attempts to encourage foreign investment and foreign organisations to enter the country. Subsequently, the state recognised social organisations as local volunteer service and permitted them to function again. The Ministry of Social Welfare issued permits to these social welfare bodies such as Home for the Aged, missionary work etc. by registering them as organisations.

The year 1990 was a turning point for nuns in Myanmar in another respect. Since the early 1990s, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) (1988-1997) government realised the value of Buddhism as an effective political instrument and actively appropriated the notion of *Sasana* (the community of believers) to consolidate political legitimacy (Saw Mon Nyin, 1999: 110). In particular, nuns engaged in social work have come to play an important role in this new direction and they increasingly took an active role to support the state as dutiful guardians of *Sasana*. Thus, Buddhist nuns are no longer seen as merely pious laywomen, though they are still not accepted as full members of the Order. Dr. Hiroko Kawanami evidenced this by pointing at the frequent usage of honorific and deferential terms by the Myanmar public in addressing *thila-shins* as great monastic members (Saw Mon Nyin, 1999: 110).

In the light of an improving religious and social standing, most nuns now are increasingly aware of the importance of religious education. They study the Buddhist scriptures and even can take part in competitions for academic excellence together with monks. This has enhanced their status and provided them with increased donations from both government and private donors.

With the new opportunities since the late 90s Buddhist nuns became increasingly active in the public welfare sector and included also in their missionary efforts activities such as providing education and daily expenses at their nunneries to under-privileged girls as well as those of Kachin, Wa and Shan ethnic minorities in the border areas of Northern and North Eastern part of Myanmar where a civil war was raging. At these nunneries, nuns took care of orphans and children from poor families. Parents were willing to send their girls to a nunnery because they could not feed their children well and support their education.

In a parallel development, several nunneries in Myanmar sought to enhance their social and religious capital through various kinds of social work. Though by religious convention, nuns should stay away from secular activities, they have now reconsidered this concept in the light of changing conditions in the country and society. They adopt a new attitude towards social work, especially education and can count it as a merit-generating activity.

Since Buddhist tradition demands to help those who need assistance, private social service organisations have developed that are often more effective and efficient than state welfare institutions. These private institutions established by rich individuals continue to emerge. After the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, 1997-2010) opened the door to a Market Oriented Economy in 1997 the economy of the country stabilised and gradually developed as a result. This enabled private individuals to financially support religious functions and infrastructure.

Simultaneously, public opinion in Myanmar increasingly accepts the idea of nuns taking on a more active religious role and Buddhist nuns themselves are responding

to new demands placed upon them by society. Nuns' institutions are acknowledged as part of the social welfare type of institutions in Myanmar. We look now at two of these institutions a bit more closely, the Samiddhodaya Sukhitarama Myanaung Nunnery and the Shwemynitzu Nunnery School.

### **Samiddhodaya Sukhitarama Myanaung nunnery (Daw Nyanacari sarthintike)**

An outstanding example of furthering religious education for nuns is the mentioned Daw Nyanacari Myanaung Kyaung. Founded in 1947 by the late Daw Nyanacari, until today a highly revered nun, the nunnery with its 45 branches countrywide is one of the most prestigious schools for nuns in Myanmar. Its reputation for *pariyatti* (teaching, learning) and *patipatti* (practicing) attracts even nuns from other countries like Nepal, Vietnam and Germany. At the moment about 300 *thila-shin* are living permanently there to undergo their studies which include Buddhist literature, Pali, Abhidhamma, and other scriptures. Around 50 of them are attending the course for *dhamma-ariyas* (Teacher of the Dhamma), which is currently the highest educational title *thila-shin* can gain. This course takes around three years and allows the graduates to teach in other nunneries. Only religious scholars teach at this school which is administered by an Executive Committee of fifteen members under the leadership of Daw Zayawadi. The nunnery inspires girls from across Myanmar to get a religious education and/or to take up a religious life.

### **Short Biography of Daw Nyanacari**

Daw Nyanacari (1897-1976) was born in Tanthonpin village, which is in Myang Aung, Ayeyarwady region in lower Myanmar. Her father, U Ingyin was a village headman. Her parents were pious and brought her up in a religious environment where listening to monks' sermons was almost a weekly ritual. Once her nun friends took her to their nun teacher and it made her realize the possibility of not only learning the scriptures, but taking up a monastic life as a woman as well. When she told her parents that she wanted to become a nun, they did not allow her to enter the nunhood. As the youngest daughter she was expected to look after her parents when they got old. Therefore, she escaped from her home three times in succession. Eventually her parents accepted her decision and her argument that she would benefit them more by being a *thila-shin*. With her highly regarded knowledge Daw Nyanacari became later a respected Buddhist scholar, known as 'teacher for 500 thi-la-shin and more.'

Like other nunneries the Daw Nyanacari nunnery receives its main support from generous lay Buddhist persons and the families of the *thila-shin*. The Government donates only 200 sacks of rice each year. Twice a week the nuns go out to the markets and streets for receiving alms. The strictly organised day is filled with periods of studies, meditation and manual activities. A high-quality Buddhist education and meditation practice is the major concern of the nunnery. In addition, the nunnery has long tradition for admitting Buddhist girls between five and ten years of age during the summer

vacation. They don the nun costume and follow the novice routine. They are trained in basic Buddhist deportment and duties, such as presentation and offering of alms food, of votive water, of flowers, as well as the asking for precepts, taking of precepts, prayers and suttas. This not only provides them with religious knowledge, it is also intended as a training in graceful manners and elegant speech. Thus, Daw Nyanacari can be called the master of *thila-shin* Sasana in the post-independence period.

## Foundation and Development of the Nunnery

The Second World War spread to Yangon in December 1941 and the Japanese army ordered the people to evacuate Yangon. Daw Nyanacari's nunnery which she had established in 1939 in Yangon, was destroyed during the invasion, and she thus returned to Myanaung. Rather than living with her parents she stayed at Bhavana nunnery with her disciples and continued religious propagation (Tin Shwe, 1989: 78-80). During the Japanese occupation some people in Myanaung took refuge at Bhavana nunnery and Daw Nyanacari accommodated these refugees. She also took the responsibility to feed them.

Daw Nyanacari was not satisfied to just propagate the Buddhist religion from Myanaung with her then seventy disciples. Therefore, she attempted to extend the nunnery to Yangon. U Chit Maung, the donor who had helped her already with her first nunnery in Yangon, donated 1.636 acres of land situated on Kyuntaw Road, Sanchaung Township in April 1948 in place of the destroyed nunnery site.

When construction of nunnery was about to be finished in 1949, Daw Nyanacari moved to the new place. Food supply and accommodation were not as convenient as in Myanaung. But Daw Nyanacari persevered with teaching and preaching. After independence Prime Minister U Nu came to know about the nunnery and visited it personally. He donated a three-storied brick building to the nunnery in 1962.

In order to provide medical care to the student nuns and novices Daw Nyanacari desired to open a western-style dispensary, to which Lay donors U Pu and Daw Saw Kyi donated the requisite tools, equipment and medicine (Western dispensary). So Daw Nyanacari was able to open both a traditional and a western dispensary in the same year on campus for student nuns. After Daw Nyanacari died in 1975, the dispensary continued under the administration of the abess. The dispensary was closed temporarily by the military government, but could reopen in 1983 with the help of unpaid assistant doctors. Besides this, the nunnery also provided dental treatment from its foundation until today. In this way, the nunnery was able to provide not only for the spiritual, but also for the bodily needs of the nuns and their disciples (Interview with Daw Vimala, 2015).

## Shwemyintzu Nunnery School

While the Samiddhodaya Sukhitarama Myanaung nunnery concentrates primarily on religious education for novices and temporary student nuns, the Shwemyintzu nunnery in Yangon, though operating in the tradition of Daw Nyanacari, has a different focus.

It has been active in social work since 1993. The school is contributing significantly to the growth of civil society in Myanmar, which is undergoing a process of opening and reform that began in 2010. In this period the school has provided a public venue for Myanmar people to meet and participate in religious activities, and even to discuss politics and social affairs in a safe environment, because the political authorities regard Buddhist nuns as non-political in contrast to monks who have led politics in Myanmar since the colonial period. Thus, the school is contributing to the process of creating a public sphere free of government control. Since its founding, Shwemyintzu nunnery has functioned as a centre for education, boarding and fulfilling the needs of young girls from remote areas and orphans.

Among the many nunnery schools, which give support to education in Myanmar, Shwemyintzu is one of the most successful ones. It sees itself in the tradition of Daw Nyanacari, but goes beyond the activities and aims of the Samiddhodaya nunnery school which focuses exclusively on religion and religious issues to serve the extended needs of society. Shwemyintzu Nunnery school was founded by Head Nun Daw Sandar Thiri. It is situated at 31/10 North ward, Tharkayta Township, Yangon Region. In 2003, Head Nun Daw Ootra Nyani took over this responsibility. The aim of this school is to provide meals and lodging in addition to education to orphans and helpless young girls from remote places in Myanmar's border areas with China and Thailand. Most of the students studying at this school are from Shan State as well as Chin, Palaung, Pa O, Shan and Bamar (Interview with Daw Ootra Nyarni, 2015).

The vision of Shwemyintzu Nunnery school is "to raise children who can build their life to become highly developed and will become the bright star of the country" (Interview with Sayagi Daw Ootra Nyarni, 2015). To be able to implement and achieve these objectives, the school provides education for students at primary and middle school levels. Besides education for the boarders, the school also serves as a day school for poor children and orphans from the vicinity.

The number of students has increased from only 30 in 2000-2001 to 152 students in the 2005-2006 academic year. This is because Shwemyintzu school not only provides free education, but also free exercise books, pencils and text books. It assists needy students and encourages and helps the parents whose children are working to earn money to let the children study at the school. Moreover, teachers teach extra time with the intention of not only helping students to pass exams but also to enhance their overall qualifications and competences. In addition, the school is conveniently located for the students' food and boarding for girls and boys who came from backgrounds of ethnic conflict (Interview with Daw Thida, 2015). The curriculum and syllabus from kindergarten to the 4th grade is the same as the government scheme. The school takes the responsibility of question setting and exam result issuing from kindergarten to the 4th grade.

Sixty hours of Reading, Writing, and Critical thinking training are taught by teachers in Shwemyintzu School. The health care group gives lectures on health education to both teachers and students together with providing nutritious food once a month. The library group gives courses on library science to the two teachers from Shwemyintzu School and the group donated books for the school library. This group also holds a story telling competition, and debate once a year, so that students can acquire the abi-

lity being prepared and confident. The three teachers from Gitameit music group give painting training, drama training and music training (Interview with Daw Nyein Sanda Khine, 2015). Moreover, with the support given by other NGOs such as the Myanmar Medical Association and Pyinnya Tazaung Association (Light of Education), students' education and health conditions have been developed and teachers' qualities have been upgraded. Still, Shwemyintzu School provides students not only with formal education but also religious knowledge.

Nunnery schools have more financial burdens than monastic schools for they cannot get as many donations as monastic schools. Funds for Shwemyintzu School are raised in many ways, by collecting donations by nuns, and from local and foreign well-wishers. Still the most crucial challenge faced by this school is inadequate funds (Interview with Daw Aye Aye Thant, 2015). Although the abbess, head mistress and teachers try to make efforts to help education for helpless girls and orphans from the remote and border areas, they face great difficulties; still the nunnery has overcome any difficulties until now and has achieved public acclaim.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The monastic community is pivotal for the socio-religious life of the Buddhist population, operating through a network of monks, nuns and lay supporters. The status and social standing of nuns have been hampered by their lower status compared to monks, which has assigned nuns a half-way position between pious laywoman and religious mendicant. Improving nuns' religious knowledge and scriptural education can enhance their social and religious capital. An improved religious and social status of nuns in Myanmar since the 1990s has simultaneously helped to empower women and improve their status in Myanmar in general. This was mainly due to the guiding work of the Daw Nyanacari nunnery and Shwemyintzu nunnery. By raising the standing of nuns in Myanmar, the Daw Nyanacari nunnery has, at the same time, broadened opportunities for the country's women and girls. This nunnery has become a role model for Buddhist nuns in Myanmar. It has developed an outstanding reputation for academic excellence. With many lay donors coming to see the beneficial outcomes, the nunnery is now self-sustaining, entirely supported by lay donations within Myanmar. The nunnery's graduate students have opened branch nunneries and the school is affiliated with mission activities and social work for orphans and poor girls. Daw Nyanacari nunnery school offers a safe single-sex environment for women to study the scriptures, pursue a religious vocation and affiliate with lay supporters. Furthermore, their spiritual standing and so also financial and social support have been enhanced by the reputation, growth and financial success of the nunnery. The achievements of Daw Nyanacari's nunnery as well as her success in her personal life had a powerful influence on the religious and social work of nuns. The disciples of Daw Nyanacari set up their own nunneries in their home towns and villages after they had finished their educational levels and obtained their degrees. They follow in the steps of their pioneer Daw Nyanacari, but also, as we saw, sometimes go beyond her activities to serve wider society in a secular fashion as in the Shwemyintzu nunnery school.

This situation creates perfect conditions also for social work defined as missionary work. Nuns' achievements in social work also gain them a higher position in society in return. After 1990 it was learning by doing. Nuns' social work concentrated on primary education, but alongside they also provided healthcare, shelter, food, and clothes for needy people. The nunneries founded since the 1990s have become well known for the social services they provide. This is particularly true for Shwemyintzu nunnery, which has operated as a school taking care not only of education but also boarding and lodging for orphans and young girls from remote areas.

These two nunneries can serve as examples how the work of nuns extended and broadened from teaching the scriptures - initially to girls and women from the upper strata of society, then to poor and underprivileged girls as well - down to basic social services for poor women and people in general. This is the most crucial change in the profile of nuns in present-day Myanmar. By looking at this development process, we can also see how the broadening of nuns' tasks and activities has enhanced mutual understanding and respect between nuns, the people and even the state.

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# From trading post to town: some notes on the history of urbanisation in Far Eastern Indonesia c. 1800-1940

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## Introduction

Since the 1960s, many studies have been carried out on urbanisation and its diverse phenomena with sociological, ethnological and historical approaches. For a long time, a contrast between the development of cities and megacities in Southeast Asia with villages and other rural settlements has been proposed, with the former being a visual sign of the success of modernity, while the latter shows the backwardness of peasant societies and rural regions (Korff, 1999: 140). Southeast Asian cities were interpreted as places of institutions and people deemed necessary for any modernisation process, of essential infrastructure such as ports, harbours, airports, railways or roads and of the concentration for required capital, in colonial Indonesia that was mainly in Dutch, Chinese and Arab hands. Furthermore, Southeast Asian megacities also provided the framework for new nationalist elites after independence where the territorial control of the new states was, more or less successfully secured, institutions of the new national administration were established, and symbols of national unity and pride such as national museums or independence memorials were erected (Anderson, 1988: 18; Kurfürst, 2018: 166-7).

Modern urbanisation processes and its results were often viewed by social scientists and others with a certain ambivalence. Immediately after decolonisation, cities of the new developing nation states of Asia and Africa were interpreted as a path to modernisation and a bright future. However, just a generation later, a number of negative aspects could not be overlooked. Slums, high crime rates and an extremely high social polarisation caused cities to be viewed as parasites. This perception rather hampered the economic and social development of the former colonies. Large portions of inhabitants of colonial and postcolonial Southeast Asian cities were not integrated in their modern economies, nor could they participate in the new ways of communication (newspapers, radio, television etc.) available in urban areas (Korff, 1999: 141).

Since the Second World War, Southeast Asian megacities became a focus in sociological or geographical studies. In addition, villages and rural development have also

been quite well researched. However, small and middle-sized towns have, so far, been relatively understudied, in particular by historians.<sup>1</sup> This humble essay in honour of Rüdiger Korff tries to show how the first small towns in Far Eastern Indonesia developed out of trading places, missionary stations and administrative posts in the Moluccas and West New Guinea. While indigenous states have been connected with the development and growth of cities and towns in Southeast Asia (Evers and Korff, 2000: 29), the historical situation in the Indonesian Far East differs somewhat from the rest of Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia as indigenous states did not develop except for a few areas of this region.

### **Examples of town development in Eastern Indonesia: Larantuka (East Flores) and Dobo (Aru)**

As highlighted by, among others, Evers and Korff (2000: 29ff), urbanisation is not a foreign element to Southeast Asia and was crucial factor in the formation of pre-colonial states in the region. However, although connected through trade relations for centuries, or perhaps even millennia, with western Indonesia, the Philippines or China, indigenous states in Far Eastern Indonesia are rather the exception than the rule. Sultanates in eastern Indonesia were strongly dependent on maritime trade relations with the outside world. Spices such as nutmeg, mace and cloves from the northern and central Moluccas were only the most valuable items circulating inside the various Southeast Asian trade networks and beyond to the West (India, Arabia, Europe) or the North (China, Korea, Japan). Other products on offer included: sandalwood, massoy bark, sea cucumbers (trepang), wild nutmeg, plumes and feathers of birds of paradise, crowned pigeons and parrots, living cassowaries, sago, tortoise shells, wax, camphor, dammar and other resins, mother-of-pearl, and last but not least, slaves.<sup>2</sup> In return, Papuan and eastern Moluccan societies received rice, salt, betel, tobacco, silk textiles, Chinese and Vietnamese trade porcelain, earthenware, Chinese copper and silver coins, Indian cloth, glass and other pearls, metal tools and weapons such as axes, knives and machetes, and since the mid-19th century, more and more fire arms and gunpowder. Rifles and old muzzle loaders, often locally named in Indonesia as *donderbus* ('Blunderbuss'), were not so much in demand for warfare or slave raids, but rather for hunting birds of paradise and other beautifully coloured rainforest birds. These birds were in demand as their plumes and feathers were used as female accessories for hats and other clothes in 19th century Europe and America. Following World War I, female fashion completely changed, thus destroying the market for bird plumes and feathers in New Guinea and the Aru Islands, but saving the birds from complete extinction (Swadling, 1996). Although little is known about this period in terms of trading relations, its century-long

1 A notable exception is "In Search of Middle Indonesia" edited by van Klinken and Berenschot (2014).

2 Although slavery was officially forbidden in Indonesia since the 1860s, slave raids in coastal New Guinea stopped only at the end of the 19th century, while the trade in slaves was locally carried out until well into the first decades of the 20th century.

existence is proved by at least three large bronze drums in the Bird's Head Peninsula of the Vietnamese Dong Son Culture (5th century BC) as well as the excavations of several Dong Son bronze axes as far east as the vicinities of present day Jayapura and beyond (Moore, 2003: 48). This is a good example that the term 'isolation' should be used with care and in a rather relative way.

States based on societies that spoke Papuan languages such as Ternate, Tidore or Jailolo in the northern Moluccas are rather untypical for Indonesia. Contact with the wider world since the *age of commerce* from the 15th century onwards (Reid, 1988) introduced Islam and Christianity into Indonesia's Far East, as well as new concepts of political organisation. Eastern Indonesian sultanates such as Buton in Southeast Sulawesi, Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo or Bacan in the Northern Moluccas, or the Portuguese-influenced state Larantuka in Eastern Flores, or the several *domains* and *petty states* on the islands of Roti, Sumba or Timor (Fox, 1977) had developed small towns as residences of their rulers. Besides these sultanates and the spice trading ports of Ambon and Banda, no pre-colonial cities or towns seemed to have existed in the Far East of Indonesia.<sup>3</sup>

Trade networks in the eastern Moluccas and New Guinea functioned rather differently from those in western Indonesia or Southeast Asia. First, different trade languages had been locally in use, which reached a considerable scale of geographical extension. Languages such as Biak were spoken until the early 20th century throughout Cenderawasih Bay, the coasts of the Birds' Head Peninsula, the Raja Ampat Islands and south to the Onin Peninsula. Malay as a *lingua franca* in coastal New Guinea was comparatively a latecomer, perhaps a side effect of the expansion of economic activities of Chinese traders into Cenderawasih Bay in the 18th century.<sup>4</sup> However, due to the impact of often Ambonese mission school teachers, and the spread of Dutch colonial control in New Guinea, Biak was completely replaced as a *lingua franca* throughout the coastal New Guinea region after World War I (Warnk, 2010: 117-8).<sup>5</sup> Besides dialects such as Ambonese Malay, Larantuka Malay or Northern Moluccan Malay, other, smaller trade languages such as Wolio (Butonese) or the *Tukang Besi* language, were in use locally in eastern Indonesia.

The absence of monetary trade in the eastern Moluccas and coastal New Guinea led historians and social anthropologists to look for different models of economic transactions. Although integrated in the world system in Wallerstein's sense, the region's economy is better understood if trade procedures are analysed with models presented in classical anthropological studies of Melanesia by Bronislaw Malinowski, or Thomas Harding among others, and general surveys such as Marshall Sahlins well-known *Stone Age Economics* (1972). Using these models, Roy Ellen has delivered an excellent study on the dynamics of a Moluccan trading network that extended well into coastal New

3 To be fair, this assumption might also result from the lack of archaeological research in the region so far.

4 When the English country trader Thomas Forrest visited Dore in January 1775 he met several Chinese traders with Dutch passports issued in Tidore (Forrest, 1780: 106) and a local Biak-Malay translator (Forrest, 1780: 100).

5 Biak now has the status of an endangered language with c. 20,000 mother tongue speakers only (van den Heuvel, 2006).

Guinea, but was also connected to European, Indian and East Asian markets (Ellen, 2003).

The introduction of the new religions Islam and Christianity resulted in the development of sultanates in the Northern Moluccas. These sultanates were rather limited in their range of power before their contacts with Portuguese, Spanish, English and particularly Dutch colonial traders and administrators, and of small states in the wider Timor region, which were heavily influenced by Portuguese Catholicism and Dutch Calvinist colonial symbolism. When the Norwegian traveller Johan Adrian Jacobsen visited Larantuka in Eastern Flores in January 1888, he witnessed the appointment of the new raja, Don Lorenzo, by the “Governor of Timor”. This account seems to be an error by Jacobsen, as there never was a Dutch governor of Timor, perhaps the Resident of Kupang in West Timor is what was meant here. Raja Don Lorenzo had to swear an oath of loyalty on a Dutch charter of appointment, a bar with a golden knob and a Royal Dutch emblem (Jacobsen, 1896: 72). Jacobsen described Larantuka as a “village” with a Jesuit mission station (established by the Portuguese in the 17th century), with a “greater church than in Maumeri” (a town on Flores, about 100 km west of Larantuka), a convent with a school for 160 girls, a safe port where he met a Chinese sailing ship from Singapore, a considerable market place and a Dutch administrative station (Jacobsen, 1896: 72-74; Beccari, 1924: 28). As a consequence, Larantuka could already be called a small town in comparison to the other settlements in Eastern Flores, Adonara, Solor, or Lembata, and in contrast to Jacobsen’s statement, Larantuka was the most important urban space in that region. However, the town developed around the Portuguese (colonial) presence in the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands even though the Larantuka raja could develop a considerable grade of independence as, before 1900, direct Dutch control in the region was somewhat weak.<sup>6</sup> In the eyes of the colonial administration, Don Lorenzo became too arbitrary in his leadership, disobedient towards Dutch rule and misused his autonomous power in local petty wars. Finally, in 1904 he was discharged and exiled and Larantuka became the town with the largest Dutch garrison in Eastern Flores. Don Lorenzo’s activities very much reflect a pattern of political behaviour analysed by social anthropologist James C. Scott as the “art of not being governed” (Scott, 2009). Scott described the manoeuvring of mountainous ethnic groups on the fringes of the spheres of power of mainland Southeast Asia as strategies of avoiding direct political control from powerful states based on wet rice cultivation. The principalities and domains of eastern Indonesia acted similarly to avoid direct interference from the Dutch colonial state and after independence from the Indonesian central administration, as was shown by Kohl in his description of traditional rituals and soccer games in the East Flores Regency on occasion of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Indonesian independence (Kohl, 2000: 105-9).

The opening of Macassar in 1847 and Ambon in 1854 as free ports secured continuing economic development in Eastern Indonesia, which led finally to the development of the first small towns in the eastern Moluccas and coastal New Guinea. Perhaps most numerous documents and sources we have on the Aru Archipelago in the south eastern Moluccas are where Dobo seems to have been a small entrepôt for centuries before

6 For a description of the political structure in the Larantuka principality see Dietrich (1989: 34-36).

the first Europeans set foot on these islands (O'Connor et al., 2005: 308). According to accounts by European naturalists and travellers, such as Alfred Russell Wallace and Hermann von Rosenberg, Dobo was populated quite densely during the trading season from January to June, depending on the monsoon winds. Before the 16th century, commercial items from Aru seemed to have been forest products such as resins or massoy bark<sup>7</sup>, but most important had been the trade in precious live birds and their plumes and feathers. The markets for the birds were the Middle East, India and, in particular, China. Birds of paradise, parrots, cockatoos or crowned pigeons had been mentioned in Chinese texts quite often, although the different species are difficult to identify. However, all of the species that can be determined, are species from eastern Indonesia, with habitats east of the biological Wallace Line (Ptak, 2006: 21). In fact, when the first plumes of birds of paradise reached Europe in the 16th century, their origin was assumed to be the Aru Islands, e.g., by the famous Dutch botanist Charles de l'Écluse (i.e., Carolus Clusius) (Clusius, 1605: Book 1, 360). Johann Otto Hellwig, a German pharmacist and alchemist in service of the Dutch East India Company after 1676, delivered in his observations on the natural history on "several Indian things" (*De rebus variis Indicis*) a short essay on birds of paradise, which according to his account, he received himself from Aru. He also mentioned a Malay nomenclature *Burung Aru* ("Birds from Aru"), which clearly shows the importance the Aru bird trade already had for a long period (Helbigii, 1680: 458).<sup>8</sup>

The development of Dobo from a rather temporary trading post to a permanent village and then to a small town started in the second half of the 19th century. The Dutch scientific draughtsman Adrianus Johannes Bik, who visited the Aru Islands in April 1824, referred to an active trade in sea cucumbers and pearl fishery. However, he did not make any mention of any greater settlement with more than 1,000 inhabitants on the islands (Bik, 1928). About three decades later, the British naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace stayed in Dobo for two months to collect all kinds of specimens, and delivered the first more detailed description of the place. When Wallace visited Aru in 1857, he found there a living maritime trade: Dobo was not only frequented yearly by ten to twelve big sailing boats (*perahu*) owned by Macassar or Bugis traders, but also by hundreds of smaller boats from Goram, Eastern Ceram, Banda, Ambon, Kei, Tanimbar and Babar. This showed a vivid local trade in the Eastern Moluccan region including the coasts of New Guinea with products intended for an overseas market.<sup>9</sup> He also mentioned the first shops being established by Chinese from Macassar (Wallace, 1862a: 131).

Indeed, the presence of traders and merchants from South Sulawesi was so considerable, it led Wallace to call Dobo a "Bugis trading settlement" (Wallace, 1862b: 154). As the centre of trade of the Aru Archipelago, Wallace estimated that Dobo, at the height of the trading season, had about 1,000 residents. Besides staple food, metal wares of all kind, and other trade items already mentioned above, Dobo was already a place for

7 On the economic importance of massoy bark in the Moluccas and New Guinea see Zieck (1973).

8 Clusius, although never been to Indonesia, also knew a Malay term for the birds of paradise: *Manucodiata*, derived from Malay *Manuk Dewata* ("Birds of the Gods") (Clusius, 1605: Book 1, 360).

9 On the various boat types used for long distance trade in Eastern Indonesia see Horridge (1978).

Figure 1: Dobo in the Trading Season



Source: Wallace 1869

“European luxuries” such as sugar, biscuits, preserved fruits or wine<sup>10</sup>, which could be obtained in small quantities. Dobo, at the time of his visit, consisted of three crowded streets of “rude thatched houses” (Wallace, 1862a: 131), which had not changed when German naturalist Hermann von Rosenberg was in Dobo in 1865 (von Rosenberg, 1878: 327). As evening entertainment, Wallace witnessed among the Bugis residents of Dobo, plenty of cock-fighting and football-playing in the streets almost every evening.<sup>11</sup> A similar account is given by Italian naturalist Odoardo Beccari, who stayed on Aru from February to June 1873: Dobo was a bustling trading port which many people entered during the western monsoon season between January and June (Beccari, 1924: 200). In particular, Beccari mentioned the presence of Muslims from Macassar. Their presence for centuries from the late 17th century and more intensively from the 1850s onwards, led to the spread of Islam in Dobo and the Aru Islands (Wellfelt and Djonler, 2019: 166).

In 1848, the Dutch government raised the claim on the territory in Eastern Indonesia up to 141° latitude. As a consequence, the spread of Dutch imperialism and colonial administration was also felt in the Eastern Moluccas. In 1882, a Dutch post was established in Aru together with a coal depot at the port, leading to further growth of Dobo. The colonial administrator, Gerrit Wilhelm Wolter Baron van Hoëvell, who visited Dobo

10 About fifty years later Hugo Merton also observed that “plenty of boxes of red wine” were loaded in Macassar with destination Dobo to his great astonishment, as he could not explain why and how so much quantities of alcohol could be consumed on Aru (Merton, 1911: 9).

11 This perhaps refers rather to the traditional game of *sepak takraw* / *sepak raga* rather than to modern soccer.

in March 1888 to investigate the trade of Aru, observed the arrival of steamships that broke the de facto monopoly of Bugis and Macassar traders (van Hoëvell, 1890: 94). More and more Chinese traders were coming to Dobo via Macassar, most being originally from Singapore (van Hoëvell, 1890: 100). After Dobo was reduced to ashes by a great fire on 1 June 1887, it was completely rebuilt by van Hoëvell's arrival the following year. The Chinese then inhabited a separate quarter, which started directly in front of the Dutch administrator's building. The Bugis quarter was located to the south of the Chinese houses. Both neighbourhoods had their own administration by a Dutch appointed official (Kapitan China / Kapitan Bugis). Dobo at that time already consisted of two parallel streets with more than 60 wooden houses, mostly inhabited by Chinese, Bugis and Macassar people (van Hoëvell, 1890: 63). Van Hoëvell estimated more than 80 Chinese and 360 Bugis and Macassar permanent residents were present in Dobo in addition to the local population (van Hoëvell, 1890: 72).

The development of Dobo into a small town was already completed when German zoologist Hugo Merton stayed at Aru from January to May 1908. Steamships then were a regular sight. Besides other steamships, the Royal Dutch company Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij ran a regular service every four weeks at the harbour of Dobo and had an agent in the town since 1906. In the harbour, Merton noticed several custom sheds where mostly Chinese people were active in selling their products (Merton, 1911: 16). The town progressed further: the Dutch colonial controlleur lived in a lovely house with a veranda and the town already had a small hospital with an able Japanese doctor (Merton, 1911: 17). Australian pearl fishers kept the only two-storied houses close to the port, while behind these, the quarters of the Chinese, Arabs, Bugis, and other residents and traders were located. In the Bugis quarter, there was now a small mosque and even barracks had been erected for a small band of the Dutch colonial army consisting of one European sergeant, two corporals and 20 Javanese and Ambonese soldiers. Furthermore, two Ambonese policemen and an Ambonese post office clerk were stationed in Dobo (Merton, 1911: 19). Merton also mentioned the only building in Dobo built with brick walls: the jailhouse (Merton, 1911: 20). The population became even more multi-ethnic than already was the case in the 19th century. Merton observed that besides the tiny European group, the town was populated not only by plenty of Chinese, Bugis and Macassarese, but also by Bandanese, Timorese, Arabs, Ambonese Protestant missionary teachers and Japanese women, who were most likely pearl divers (Merton, 1911: 14).<sup>12</sup> The evening entertainment also changed considerably since Wallace's time: the noise of an out-of-tune gramophone robbed Merton of sleep more than once (Merton, 1911: 15).

The decline of trade in bird-of-paradise plumes after World War I was compensated, as already observed by Merton, by pearl diving. The most profitable of the pearl diving companies was the Australian-run, but Macassar-based, Celebes Trading Company, which was joined by the Bandanese Arab Syekh Said Baadilla, who subsequently became the most successful pearl trader of Eastern Indonesia and nicknamed the pearl king (raja mutiara) of the Moluccas (Martinez and Vickers, 2015: 59). In 1908, when Hugo Merton was in Aru, his company ran a fleet of more than 150 pearl fishing boats that

12 The Arab Syekh Said Baadilla established a pearl diving station in Dobo in 1897 (Broersma, 1934: 325).

also transported Merton during some of his several expeditions starting out from Dobo (Merton 1911: 168). The population became even more cosmopolitan: besides Chinese, Arabs, Bugis, Europeans and local Arunese, now also dozens of Japanese and Filipinos (“Manilamen”) dwelt at Dobo (v.S., 1916: 299-300).<sup>13</sup> The pearl business blossomed until the late 1920s, when, during the Great Depression, the global pearl trade collapsed. Finally, in 1933 Baadilla had to declare bankruptcy, and sold most of his pearling fleet to a certain Chiu, a Chinese wharf master from Dobo (Alwi, 2008: 18). The pearl industry in Aru saw a short recovery before World War II, which led to a further growth of Dobo. However, as in other parts of Indonesia, the Pacific War interrupted development. Dobo was bombed during World War II where the Japanese maintained a seaplane base. Following the Indonesian revolution and independence, Dobo remained a small town in Eastern Indonesia, never regaining its former status as a centre for trade with Moluccan and New Guinean trade products. In the early 1990s, Dobo had about 3,500 mostly non-Papuan inhabitants: Chinese, Bugis and Macassarese, with a few Arab merchants and Javanese civil servants (Muller, 1993: 163). Dobo is now the capital of the Aru Islands district (Pulau-Pulau Aru) comprising perhaps far more than 10,000 residents.

### The first towns in Dutch New Guinea 1900-1941

The first small towns on the coast of Western New Guinea show parallel developments to those in the Aru Archipelago. Indigenous acephalous societies based on big-men, and not on hierarchical state structures, did not lead to the creation of local cities or towns.<sup>14</sup> Although Fakfak, Sorong and Manokwari-Dore were small entrepôts for the trade in birds of paradise for centuries (Warnk, 2010), it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that greater settlements grew out of villages inhabited by Chinese, Bugis and Arab traders – quite similar to Dobo on Aru. In addition to growing colonial control, Fak-Fak and Dore were also stations for Christian missions. In Dore, the Berlin-based Gossener Mission had already established a mission post in 1855, which was continued by the Utrechtsche Zendingvereeninging in 1863 (van Hasselt, 1888). In Fakfak, a Catholic mission station was opened in 1894. In 1898, Dutch officials were stationed in Fakfak and Dore, with Merauke in South New Guinea following in 1902 and finally Hollandia (present-day Jayapura) in 1910.<sup>15</sup> Dutch control before World War II, however, remained weak: in 1937 still only 15 Dutch administrators and 50 native clerks were based in New Guinea, all of them on posts close to the coast (Hastings, 1984: 131).

Alfred Russel Wallace and Hermann von Rosenberg visited Dore in 1857 shortly after the foundation of the mission there. Dore was a village where the houses were standing completely on poles in the water (Wallace, 1869: 378; de Bruijn Kops, 1850: 174),

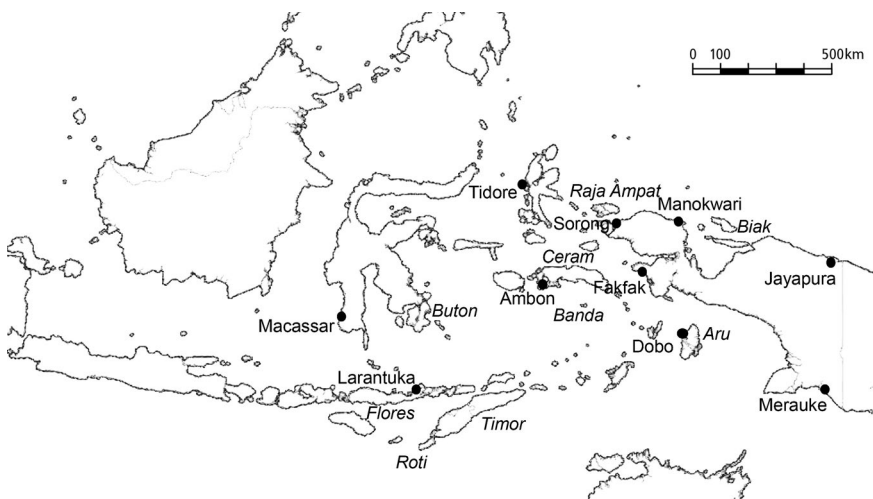
13 One cannot but wonder how the communication in Aru functioned at that time as an anonymous observer stated that Japanese pearl divers and prostitutes in Dobo were neither able to speak or to understand Pidgin Malay nor Pidgin English (v.S., 1916: 311).

14 For a description of societies based on big men see Godelier (1987).

15 A good overview on the Dutch administration in New Guinea is given in Drooglever (2009: 12-34), for a detailed study see Sinaga (2013).

similar to Sorong (Beccari, 1874: 653) and Fakfak (Beccari, 1924: 72). All three places nevertheless were vivid trade ports where Bugis, Arab and Chinese traders were present and bought live birds and plumes, massoy bark, pearls, sea cucumbers, sago or wild nutmeg (Wallace, 1862a). Besides trade goods such as glass pearls, rice, knives and axes, Bugis sarongs and Indian cotton ware, Chinese porcelain and ceramics, silver dollars and tobacco, these traders also brought a new language (Malay), and a new religion (Islam) to coastal New Guinea (Warnk, 2010). However, modern buildings and fixed streets only appeared in the aftermath of the mission station in Dore and governmental posts after 1900. Visitors to Fakfak in the first decade of the 20th century were surprised about the hustle and bustle less than 10 years after its foundation: at the roadstead was a street with several Chinese and Arab shop houses. Besides this, a garrison of 48 Indonesian soldiers and a Dutch sergeant was stationed close-by, a Javanese doctor named Suhirman (Sudirman?) was practicing, and a Dutch assistant resident, a postal clerk and an agent of the Dutch Nieuw-Guinea Handelsmaatschappij were living in Fakfak (van Weede, 1908: 212ff; Haga, 1911). When Swedish zoologist Sten Bergman visited Fakfak in 1948, he noticed the presence of Papuas, “Malays” (Indonesians, perhaps mostly Ambonese) and hundreds of Chinese (Bergman, 1950: 81).

Figure 2: Eastern Indonesia: colonial towns.



Source: Author's own draft

Manokwari-Dore, in the eastern Bird's Head Peninsula, became the District of New Guinea's administration centre in 1898, which included the northern Bird's Head and northern New Guinea up to Hollandia (Jayapura) in the remote east. Parallel developments to Fakfak and Dobo do appear: a former small entrepôt surrounded by acephalous Papuan societies was included into a greater economic world. Former local traders became largely replaced by outsiders such as Chinese and Arab merchants. This was partly due to a change in trade items. The formerly dominant trade in bird-of-paradise plumes became obsolete after World War I due to the global change in female fashion. In addition, there was strong competition and a lack of direct access to the world's markets

(e.g. the marketing of oyster pearls). Less than 20 years after the arrival of the Dutch, the then well-known journalist Alma Karlin visited Manokwari in 1926. She described it as a small town with nice streets, a fish market, quite a number of Chinese shops and a hospital (Karlin, 1930: 193; Anonymous, 28 May 1926). Already two years earlier, an anonymous observer witnessed the first plantations around Manokwari, run by a Japanese together with a son of Dutch missionary (Anonymous, 21 February 1924). Unfortunately, this observer did not mention the workforce for these plantations, which perhaps were either Chinese or Javanese, and must have arrived via the port of Manokwari, thus creating economic possibilities for Chinese and Arab traders in the town. Manokwari had progressed further when American ornithologist Dillon Ripley reached New Guinea in 1938. At that time, in the town, plenty of Chinese shop houses existed on the main street, followed by several smaller houses for Indonesian native colonial clerks. Furthermore, army barracks, a jail, a radio station and a small generator existed, but Ripley explicitly mentioned the absence of any cars in Manokwari (Ripley, 1942: 80). Further down on a hill, were a number of comfortable bungalows for the Dutch officials, the largest one reserved for the Assistant Resident.

Even remote Hollandia (Jayapura) developed into a small town after World War I. Alma Karlin saw in 1926 a main street, a second mountainous street as well as two lanes with Chinese shops and “Malay houses” (Karlin, 1930: 173). There was also by now a mosque, barracks for 30-40 colonial soldiers, a post office, an official building for jurisdiction and a private house for the Dutch judge (Karlin, 1930: 173). The local trade in the town was completely in the hands of Chinese and “Ternatese” (Arabs and/or Bugis?) (Anonymous, 21 February 1924). In addition, at the end of World War I, the first Dutch and German planters arrived in Hollandia, accompanied by the plantation workers, although these again are not mentioned in any of the travel accounts and other sources (Haffer, 2008: 63).<sup>16</sup> In 1937 Hollandia had a radio station, a jail for 20-30 inmates, a hospital with 20 beds, a soccer field and a tennis court (Galis and van Doornik, 1960: 14).

Perhaps the most spectacular development in economic and demographic change in Dutch New Guinea before, and directly after World War II, happened in Sorong on the western cape of the Birds’ Head Peninsula. Contacts to the Northern Moluccan sultanates, to Ambon and Ceram had been established at least since the 17th century and brought the spread of Islam to the coastal areas of New Guinea. The Italian naturalist Luigi Maria d’Albertis, who visited Sorong in April 1872, described its 200 inhabitants as “nearly all” (“quasi tutti”) being Muslims (Santini, 1937: 16; d’Albertis, 1874: 312). A colonial post was established in Sorong in 1906 which developed into a city in the late 20th century. Sorong was still a village in 1924, with a few Chinese, Bugis and Arab traders (Anonymous, 21 February 1924), but this changed as soon as oil fields were discovered close-by. The exploitation of the oil fields started in 1935 and brought dramatic changes. Already in 1938, several white bungalows for European expats had been

16 Although the existence of copra and other plantations in New Guinea after 1920 most have involved a considerable workforce, not much is known on plantation workers in Dutch New Guinea and where they came from. An anonymous newspaper article mentioned the lack of workers as the major difficulty for plantations in the Far East (Anonymous, 20 February 1924).

built as well as barracks for 10 policemen (Ripley, 1942: 162). A local Chinese doctor was practicing in town, a Dutch magistrate and the well-known Dutch-Frisian missionary Freerk Kamma were based in Sorong (Ripley, 1924: 84).<sup>17</sup> Many of the servants for the European communities were Malay-speaking Ambonese, while the few shops were in Chinese hands. It is no surprise that Sorong was among the first targets of the Japanese in New Guinea in World War II and was taken in early April 1942. After the return of the Dutch following the war, the *Nederlandsche Nieuw Guinea Petroleum Maatschappij* enlarged the port and built large administrative buildings, impressive residences for the administrators, a large hospital and plenty of new roads (Bergman, 1950: 34-5). In 1948, Sorong already had a population of more than 5,000 people and was crowded with traffic including hundreds of trucks of all kinds, busses, shovel diggers, jeeps and the latest American luxury cars (Bergman, 1950: 35-6). Chinese and native Indonesians lived mostly in a *kampong bahru* ("new quarter"), separated from European-American expats. Besides the already mentioned infrastructure and buildings of Sorong, there was also a telegraph station, a school, a church, an army barrack and a small radio station, which broadcasted music and news from the outside world every evening for the European community (Bergman, 1950). As further evening entertainment, Bergman mentioned the bi-weekly open-air cinema with free entry, depending, of course, on the weather conditions (Bergman, 1950: 36). The economic development was carried on by the Indonesian government after its occupation of West Papua in 1963. Today Sorong is the largest city of the Indonesian province Papua Barat (West Papua) with more than 220,000 residents, while Manokwari as provincial capital (since 2003), with a university, now has about 216,000 inhabitants.

## Conclusion

To sum up, comparatively less studies have been carried out on middle sized towns, especially in regions with stateless societies organised in domains or petty states in the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands (Fox, 1977) or even acephalous societies such as New Guinea organised around big men (Godelier, 1987). In the Far East of Indonesia, urbanisation did develop, but only after contact with the outside, in particular with the European world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Traditional trade patterns were replaced by the colonial monetary economy with the region becoming more dependent on the world economy. A point in case is the trade in precious birds and their plumes: a highly profitable business faced a complete breakdown with the change of female fashion and the prohibition of hunting in the Dutch East Indies and Australian administrated eastern New Guinea after World War I (Ellen, 2003: 136).

The new towns such as Sorong, Dobo, Hollandia or Manokwari were rather Indonesian-cosmopolitan than locally Papuan in character. An anonymous observer even went so far to claim that in 1915 "Dobo actually had no native population at all" (v.S., 1916: 300). The position of Chinese traders and the evident economic presence of a very tiny

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17 Ornithologist Ripley to his great surprise first met Magistrate Kern while he was playing soccer outside with some boys (Ripley, 1942: 84).

group of Arab-Hadhrami merchants is particularly striking. Until around 1900, the Arab community was very active in the Moluccas until they faced strong economic rivalry by Chinese businessmen. Following the war, they also faced competition from Japanese companies (Clarence-Smith, 1998: 41). This development is also confirmed by German geologist Johannes Wanner who observed in December 1902 that the local trade in Eastern Ceram and the Geser-Goram islands was nearly completely under the control of Chinese and Arabs who replaced local Moluccan-Papuan as well as Bugis traders (Wanner, 2009: 31; Ellen, 2003: 237). Similar accounts had been already mentioned for Sorong or Dobo. In this respect, the first urban environments in Indonesia's Far East followed a pattern famously considered as *plural societies* by former colonial administrator John S. Furnivall. In Furnivall's opinion, colonialism was the impetus for the development of such plural societies, where different ethnic groups or races only interact for economic reasons at particular places such as markets. They live side by side in the colonial state without mingling and are not able to express one common social will (Furnivall, 1944: 446-7). Yet, although Furnivall was heavily criticised for creating a Southeast Asian homo oeconomicus, his general description fits rather well for the new towns in New Guinea and Eastern Indonesia.

In the vicinity of colonial expansion, new religions found their way to the south eastern Moluccas and coastal New Guinea. Although Islam was present in the region at least since the 1850s and Christian mission stations had been established around the same time (Warnk, 2010), colonial expansion facilitated their further spread. Oral traditions about Islamic migrants and holy men from Mecca still circulate in the Aru Islands (Wellfelt and Djonler, 2019: 170-171). Perhaps it is justified to say, the introduction of the new religions of Islam and Christianity can be interpreted as much as being a catalyst of town development as well as a result of it. The first colonial administrative posts in the region were established at exactly those places with either a strong presence of Muslim and Chinese traders (such as Dobo or Fakfak), or with an already existing Christian mission station (Dore-Manokwari, Larantuka).

On the other hand, in the wake of colonial expansion, new possibilities also emerged. First, the emergence of small towns led to the creation of completely new social and economic patterns in the informal sector. New competitors replaced others and local traders lost their former status in coastal trading ports. Furthermore, the first towns became not only centres of colonial rule and economy, but also of education. Education at Christian mission schools and to a lesser extent also at the often informal Islamic teachings, following the presence of rather wealthy Arab traders, was a pattern of urban development, modernity and change (Korff, 1999: 140). In particular, Christian education brought the region new languages such as Dutch and, more importantly, Malay via mostly Ambonese, and to a lesser extent, Manadonese school teachers. With the introduction of Malay, they paved the way for further integration into the Dutch East Indies (Anderson, 1988: 132-133). Finally, school education in eastern Indonesian towns gave its pupils and their families access to modern media and entertainment. Radio stations were set up in places such as Sorong, and radio sets could be bought easily if you had enough money as soon the colonial authorities had established electricity and generators. The common education also enabled locals to travel to other parts of Indonesia and created a sense of more comprehensive identity which shortly before World War

II resulted in the growth of an Indonesian nationalism also in New Guinea and other remote areas.

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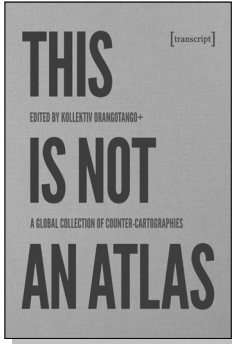
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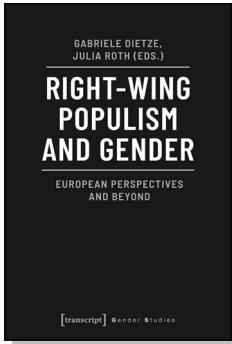
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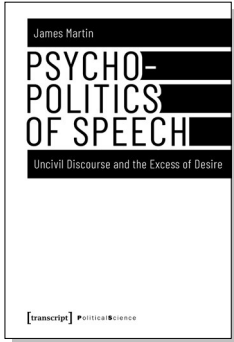
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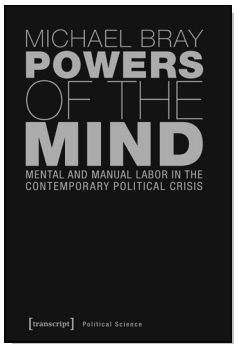
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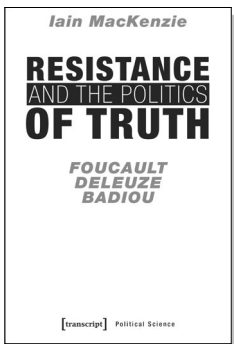
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