

When Stories Wander: Ideas on the Co-Production of Social Movements' Narratives in Transnational Space

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Abstract

Burma/Myanmar has faced change in recent years. Since the elections of 2010, sanctions have been lifted and foreign direct investment has risen significantly. These developments, however, have not always been welcome. Local people from Dawei, for example, have expressed their dissatisfaction over land seizure, lack of compensation and participation in the decision-making processes over the development of a large Special Economic Zone (SEZ). The local grassroots movements can rely in their struggles on a network that is not restricted to Myanmar, but reaches out to exile groups, INGOs and academia in Thailand and beyond. To successfully communicate their stories, these groups rely on transculturally competent individuals re-presenting their stories within and across various (transnational) spaces. The conceptions of space I apply in this context rely heavily on Harvey and Lefebvre. But while these scholars focus more on the production of space(s), I intend to undertake an examination of the utilization of space(s). Hence, the main questions of this ongoing research project are: 1. how do transnational spaces affect the production and re-presentation of social movement narratives? 2. What narratives are re-presented when, where, how and why by transculturally competent individuals from Dawei's social movement network? 3. What difficulties do these transculturally competent individuals face in translating/re-presenting these narratives? 4. Ultimately, how empowering are these narratives for Dawei's activist network? The paper itself will not elaborate on any findings (as it is too early in the research process, yet), but on the theoretical framework and its implication for fieldwork offering a hopefully exciting new perspective on the re-production of narratives in transnational spaces like the borderland of Myanmar and Thailand.

Introduction

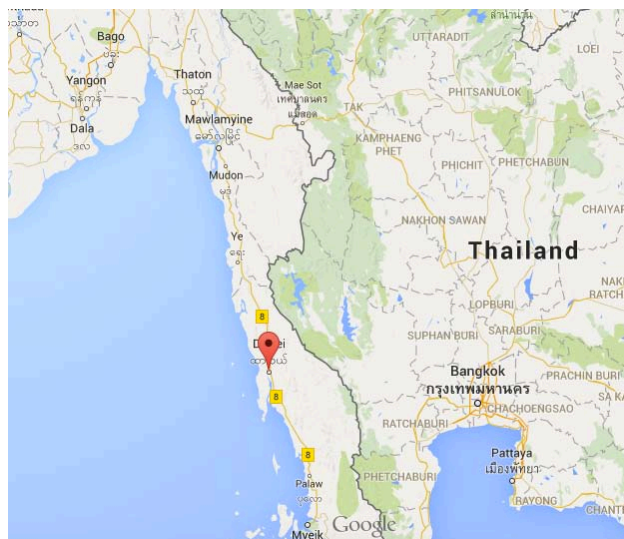
The recent history of Myanmar/Burma has been characterized by ethnic conflict, oppression and military rule. There are not many things uncontested; land, laws, even language: the very name of the nation of "Myanmar" gives cause for argument and is referred to by many with its colonial name "Burma" (Steinberg 2001)¹. Nonetheless, there have been changes in the most recent years that made many believe in a better future for Myanmar. In 2010, there had been the first elections since nearly 20 years, many political prisoners had been released and the media were allowed to report less restrained by censorship. But there are many who argue that the press is still not "free" (Buchanan, Kramer, and Woods 2013). This might be one of the reasons why many activists of

¹ I will use these two terms interchangeably

the former 8888 movement or the so-called Saffron Revolution prefer to stay abroad, away from possible prosecution.

Nonetheless, the reforms under President Thein Sein have been considered sufficient enough by the international community to drop many of the sanctions that limited Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Burma. Rich resources and a formerly isolated market promise huge returns to investors. This has quite often led to conflicts where investors seek to implement projects in areas that are of importance to local communities (e.g. for reasons of livelihood or culture). However, due to the reforms and an ever-increasing conscious civil society, these projects do not go uncontested. Protests against the construction of the Myitsone Dam, for example, have resulted in a temporary halt of the project. In Dawei, protests against the implementation of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) put a halt on the construction of a 4000MW coal-fired power plant(Boehler 2012).

It is the Dawei SEZ and the local people's struggle against it that I have wrapped around my ideas. The Dawei project covers 205km² of land north of the city of Dawei (Tavoy) in Myanmar's Tanintharyi Region and consists of three different projects: a deep-sea port, an industrial estate and



map1 - www.google.co.uk (10 June 2015), red flag: Dawei

a road-link connecting Dawei via Kanchanaburi (Thailand) with Bangkok and the Southern Corridor of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS). There are various arguments for this project. For one, projects like the Dawei SEZ aim at the diversification of Burma's production and exports, which so far, consist mostly of resource extraction and export. The new industries shall offer jobs to the local population as well as to returning Burmese emigrants(Buchanan, Kramer, and Woods 2013). Furthermore, goods from Thailand could more easily and cost-effectively be

shipped from Dawei to the Middle-East, Europe and Africa (avoiding the Strait of Malacca)(Pavin 2011). Additionally oil from the Gulf States could more easily be imported and together with the gas from the fields in the Andaman Sea be processed in the facilities of the planned Industrial Estate. However, many people are not in favor of this mega-project.

Local groups like the Dawei Development Association (DDA), the Karen Environmental and Social Network (KESAN) or Paung Ku, another local group, voice concerns over the impacts of the project. About 30.000 people are estimated to lose their homes. Farmers and fishermen are afraid for their livelihoods(Lawi 2012). While fishermen lose their homes next to the sea and therefore access to the fish stock, farmers experience land-confiscation. In the cases where compensation is offered by the authorities, these compensations do often not meet the expectations of the affected people. Furthermore, the local people are skeptical that they would have chances to get jobs in the industries as they are lacking necessary skills. Another important point of concerns are the environmental impacts that are to be expected. Experiences from other similar projects in the region (e.g. Thailand's Map Ta Phut), show that the environmental impacts are severe and that

administrations lack the capabilities (and/or the willingness) to enforce environmental and health regulations satisfyingly.

However, there is hope. Mega-projects like the Dawei SEZ meet a citizenship, like the groups mentioned above, that is aware of the newly gained freedoms. Furthermore, these various groups and social movements do not stand alone in their struggles. Many of them make use of ties with exile activists, building networks that transcend the nation state of Myanmar/Burma. Exile activists and media based in Thailand, for example, have become natural allies to them. But making use of a borderland, to transcend national spaces in course of a struggle is not always easy. The narratives of such struggles need to be translated accordingly to the contexts in which they are re-produced and re-presented. To identify the constraints and opportunities of cross-border narrative co-production is the aim of my study. More precisely, my study is set to find answers to the following questions:

1. How do transnational spaces affect the production and re-presentation of social movement narratives?
2. What narratives are re-presented when, where, how and why by transculturally competent individuals from Dawei's social movement network?
3. What difficulties do these transculturally competent individuals face in translating/re-presenting these narratives?
4. Ultimately, how empowering are these narratives for Dawei's activist network?

In the following paragraphs I will present the conceptual framework that lays the foundation to the study. In the end I will add a short discussion of how I intend to follow up these conceptual ideas with the methodology in the field.

Space, Social Movements and Narratives

I argue that to understand social movement networks and their narratives in cross-border settings it is important to understand how social movements are emplaced in space. To do so, I follow the ideas of Lefebvre(1991) and Soja (1996)who describe space as "social". Following their argument space is far from being an empty, but fixed sphere, on the contrary: far more, it is produced and re-produced again and again, constantly changing and evolving. Harvey(2008, 1973) emphasizes the conception of space as being "social" through the introduction of the spatial dimensions of relative and relational space. Social movement networks, on the other hand, do not only constitute social spaces by themselves, but also transcend several social spaces (e.g. various nation states). This is especially for cases when social movement networks maintain relations to groups and individuals outside their countries of origin. Social space, however, (e.g. the social movement network of Dawei) is maintained/contested through discursive practices. These discursive practices de-lineate social space, define who is part of a certain social space or who is excluded from it. From here, it is not a far step to take to "frames". Frames shape the ideas as well as relate to other ideas(Goffman 1974). In a transnational context, when social movements transcend national borders and cultural boundaries, these frames (as cognitive schemata (Bloch 2012, 2005)) often need to be translated. At the nodes of such social movement networks one can

find transculturally competent individuals (Koehn and Rosenau 2002) who translate the narratives and discourses that produce the social space of their respective network as they are aware of the differences of relational spaces: said frames as cognitive schemata. In the following paragraphs I will have a closer look at the concepts of space, social movements and narratives and how they are brought together in the translations and representation of transculturally competent individuals.

Space

Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is three-folded. While one dimension refers to material space (where objects and subjects are actually emplaced), a second one refers to representations of space, (e.g. maps, organograms), and a third one to representational space. This representational space is called by Soja (1996) and Kahn (2000) "imagined space". This dimension refers to spaces of meaning: like one refers to a certain village as his/her "home town". Space is therefore far from being apolitical. As a social product it has to experience contestations. Attempts to fix certain meanings of certain spaces (e.g. defining a certain area as a SEZ, like in Dawei) will lead to contestation. Hence, space and contestations of space can be considered representations of underlying power-relations.

While these three dimensions of space already lend to the idea of "social space", the social properties of space can even better be understood when identifying the varying relations of space between certain subjects and objects. To do so, Harvey (2008, 1973) adds three additional dimensions of space: 1. absolute space, 2. relative space and 3. relational space: "If we regard space as absolute it becomes a 'thing in itself' with an existence independent of matter. [...] The view of relative space proposes that it be understood as a relationship between objects which exists only because objects exist and relate to each other. There is another sense in which space can be viewed as relative and I choose to call this relational space – space regarded in the manner of Leibniz, as being contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects" (Harvey 1973 cited in Harvey 2006). Therefore Harvey expands on the idea of space as being social. His differentiation between *relative* and *relational* space is important: while *relative* space is enacted between objects (e.g. through speech acts), *relational* space defines which relations are available to be made with another object. These "relationships to others within" can be identified in something else as well: in cognitive schemata or frames that define how individuals position themselves towards other individuals or objects.

	Material Space	Representations of Space	Spaces of Representation
Absolute Space	Walls, bridges, doors [...]	Cadastral, administrative maps [...]	Feelings of contentment around the hearth, sense of security [...]
Relative Space	Circulation and flows of energy, water, air, commodities [...]	Thematic and topological maps [...]	Anxiety not getting to class in time [...]
Relational Space	Electromagnetic energy flows and fields, social relations [...]	Surrealism, existentialism, psychogeographies, cyberspace [...]	Visions, fantasies, desires, frustrations, memories

(Harvey 2008)

Therefore this conceptualization of space lends itself to be applied in an analysis of the power-relations amongst several actors; especially if these actors, like in the case of Dawei, tend to continuously transcend several spaces, utilizing the differing opportunities these spaces offer. Due to the highly volatile properties of space it is clear that space is interwoven with power-relations. “[...] [H]egemonic cultural practices will always attempt to fix the meaning of space, arranging any number of particularities, disjunctures, and juxtapositions into seamless unity” (Natter and Jones 1997: p.150). These cultural practices while aiming at a fixation of space, rarely go uncontested. This is true, no matter which dimension of space (lived, represented or imagined) these fixations of meaning are aimed at; precisely because they concretize these power-relations they demand contestation (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003).

Social movements play an important role in the contestation of the production of space. Nowadays, they are less and less restricted to the confined social spaces of nation states. They actively employ the opportunities offered by transnational spaces, avoiding the constraints they have to experience on national scales. They are able to spread alternative versions of imagined spaces, enlarge their relational properties and expand their networks across borders. This practice correlates with an increased capability of contestation “[a]s the imagination as a social force itself works across national lines to produce locality as a spatial fact and as a sensibility” (Appadurai 2000: p.6). Utilizing the opportunities offered by transnational space means that alternative productions of space are possible: productions that easily transcend national borders and impact localities different from the ones where these alternative spaces had been produced beforehand. The future of Dawei is not restricted to actions in localized absolute space. Much more it is co-produced in a transnational flow of narratives and discourses that re-imagine the spaces of Dawei.

Social Movements

It is clear that the conceptualization of social movements plays an important part in my research. However, there are various approaches to social movements that differ in not only their emphasis on certain aspects of social movements. The approaches that I have identified to play a certain role in the transnational co-production of narratives are “resource mobilization”, “political opportunity structure” (POS), “frames” and “network” approaches. In the following paragraphs I will have a short look at these and discuss their relevance to the case and the links to the conceptualization of space.

In general one can speak of social movements as “[...]a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (McCarthy and Zald 1977: p.1217-1218). For McCarthy and Zald this definition constitutes the starting point for their conceptualization of social movements in terms of “resource mobilization”. Goodwin and Jaspers (2009: p.4) however, define social movements as “[...] a collective, organized, sustained and non-institutional challenge to authorities, power-holders or cultural beliefs and practices”. Both definitions highlight the relative properties of social movements: at one point as relations within social movements (“set of opinions and believes”) geared towards changing relations to outside objects and subjects (“challenge to...”). Already at this point, one can realize the potential of social movement conceptualizations in terms of space as discussed before (relational space/relative space).

Resource Mobilization

Resource mobilization (RM) approaches to social movements argue that the successful action of social movements is dependent on the successful mobilization of resources and followers (Opp 2009). If social movements are successful gathering resources they are perceived as more likely to be successful and therefore more attractive to potential followers. These resources can be defined following Opp(2009: p.139) as “[...] goods (i.e. everything that has utility) which individual or collective actors can control”. To achieve a position in which social movements are able to amass resources they need to improve their “mobilizing structures” which refer to “tactical repertoires”, “organizational forms” McCarthy (1996: p.141). The strong point of resource mobilization approaches is their abilities to offer explanations for successful action by certain social movement organizations. However, they fail to do so with social movement groups who barely have access to resources and most of them lack a transnational perspective. Nonetheless, work on activism in diaspora shows that these groups contribute massively (e.g. lobbying, transmittance sending) to local actors(Heindl 2012). This is especially true for the case of Myanmar and is not restricted to exile media, or political organizations of minorities like the Karen National Union (KNU), but as well for environmental activism as described by Simpson’s work on activist groups against the construction of dams (Simpson 2013). From this point interesting ideas can be taken for the case of Dawei: exile activists and media in diaspora in Thailand offer great opportunities for the local grassroots movements to attain resources and opportunities for mobilization that they otherwise could not access. The borderland therefore represents a relational material space, following Harvey, offering a vast amount of possible alternative social relations.

Political Opportunity Structure:

Another important point of critique of RM approaches is that they often fail to address issues of the political environment. Social movements come not to exist in a vacuum. The answer to this lack of context in RM is addressed by Political Opportunity Structure (POS). The idea is that social movements actions take place in political contexts that contribute significantly to the outcomes of social movements' actions. "The primary point of political process approach was that activists do not choose goals, strategies, and tactics in a vacuum. Rather, the political context, conceptualized fairly broadly, sets the grievances around which activists mobilize, advantaging some claims and disadvantaging others"(Meyer 2004: p.128). Therefore changes in the political contexts – the political opportunity structure – allow activism or increase the probabilities of positive outcomes of activism (Opp 2009, Tarrow 1998). The relevant changes of the POS have been identified by (Tarrow 1998) as the following:

- 1) opening of access to participation;
- 2) shifting political alignments;
- 3) appearance of influential allies;
- 4) division amongst elites and
- 5) a decrease of repressive means.

Having a look at the aforementioned list one can easily identify how helpful such a conceptualization could be to analyze recent events in Burma. The reform agenda of the last years has definitely offered improvement in some of the areas: due to a decrease of repression (at least in some areas, e.g. Myitsone Dam, coal-fired power plant Dawei) participatory action seems to have become possible (in the sense of being able to publicly express one's opinion²). The constitution with a partially elected parliament constitutes an opportunity to gain access to a more diversified set of possible allies, shifting alignments and division amongst elites.

While being a helpful tool in the analysis of social movements, POS has attracted critique for having become a "one-size fits all"-conceptualization of social movements. Gamson and Meyer, for example, state that "[political opportunity structure] threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action. Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all" (Gamson and Meyer 1996: p.275). Furthermore, it focuses far too much on political entities like the nation state, disregarding that social movements extent more often than not over the boundaries of nation states. A transnational perspective, following Gupta and Sharma (2006: p.291) however, is necessary as "[a] cultural and transnational perspective allows one to go beyond institutions, official policies, and plans that are often placed at the center of the analysis to consider the multiple ways in which such institutions and policies are contested". The relative and relational space of the borderland is exactly not restricted to the nation state. This is one key-point of the research I intend to undertake: the travelling of social movements' narratives across borders and their representation in a transnational social space (in this case the transnational social space of the borderland of Myanmar and Thailand). While I will have a closer look at narratives and discourse later, I will now introduce a paragraph on

²It is important to note that the most recent events regarding the violent crack-down on student protests represents a worrying decrease of these opportunities

“frames” and social movements. Frames offer a great opportunity to link the literature of social movements with narratives and space and will be highly relevant for the case of the social movement network of Dawei.

Frames:

Social movement networks, like the one of Dawei, try to counter the narratives and discourses employed by political and business elites with counter-narratives/-discourses. However, to successfully implement a counter-narrative, frames are of great importance. Frames, as described by Goffman, are “[...] ‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify and label’ occurrences within their life space and the world at large. By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Goffman 1974) cited in (Opp 2009: p.235). Hence “[a] ‘frame’ is a *mental model which consists of cognitive elements*” (emphasis in original; Opp 2009: p.235). This means that frames are the way one relates to the world and the objects/subjects within. They are at the core of *representations of space*: they decide which kind of feelings or ideas we envision in certain spaces. Many villagers of Dawei, for example, will most likely perceive the land they live on as “home”, “land of the forefathers” or something similar. Investors like Ital-Thai, however, are more likely to perceive the land as a great investment opportunity, or the planned deep-sea-port as a “gate to the world”.

It is clear that Harvey’s ideas on space can be very illuminating for this case, where relational space, the innate properties of a space, create and define outward relations. Frames, as cognitive models, can be identified as a defining part of these relational spaces. Social movements constantly deliberate on how they relate to certain objects and subjects: in Dawei, for example, local groups express their fears of losing their livelihoods and being evicted from their homes. They frame their situation in terms of loss, a loss caused by an outside force that needs to be resisted. Social movements therefore form relational social spaces that define the interactions with outside actors. By framing certain issues in certain ways (e.g. loss of land and livelihood through the implementation of the Dawei SEZ), social movements create a specific social space (their respective social movement network). The properties of these newly created spaces, however, impact the relations with other actors. To be clearer: while social movements struggle “[...] over meaning as they attempt to influence public policy. An essential task in these struggles is to frame social problems and injustices in a way that convinces a wide and diverse audience of the necessity for and utility of collective attempts to redress them” (McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996: p.291). The most likely way to succeed in the attempt to attract a “wide and diverse audience” however, is to align the frames used, with frames widely distributed throughout a society (Opp 2009). As I will show later, narratives as a more accessible form of discourse, play a key part in framing processes (Miethe 2009).

Following this logic, it is clear that in a cross-border, transcultural context, frame alignment (the alignment of certain frames to widely distributed cognitive schemata) is not achieved easily: misunderstandings, difficulties to identify corresponding frames are inevitable. Wierzbicka (1992: p.27) described this problematic as follows: “We cannot understand a distant culture ‘in its own terms’ without understanding it at the same time in our own terms. What we need for real ‘human understanding’ is to find terms which would be both ‘theirs’ and ‘ours’”. This is true for the case of Dawei as well. Local groups interact with exile activists, exile media, (I)NGOs and academia from

Thailand and elsewhere. Aligning frames in this transcultural context, expanding the network across borders is a daunting task. In the next paragraphs I will highlight how some ideas of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and conceptions of transculturally competent individuals can be helpful in this context.

Social Movements and Networks

Social movement networks like the network of Dawei that span from local groups to activists abroad, cannot be considered fixed entities. They are far more constantly evolving. They could best be described as “objects in motion” as done by Appadurai: “These objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques” (Appadurai 2000: p.5). The fluidity of these objects establishes ever-evolving new relations, creating new worlds and spaces. In this context ANT can be very helpful as it “[...] is especially concerned with the discursively and materially heterogeneous “world-making” activity of actors” (Baiocchi, Graizbord, and Rodríguez-Muñiz 2013: p.336). However, I prefer to call it “space-making” as relative spaces are continuously (re-)produced by maintaining and expanding relations to other actors: “[T]he relational space that defines how entities unfold is an external inside that define them as mobile constellations” (Lecomte 2013: p.466). This means that the way social movement networks like the one of Dawei constantly evolve, the frames they choose to be represented in their narratives, externalize their “inside”, allowing to develop new relations (further evolving their respective relative and relational spaces). Here, one can draw an important link between the works of Harvey and Latour(2005). Actors situationally enact relative spaces. Through the enactment new relational spaces are formed from which the activists’ activities derive meaning. In the case of Dawei that would mean that, for example, local activists who frame their case as “loss” could easily establish contacts with other groups elsewhere who share similar experiences and therefore have developed similar frames: frame alignment can therefore be easily established (as they share a similar ground in relational space). In the case of Dawei this frame alignment can be identified, when local groups had established contact with local groups from Map Ta Phut, Thailand. Here, local groups had fought (partially successful) against the environmental and health hazards they experienced through the pollution caused by the nearby Special Economic Zone.

Having established these new contacts know-how and other resources can be exchange, establishing a flow that re-produces and reshapes the networks’ goals and agendas: joint ideas are formulated that lay the foundation for alternative imagined spaces. In the case of Dawei that means alternative ideas to the development plans imposed by political and business elites. These networks, understood as imagined communities, now share to a certain extent identities: “The mutual perception of shared objectives and purpose motivates diverse stakeholders to form, participate in, and sustain transborder and inter-organizational networks [...] and to seek to combine their separate capabilities when confronted with the need to deal with highly interdependent challenges” (Koehn and Rosenau 2002: p.107). However, to sustain these networks, it needs individuals at the nodes of these networks who are able to communicate across borders, who are able to transcend the cultural properties of varying spaces and communicate in and across them. “Transnationally competent professionals and activists, acting as individuals and through civil-society networks, also play a major part in determining the outcome of situations on the global agenda” (Koehn and Rosenau 2002: p.122). These transculturally competent individuals give social movements the ability to fight their cause on a global scale: exactly, because their narratives can now be communicated on a global

scale. And while social movements, have now “[...] the technological means to exist independently from political institutions and from the mass media. However, the capacity of social movements to change the public mind still depend, to a large extent, on their ability to shape the debate in the public sphere” (Castells 2008: p.87). And to do so, discourse and narrative play a major role.

Narratives and Discourse

Engaging in a public debate, engaging with development discourses is the element of change for social movements. Framing a debate in alternative terms is, as I have shown so far, not only element of how to counter discourses, but as well a tool to establish lasting relations with an ever evolving network of actors within a social movement. The discourses applied by social movements intend to not only replace or reshape certain relative spaces (like the organization of nation states or in the case of Dawei, just the implementation of development plans), but intend as well to reinforce the relational space of the social movement itself. They communicate the boundaries of their newly founded imagined communities and formulate imagined spaces that are desirable to them. Hence, discourse and therefore narrative as a universal of discourse (Jaworski and Coupland 2006), are one part of a dialectic between space and discourse as I will show. This dialectic is of great importance for social movements, especially in transnational contexts where it transcends languages and other cultural boundaries. In the following paragraphs I will have a closer look at discourse and then will highlight the importance of narratives as a discursive practice of social movements. In the end I will demonstrate how these ideas will inform my study on the social movement network of Dawei.

Discourse:

First and foremost discourse can be identified as a social practice (Fairclough 2001). While there are various approaches to discourse, Poynton and Lee (2000) identify two major traditions of discourse analysis. One of these is influenced by the works of Foucault, while the other is informed by linguistics. The approach that I take can be considered belonging to the former, as I am interested in which decisions have been made regarding the representation of narratives in its social rather than its textual contexts. In that sense I am following Fairclough who describes language and therefore discourse as “as a form of social practice”, “[...] a part of society, and not somehow external to it”, “[...] a social process” and “a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other (non-linguistic) parts of society” (Fairclough 2001: p.18-19). The inseparableness of discourse and society corresponds with the inseparableness of discourse and the social space in which discourse is produced (and vice versa social space being produced by discourse) opens many interesting ways of analysis: not only for discourse itself, but for the dialectic of the production of space and discourse. As Jaworski and Coupland (Jaworski and Coupland 2006: p.3) state: “Discourse is language use relative to social, political and cultural formations – it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals’ interaction with society” (Jaworski and Coupland 2006: p.3).

That means that discourse needs to be analyzed regarding to its contextual features. The approach that I take to do this is to analyze the dialectic of space and discourse. Space plays in this process the main contextual feature: Harvey’s conceptualization of space offers the multiplicity needed to reflect the diversity of this dialectic. Van Dijk correctly states that “[d]iscourse is being

produced, understood and analysed relative to [...] context features. It is therefore taken that social discourse analysis defines text and talk as *situated*: discourse is described as taking place or as being accomplished ‘in’ a social situation” (van Dijk 1997a: p.11; emphasis in original). Language is therefore as well reflective as constructive of its respective context (Gee 2011). Hence, the analysis of context, in this case the spatial contexts of social movements’ narrative production, has to be at the center of analysis (Van Dijk(1997c) and Fairclough(2001, 2012)). For this study it means, that I will analyze how spatial properties (Where? Who?³) influence the outcome of narrative production (What? How?). For example, I intend to examine the differences in the representations of Dawei narratives in different spaces. These stories are most likely to be told differently regarding to if they are told amongst members of local groups at meetings in Dawei, for example, or if they are re-told by an activist in an academic forum in Thailand. Most likely they are told differently as they have to be framed differently to be successfully aligned to frames that are available in other spatial contexts. But why do I think that narratives are a good way to analyze this? In the following paragraphs I will shed some light on the idea of why “narratives” matter in that context.

Narratives

First, because “[t]elling stories is a human universal of discourse. Stories or narratives are discursive accounts of factual or fictitious events that take place, have taken place or will take place at a particular time” (Jaworski and Coupland 2006: p.25). As a universal form of discourse they are broadly available and do not require a specific professional terminology. Therefore, the chances to align frames carried by these narratives with frames of other groups are much higher: the potential for resource mobilization accordingly so. While each “[...] story contains a sequence of events, which means that narratives take place within or over [...] some kind of time period” (Berger 1997: p.4), stories furthermore need some form of a plot, someone who tells it and someone who is listening to it to actually qualify as a story (Toolan 1988). These qualifiers highlight the links to space: while narratives are told in specific spaces they link the relational spaces of the teller with the ones of the addressee, creating new relational spaces. Let me give an example: the story of loss of health and livelihood as told by activists from Map Ta Phut, creates a new relationship - a new relative space - between the Map Ta Phut activists and the local people of Dawei. The people of Dawei who hear this story link it to their own experiences of land grabbing. The frames of loss of successfully be aligned and created a new relational space: a social movement network that transcends the national borders of Myanmar and Thailand. This might be an overly simplistic example, but it illustrates how space, narratives and social movements are linked to each other.

A second important reason for why narratives are that interesting is the possibility to track the changes they undergo. Even though that is possible with any form of discourse, the universality of narratives grants a bigger accessibility. Tracing narratives and the way they develop offers great opportunities: “[T]he fact that we can isolate different versions of the same narrative makes it possible to trace the careers of particular stories, exposing the political processes by which they come to be tellable or authoritative but also the dynamics by which newly legitimated stories produce new modes of action and new terrains of contention” (Polletta 2009: p.39). “Following the actor” as proposed by Latour(2005) can be very helpful in this case: accompanying actors to the

³the “who” is important to understand the social properties of space

locations of storytelling, asking them about their strategies and ideas of why the stories had been told in a certain way not in another can help to identify how certain spaces are chosen by these storytellers and how storytellers adapt stories according to certain spaces. Having a look at the aforementioned transculturally competent individuals is important as these individuals represent the nodes of social movement networks that have the ability to transcend cultural spaces through their competencies. Hence, they minimize problems arising from issues of incommensurability (Stanford Friedman 2011).

Ideas for the Fieldwork

The conceptual ideas I have outlined so far have implications for the phenomena I am about to study in the field. At the core of the research are three phenomena that I would like to study to find answers to the aforementioned research questions. First, there are the re-presentations of narratives in different social and cultural contexts. To identify the influence of space on narratives it is important to identify what kind of influence other contextual features might have, e.g. different language or social backgrounds. This will allow me to, secondly, identify the explicit implications of space on narratives as discussed before. Having identified the contextual features (as structural elements) of narrative re-production and re-presentation, I will be able to, lastly, identify the strategies and ideas of why/when/how/where narratives are re-presented by transculturally competent individuals (as brokers and nodes of the broader social movement network of Dawei).

In terms of methods applied in the field that means that I intend to undertake a documentary research to identify the discursive context (Fairclough 2001, Fairclough and Fairclough 2012, van Dijk 1997b, c) in which the social movement narratives are re-presented: I locate the Dawei social movement narratives so to say within the discursive field (media, business and governmental publications). From that point I intend to follow an idea very prominent in ANT: following the actor (Latour 2005). While I do not intend to apply a fully-fledged ANT-study I think ANT provides a very rich environment for researchers tracing changes. To do so, I will identify transculturally competent individuals within the Dawei social movement network who translate the various narratives between the different groups within the network as well as to groups and associations outside the network. Therefore, I intend to apply participant observation at meetings of the diverse groups of the Dawei network (e.g. meetings of local groups with NGOs from Thailand or exile media), to identify how the narratives are formulated according to the contexts in which they are told (e.g. How are they told? Are there tropes that have (dis-)appeared?). This will be followed up with interviews with the transculturally competent individuals who facilitate the translation and re-presentations of these narratives at these meetings to identify why certain narratives or tropes thereof have been represented in a certain way and not another (which strategic decisions have been made in regard to the representation of the narratives according to the spatio-temporal contexts in which they are told).

At this point it is clear that I will have to introduce an inevitably artificial limitation to avoid the problematic of infinite regress as described by Lecomte (2013): the possible traces of narrative production to be followed would be infinite in number and hence impossible to follow indefinitely. Therefore, I will concentrate on the representations of Dawei narratives as performed by the transculturally competent individuals active in the Dawei social movement network. They represent

the links between local grassroots movements, (I)NGOs, academia, media, government officials and business representatives. I have identified several of these transculturally competent individuals so far, but at this point as (not having met them in the process of the fieldwork for this research, yet), I will not disclose their names or affiliation for ethical reasons. Nonetheless, I am convinced that the research I am about to undertake will contribute not only to literature, but might be interesting for transnational social movements in general and the Dawei social movement network specifically.

Conclusion

As the conference title already says: Burma/Myanmar is in transition. The increased interconnectedness amongst the ASEAN member states and business, the increased openness for economic development in Burma, while being a chance for some poses a challenge for others. For the communities surrounding Dawei it poses the threat of losing one's home and livelihood. Nonetheless, the transition also offers chances: for social movements like the grassroots of Dawei that means increased opportunities to widen their networks, to connect with groups with experiences and knowledge that might be helpful for their struggle to change the destiny of Dawei. The borderland offers a space with differing political opportunity structures: a space in which narratives can be produced that would otherwise not be (or less likely) be told. However, there are challenges that remain: border crossings, transgressions into differing cultural space bring about changing frames of reference. To translate these frames accordingly is a difficult but very important task. Hence, transculturally competent individuals play a vital role for the success of social movements.

This research is about identifying these challenges so that social movement networks, like the one of Dawei, can steer successfully through the rapids of the transnational flow of discourse and narrative. To examine the dialectics of space and narrative in this regard is not only promising for an increase of knowledge in the academic literature, but could serve as a reflective and strategic tool for social movement networks and their discursive work for change. The borderland in this regard, is challenge and chance at once. Understanding the dynamics of space will make it more likely that the chances outweigh the challenges when stories of Dawei are told across borders.

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