



managed pacification

aid, peace, and the focus on results in Myanmar's transition

the picture on the cover page was taken by Stefan Bächtold in Mawlamyine, April 2015.

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Dissertation

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Stefan Bächtold

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Myanmar has seen a marvellous transition over the last years. Not only in the sense that the country has emerged from six decades of military rule and armed conflict, and embarked on a path towards democracy and peace. Rather in the sense that its quasi-civilian government was suddenly not a 'pariah' of the international community anymore, but a 'development partner'. International sanctions were replaced by capacity building for the government and civil society. Criticising the country's human rights record gave way to assessing the country's progress in reaching development goals. And Obama visited. Twice.

In this dissertation, I analyse how this became possible. Drawing on a Foucauldian understanding of discourse analysis and extensive ethnographic data, I examine how aid and peacebuilding construct 'development' as Myanmar's most pressing problem in its 'transition'. By analysing the discourse and practices of actors like local civil society organisations, bi-lateral donors, the Myanmar government, and international NGOs, I show how the country is constituted as 'in transition', and how this makes Myanmar amenable to the practices, policies, and 'solutions' of aid and peacebuilding. And, as I will argue, these solutions de-politicise and pacify political conflicts, rather than addressing them.

As my analysis shows, this is only partially due to events in Myanmar itself. Rather, it can be seen as the effects of processes of professionalisation, bureaucratisation, and de-politicisation that have taken place in the fields of aid and peacebuilding themselves. When coming under increased scrutiny with the rise of neoliberal governmentality in the Global West, 'results', 'value for money', 'effectiveness' and similar concepts became as common in aid and peacebuilding as in any other field of public policy. The use of technical instruments such as audits, benchmarks, or evaluations is hardly questioned anymore, and neither is the use of science to identify 'high-impact' policies and 'evidence-based' solutions. The effects of these concepts and instruments are far-reaching: 'development' and 'peace' are removed from the political realm, and firmly placed under the rule of 'technical' experts.

Although often presented as 'untouched by power', aid and peacebuilding are governed and govern by fine-grained networks of 'technical' concepts, practices, and institutions of accountability, professional knowledge, and standards of efficiency. These networks imbued with power/knowledge subjugate the actors in Myanmar's transition into hierarchical structures that gloss over political conflicts, prioritise gradual reform, de-legitimise more far-reaching societal change, and re-produce global power structures – in the name of development effectiveness, or sustainable peace. The discourses, practices, and institutions of aid and peacebuilding thus form a *dispositif* of managed pacification: a *dispositif* permitting to 'develop' on the one hand, to disenfranchise on the other, to build peace while waging war, and to democratise albeit concentrating political influence in the hands of a few – in short, to confine complex, contradicting societal change processes to a model of gradual transition that can be managed, planned, and controlled.

But this order is far from uncontested: actors in Myanmar struggle for legitimacy for their perspective and their practices, de-legitimise other accounts, appropriate the power effects of global discourses, or engage in small acts of resistance to test the limits of the gradual transition. It is in these struggles for legitimacy and the accounts of the marginalised that the capillary power structures of the *dispositif* of managed pacification are exposed, incessantly altered – but at the same time, re-produced.

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list of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DFATD	Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (Canada)
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (Switzerland)
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KNU	Karen National Union
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIMU	Myanmar Information Management Unit
MP	Member of Parliament
NCA	Nation-wide Ceasefire Agreement
NCCT	Nation-wide Ceasefire Coordination Team
NFI	Non-Food Item
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUP	National Union Party
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PFM	Public Financial Management
PSG	Peace- and Statebuilding Goals

PWL	Peace Writ Large
RCT	Randomised controlled trial
RPP	Reflecting on Peace Practice Project
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPWC	Union Peacemaking Work Committee
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

1

introduction

‘People used to be afraid of the military, now they are afraid of development’ says the representative¹ of a local civil society organisation. His organisation stems from one of Myanmar’s² ethnic minority states – the borderlands of the country that have seen armed conflict for decades – and he just summed up his account of the situation in these areas. The international experts and advisors that are sitting around the table in an overly cold meeting room in Yangon, the economic centre and former capital of Myanmar, do not even raise an eyebrow in reaction to the statement.

It is a bewildering statement: it is diametrically opposed to the understanding that most people would have of development, and to the self-declared values of the manifold organisations working in the name of development and peace. Is development not supposed to be something good and wished for by the populations of so-called ‘developing’ countries? How can people in Myanmar’s ethnic minority areas, which have seen armed conflict for more than sixty years, be ‘afraid’ of development? What is there to be afraid of from development, a concept commonly associated with a higher standard of living, and better access to education and health services? And, how can somebody liken the fear of ‘development’ to the fear instilled by the military during armed conflict, when the soldiers beleaguering the communities in Myanmar’s borderlands were commonly associated with every imaginable kind of human rights violations?

It is not that the international experts and advisors in the room didn’t hear what was said. But somehow the statement just uttered did not seem to fit in the order of knowledge to which they adhere. It entailed a fundamental criticism of what has been happening in the country over the last years, and the local society representative carefully chose his words to make the largest impression possible in a meeting room full of people working for the United Nations, bi-lateral donors, and international Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). But his criticism was barely heard; it was too easily brushed aside by the daily business these people had to attend to before, after, and even during his statements.

¹ Informal conversation # I2 (IC1410_2) with a national NGO, Oct. 2014.

² To use either ‘Myanmar’ or ‘Burma’ to name the country in question is often interpreted as showing political colour. Not as a political statement, but to for the sake of coherence in writing, I will use the term ‘Myanmar’, as it is used by the majority of dominant actors that my research analyses. For historical sections concerning the time before 1989, I will stick to the name used for the country in this specific period: Burma.

Myanmar surprised most observers a few years ago when it initiated a transition to a ‘discipline-flourishing’ democracy. The military regime that had ruled the country for decades formally handed over power to a civilian government, and a former general was appointed as president. His government quickly embarked on a reform process that freed political prisoners, initiated economic reform, and started ceasefire negotiations with a range of ethnic armed organisations. Quickly, the country came to the centre of attention for business actors, bi-lateral donors, and INGOs, who all came into the country to ‘contribute to the transition’ in one way or another. They came to make their fortune in Asia’s last ‘frontier’ market, to help improve access to health service provision for the rural population, or to build peace.

For all the international actors that were sitting in the room on that day, the statement above cast little doubt on their mission. In essence, the person from the borderlands asked one of the fundamental questions that can hardly be asked in the international community: is ‘development’ always the right thing to strive for? It is not that criticism *per se* would be unwanted in the so-called ‘aid industry’. But as Ferguson (1990) has already observed, criticism is mostly restricted to the kind that helps in doing development ‘better’ – as opposed to the kind that questions development itself. And this is how the experts around the table received the statement I quoted initially: they were not reconsidering whether development is the right thing for the borderlands. But they were eager to ‘better take into account the local voices of civil society in the planning process’, to make international programs more ‘conflict-sensitive’, or to ‘better consult with the local communities’. It was all about the possible ways, instruments, or tools to mitigate the problems that might come with development, especially in a context that was affected by armed conflict for decades. But development *per se* seems to remain practically unquestioned, and a myriad of international actors have come to Myanmar to bring it about.

Only a few years back, the military regime of Myanmar had the reputation of being one of the worst authoritarian governments worldwide. The country was branded as a pariah in the West, and sanctions were the only form of engagement that was seen as appropriate. Only few INGOs were active within the country, most United Nations agencies were operating on restricted mandates there, and business investments were broadly seen as illicitly supporting a military regime.³ Nowadays, the government of Myanmar (2013, p. 1) states that it has ‘high aspirations for people-centred development while staying focused on achievable results’, and it is referred to as a ‘development partner’ by bi-lateral donors. Most international actors try to constructively engage with the government and other stakeholders in Myanmar to support them in planning, implementing, and managing what is construed as the ‘greater good for everybody’: a transition to democracy and peace that yields prosperity and inclusive development.

This begs a glaring question: how is that possible? How did it become possible that ‘development’ in Myanmar is seen as inevitable, un-objectionable, and cannot be put into question? How can a question touching upon the most fundamental elements for the future of a country be removed from political discussion, and apparently be addressed by ‘technical’ solutions of experts? And, how did it become possible that the experts working for

³ See chapter 4.

international actors are there in the first place; eagerly discussing ways to improve service delivery in the borderlands?

This situation also raises a second set of questions: How is it possible that ‘development’ seems to be understood to bring peace to a country like Myanmar? How can a complex history of armed conflict involving a myriad of actors be reduced to a question of efficient service delivery to all stakeholders? And, how can the process of profound societal change, of the alteration of fundamental structures of power that a transition to democracy and peace entails, be portrayed as a process of incremental, managed, and gradual reform?

As I will argue, all of these questions have something in common: they are linked to what we perceive as legitimate courses of action, legitimate things to do, legitimate ways to solve societal problems. In my analysis, I assume that what we generally perceive as appropriate, legitimate things to do, are not appropriate or legitimate because of their nature, or a certain inherent quality. Even if we often take for granted what we see as legitimate ways of action, policies, or practices, their legitimacy is made possible, constructed, enabled, and produced by specific orders of knowledge. In this sense, what is seen as ‘legitimate’ or the ‘right’ thing to do, is always specific to a certain place, a certain historical period, and often to a certain professional field.

Foucault (1975, p. 36) writes that the processes that produce what we take for granted, for ‘normal’, are intrinsically linked to power. What we see as a legitimate policy – e.g., to improve access to health services in Myanmar’s borderlands – is always excluding other accounts of the topic, marginalising them, subjugating them to the dominant way of seeing things. In the example above, it is the account of the civil society representative that immediately is made fit into the standardised practices, technical means to deal with problems supported by a network of international institutions and actors; and thus, subjugated into the broad lines of ‘development’ that are not discussed anymore. Hence, it becomes clear that the answers to the questions above cannot be understood by looking at Myanmar alone. Rather, I must examine how the international networks linking specific institutions and practices realise their power effects in the country: how they construct legitimacy for dominant understandings of ‘problems’ and their legitimate ‘solutions’. But also, how other actors on the ground take up these interpretations, reinterpret them, and resist these dominant constructions.

This example shows the direction of my analysis as a whole: By setting out to examine the questions above, I must dig deeper into the processes in which different orders of knowledge are constructed. I must lay bare the specific systems of rules - Foucault (1966) calls them discourses – that regulate what we say, how we say it, and what cannot be said. And, as these processes are inseparably linked to and imbued with power, I must examine how different discourses relate to each other, struggle to uphold their inner coherence, and integrate, subjugate, or marginalise other accounts. But it is not on the level of language where my analysis stops. Discourses – to me – are only of analytical interest as long as they are practised, meaning that they realise their worldly power effects. This happens in the form of specific practices they enable, policies they constitute as legitimate ‘solutions’, artefacts they make meaningful, and institutions they put into place. It is thus a perspective that understands power as permeating and imbuing virtually everything, that sees struggles for legitimacy

where other perspectives do not, and that has the sensitivity to question what we mostly take for granted; always with a focus on other accounts that are excluded and marginalised by what we consider ‘normal’.

It is a vantage point that is ideally suited to analyse professional fields that in their self-understanding are practically untouched by power, which work in a participatory fashion and consult with everybody, and which ground their practices in scientific knowledge to better achieve the ‘greater good for all’: aid and peacebuilding. This approach is less concerned with power understood as reduced to its direct, manifest forms. Rather, with this perspective and these research questions, it becomes possible to deconstruct, dissect, and better understand the fine grid of power/knowledge that permeates all societies, and that we hardly perceive. From this vantage point, I can now formulate more specific questions that guide my analysis. These try to disentangle the different elements that have led to the situation in Myanmar today, and to the broader questions I asked above. At the same time, they allow me to outline the structure of my analysis.

The methodology I adopt in my research is quite a specific one, and even though discourse analysis based on Foucault’s *oeuvre* has become more widely used in recent years, I would still not consider it a ‘mainstream’ approach in academia. In the following chapter 2, I thus reflect on the epistemological and ontological considerations that underpin my research, but also the implications they have for the way I understand my personal positionality in my research, how I draw conclusions, or how I present my findings. This also includes discussing the work of other authors on whose writings my research is drawing. Further, I explain the different concepts of discourse analysis, how I apply and operationalise them for my research, before I turn to the more methodical aspects and details of how I forged discourse-analytical and ethnographic methods into a framework for my analysis.

After this clarification and sharpening of my perspective, I proceed to the main part of my analysis that is organised in two overarching parts: A first part (chapter 3) to analyse the international discourses that are influential in shaping today’s situation in international aid and peacebuilding, as well as the historical processes in which they were forged. In a second part, I then focus my analysis on the discursive environment in Myanmar (chapters 4 and 5).

The guiding questions for the first part mainly centre on how the discourses of aid and peacebuilding constitute – and thus produce – the objects that they are speaking of: How do aid and peacebuilding discourses problematise the countries in which they are intervening, and how do they create legitimacy for their ‘solutions’? How do they give rise to a network of institutions, practices that are set to realise their power effects in other countries, projecting specific orders of knowledge, and subjugating other possible accounts? How are they shaped by broader, dominant orders of knowledge that make them possible in the first place?

To address these questions, I start with laying bare the set of rules that can be called the ‘discourse’ of aid, and show how its way of regulating speech emerged in historically and spatially specific processes in the West. This entails to examine the influence of the rise of neoliberal governmentality and the understandings of state action, public policy, and the system of practices this order of knowledge enabled to be established and to be seen as legitimate. With this, I show how the aid discourse constitutes ‘aid’ as being ‘in charge’ of

ending poverty while being accountable to the ‘taxpayer’; and how this gives rise to a specific model of managing societal change processes with the help of science.

I then move on to analyse the discourse of peacebuilding, giving special attention to how it emerged in relation to the aid discourse, but also how it constitutes itself as ‘being different’ while at the same time also subjected to the same influence of the neoliberal order of knowledge as the aid discourse. A closer look into the growing prominence of a specific understanding of societal change, rooted in complexity science and system dynamics, then helps me to show how potentially competing worldviews and recipes still cannot escape the broader, dominant order of knowledge of our time. As I will argue, also initially competing or outlying elements get subjugated to the dominant frameworks; and are made to work along their lines. Ironically, their influence even gives the international landscape of aid and peacebuilding its distinct form that I am analysing in the following. It was due to the understanding rooted in complexity science that the problems that aid and peacebuilding are addressing are now constituted as interlinked problem systems. This understanding in turn constructs legitimacy for intervention on virtually all aspects of societies in other countries with means that are presented as technical, scientifically grounded solutions.

With the example of the ‘fragile’ state, I can then examine how such intervention is legitimised as the solution for the greater good of bringing about ‘development’ and ‘peace’. At the same time, the ‘solutions’ put into place are specific and restricted to certain options; and both the strategies to put them into place as well as their content are projecting a certain order of knowledge and neoliberal governmentality into the states identified as ‘fragile’. Hence, I argue that aid and peacebuilding are now forming a *dispositif* of managed pacification, whose function is to technicise and de-politicise societal change processes in ‘fragile’ states, stabilising and reproducing existing power structures both in fragile states and on a global level. This *dispositif* produces states and civil society organisations as self-optimising subjects along the lines of neoliberal governmentality, who are mainly tasked with effective and efficient service delivery and the production of evidence-based solutions to societal problems.

This sets the stage for the second part of my analysis, where I look more closely on how this *dispositif* realises its power effects in the specific case of Myanmar. The questions guiding this part of my research are: How are different actors problematising the situation of Myanmar, and how do these specific problematisations enable specific ‘solutions’? How are different actors drawing on the discourses of aid and peacebuilding, and how do these discourses constitute their ‘objects’ – meaning the notions of ‘development’, or ‘peace’ – in the case of Myanmar? What is the ordering of things that is enabled in this; i.e., what are actors, and practices, and roles that are legitimised by these? In short: what are the power effects that the *dispositif* of managed pacification is realising in the specific case of Myanmar?

To contextualise my analysis, I start with a short synopsis of the histories of Myanmar. While this has analytical value in itself – e.g., by showing astonishing continuities among the discourses of colonial times, the subsequent military regimes and today’s discourses of aid and peacebuilding – its purpose for my analysis is mainly to show how the discursive

environment of Myanmar has evolved over time. This then enables me to problematise the phenomenon that has decidedly marked the discursive context in the country: Myanmar's transition. I analyse how the 'transition' enabled a shift in the dominant discourses that regulate speech in Myanmar and in the international community; namely from a 'human rights activist' discourse towards the discourses of aid and peacebuilding. The effect of this shift is that the dominant discourses now constitute all actors in Myanmar as being part of a coalition of development partners, which are all working for the greater good that is in everybody's interest: development. This enables to gloss over political differences, and to focus on the improvement of the country with technical solutions in the framework of a constructive, pragmatic engagement with the government.

I then turn to the specific problematisations of Myanmar and the 'solutions' in the form of more specific practices these enable. I show how the *dispositif* of managed pacification constructs legitimacy for building the capacity of the state institutions for 'effective service delivery' relying on accurate data and expertise to manage its population, and how this is linked to a specific understanding of Myanmar's longstanding armed conflicts along economic lines. I then address the question of how the aid and peacebuilding discourses make it possible to deploy the *dispositif* of managed pacification, and to make civil society organisations amenable to be acted upon in the form of capacity building. In this context, I argue that the manifold practices and standards that regulate the *dispositif* of managed pacification reproduce a clearly hierarchic structure among the actors of the coalition of 'development partners'; and that they marginalise actors of civil society that are not taking the institutional form of an NGO.

Finally, I move to the margins of the *dispositif* of managed pacification and its practices. This means to delve into the manifold accounts and practices that present themselves as resistance to the dominant discourses, but which are an inherent part of them. Without resistance, there is no discourse; it only comes into being when it subjugates other accounts, de-legitimizes other practices, and forcefully integrates them into a dominant order of knowledge. The focus on the margins allows me giving space for the typically marginalised accounts, and at the same time, to underline the contingency of the construction of dominant discourses. In this part, I concentrate on the accounts of local actors, and how they draw on different discourses to create legitimacy for their perspectives, problematisations and 'solutions'. This part of the analysis unfolds by identifying points of criticisms that are voiced towards the *dispositif* of managed pacification along its own criteria, before I look more closely towards the broader visions that typically marginalised actors have for Myanmar – and what their effect is on the dominant visions. Are they destabilising the 'mainstream' approaches? Or are they simply irritating, or even reproducing their way of ordering the world? In the broad lines, these agendas are aiming at more profound transformations of Myanmar's society than foreseen by the strategies of the *dispositif* of managed pacification – and its main target of stabilising and managing a gradual transition. In this context, I also work out the differences between actors that are easily lumped together, but turn out not to be spared from struggles for legitimacy among each other: civil society organisations and the democratic opposition. Finally, I turn to the analysis of discourse fragments that are actively

contesting the specific ways that the *dispositif* of managed pacification constitutes the notion of peace; and the hierarchy that is embedded in the coalition of ‘development partners’.

Overall, my analyses sheds light on the specific ways that the international discourses of aid and peacebuilding make countries amenable to a machinery of specific practices and ‘solutions’, and pave the way to act upon these countries to integrate them in a global order of neoliberal governmentality. On the way, differing accounts are subjugated, existing power structures are reproduced, and more far reaching notions of societal transformation are marginalised. This problematisation of aid and peacebuilding is relevant in the sense that it sheds doubt on dominant assumptions and values that underpin these professional fields. More specifically, the discourse analytical perspective I apply brings to the fore that many of the ‘technical’ concepts are not as uncontested as they are often presented; and that also the aid and peacebuilding fields are imbued with power/knowledge. Consequentially, also for these fields a research perspective that concentrates on struggles and conflict between different actors, and the fine grid of power that permeates their interaction, yields findings that go beyond the ‘cloak of rational planning’ (Mosse, 2004, p. 641) that masks that these fields are fundamentally political in nature. I thus show that even if aid and peacebuilding present and understand themselves as aiming at transformational change, their effects are (at least) equally stabilizing, reproducing, and entrenching existing structures of power. I don’t do this with the aim of de-masking these practices and institutions as part of a larger conspiracy, or neo-colonial endeavour. This would be a short-cut way to simplifying the manifold effects of the *dispositif* of *managed pacification*. Rather, I hope that a more nuanced understanding of the its effects opens entry points to re-politicise what has been technicised, to re-problematise what has become taken for granted, and to open space to think and act in different ways.

2

power/knowledge as an analytical perspective: methodology and theoretical framework

If I have to define the overall rationale and driving force behind this research in a single word, I would choose the label ‘critical’. On the one hand, this label is elusive: too many scholars, activists, politicians, practitioners, and revolutionaries of all sorts have claimed this term for their thinking and actions. Nowadays, to label one’s work as ‘critical’ is mostly a non-reflected statement positioning oneself in a vaguely defined community of those who understand themselves as being not part of an (even more vaguely defined) ‘mainstream’ – rather than elucidating a clear-cut way of thinking.

On the other hand, the label ‘critical’ easily associates with different qualities that make it more than just a fashionable statement in the description of my analytical perspective. ‘Critical’ carries the notion of not accepting what presents itself as real, true, or obvious. It carries the notion of not taking things for granted; and questioning foundations, even this proves uncomfortable. It carries the notion of taking a step back, of moving to the margins, to reflect and to open a different perspective on what is in the centre. At the same time, ‘critical’ also carries the notion of not just replacing one argument by another; but to question the functioning of the first argument, to deconstruct its underlying rules and conditions of emergence, to situate it in a specific moment in time and a specific place.⁴ And to position myself at the margins – of a field, a school of thought, a discipline – while trying to better understand what is happening at the centre is just too attractive a metaphor to be discarded light-handedly: It is even the essence of the approach to research taken here.

The idea of being positioned at the margins is important for this research project in different ways. In the very first place, the research took place on the margins of both practice and academia. The research was conducted while I am working at a practice-oriented research institute, where research is conducted on questions that originate from practice, or where research is ‘applied’ to practice. One cannot really position himself being part of the practice community, or being part of the research community. Even if one tries to, the very act of positioning oneself is performed in relation to the respective other: I define myself as a researcher by distinguishing myself from being a practitioner, and vice versa. In an institution

⁴ Dean (1994, p. 4f.) called this way of thinking ‘problematizing’ – see section 2.1 below.

firmly placed in the centre of one of the communities (be it practice or academic research) this positioning would not even be necessary; the question of one's belonging would not even be thinkable. But it is at the margins.

It is an uncomfortable position, plagued with recurring reflections on how one situates himself in relation to this or that. But it also opens a different perspective: It sensitizes for the relations between the margins and the centre. It sharpens the analytical gaze for questions that are hardly perceivable at the centre, and not even thinkable. It makes clear that there are things that cannot be understood if one remains at the centre and accepts the ways of doing or thinking there. It enables to be surprised again when looking at things that in the centre are easily taken for granted. It helps being critical. On a meta-level, it also sparks interest in understanding the mechanisms and processes that are behind this very configuration of a centre and its margins. Suddenly, a whole research agenda emerges: How is the centre constituted, and how so are the margins? What gives rise to this setup, and how is it reproduced? What are the microphysics of these processes, now, here, and in other moments and places? And, what makes us so naturally accept this configuration, what is behind its perceived materiality? And how come that we tend to take things for granted in the centre, while they are not when observed from the margins?

At some point in my research process, when I was moving outwards from the centre – towards the margins – these questions began to weigh more heavily. Also, it became obvious that the questions I asked as a researcher could not be separated from the context in which they took place: They were influenced by my socialisation, my focus of education, the institutions I worked and am working in, and my personal experiences. And, the same is likely to apply to my findings as well; which sits uneasily with more traditional approaches to science. So, I had to find a methodology that does justice to these ideas.

Although one can speak of a basic consensus in social science on the importance of collectively constructed systems of meaning and knowledge in ordering the relations of humans to their world (Keller, 2007, p. 7), there are still a multitude of different paradigms that thus would qualify to serve as a methodology for my research. Hence, I will clarify my basic epistemological and ontological assumptions, as well as the writers who inspired them over the next sections. Given that the notions of discourse and discourse analysis have seen an impressive upsurge in interest in different disciplines – ranging from sociology and political science to disciplines like social anthropology and international relations – and the offer of approaches that refer to discourse analysis has grown accordingly, I deem it important to justify the specific approach chosen.

2.1 Truth, power, and the role of science: epistemological and ontological considerations

I see this research project as critical; not only in the sense of criticising certain practices or concepts, but also in the sense that I understand science and research *per se*, as well as prominent concepts like 'knowledge' or 'truth'. Primary source of inspiration for these concepts is the *oeuvre* of Michel Foucault. While there is a wealth of ideas and concepts in

these writings, they barely form a coherent body that can easily serve as the base for a methodology. What is obvious in all of his writings though are the epistemological ruptures⁵ with more traditional understandings of science – at that time mostly represented in the dominant Durkheimian sociology and positivism (cf. Diaz-Bone, 2006; Marttila, 2010, p. 96 f.). Accordingly, I find it easier to lay out my epistemological position not by trying to specify what it is, but by contrasting it with what it is not. To define this position *ex negativo*, and to position my research against other understandings of ‘science’ allows chiselling out my analytical perspective more clearly.

Proceeding in this way raises the question of whose position or system of thought I am contrasting my own analytical perspective with. Answering this question proves more difficult than expected: The assumptions I am about to reject are difficult to attribute to a specific epistemological position, or the work of a single author. Rather, they are implicitly present in the majority of ‘scientific’ publications that aim to produce evidence for the solution of social problems, which will form a major object of interest in my following analysis.⁶ Dean (1994, p. 3 f.) has subsumed this understanding under the label of ‘progressivist’ theory, and sees its elements present in Auguste Comte’s nineteenth century positivism, Karl Marx’ historical determinism, but also Max Weber’s rationalisation. Noteworthy is that not many authors today would openly identify with these positions – but they implicitly form the ground on which a lot of research around aid and peacebuilding is built; as I will show later in my analysis.⁷ Tacitly present; and conspicuously absent of the questions discussed in the ‘methods’ section: In this sense, these positions and their assumptions could be called the ‘default’ position for a lot of research that is undertaken in the nexus of aid and peacebuilding.⁸ Only if one’s analytical approach differs from these positions, it has to be justified and made explicit.

My analytical approach is clearly different from a few of these assumptions, so I deem it worthwhile to dissect these in the following – and to position my own research in relation to them. Accordingly, this research endeavour is based on the following rejections – or epistemological ruptures, which are also present in Foucault’s work:

Firstly, it rejects that there is an objective or true reality which is independent of the social, and which could be ‘discovered’ by research. To put it with Foucault (1977a, p. 158), ‘truth is from this world; it is produced here under multiple constraints’. I start from his assumption that what we perceive as ‘truth’, and what in everyday life we uncritically accept as a given, is a historically and spatially contingent construction with specific effects. This means that even the very foundations of our beliefs, ways of thinking, categorising, ordering and prioritising thoughts are not independent from the societal context in which they are produced and take place; and that they play an important role in structuring our societal context. Naturally, this

⁵ In the sense of Bachelard (1996).

⁶ See section 3.6 below.

⁷ See chapter 3.

⁸ This assessment also would hold true for other areas of political science that I subsume here as the ‘mainstream’: an example is the widely influential methodical guidance for social science research by King, Keohane, and Verba (1994), which was harshly criticised for their ‘tacit positivism’, e.g. by J. Johnson (2006).

has implications for the way I understand the role of science; of what it is able to discover, and what position I attribute to the ‘scientific’ knowledge it produces.

Secondly, it rejects that science is an independent system discovering and accumulating knowledge, which converges on a ‘truth’ (cf. Foucault, 1966, 1969) – an assumption that is implicitly present in both the positivist understanding of science, as well as its derivatives that are influential in ‘science applied to societal problems’.⁹ But my position taken here is not relativistic in the sense that I assume an equality of all statements, produced by research or other sources. As noted by Foucault (1977a, p. 159), a researcher or an intellectual still occupies a special role in the production of ‘truth’. But it is not a special role in the sense that their education, tools, and research institutions give them a prioritized or better access to discovering an objective ‘truth’. He posits that our society *reserves* a special role for them which is linked to the system our societies have developed to produce and regulate ‘truth’ – or, more importantly for my research focus, ‘evidence’. What is of utmost importance for my analysis is to understand ‘science’ or ‘academia’ not as a place or institution that produces ‘knowledge’. In line with Foucault, I rather understand it as a specific system of mechanisms, procedures, and institutions that define what is true and false, what is seen as a ‘scientific’ way to get to ‘truth’, and who is in a legitimate position to judge what is true and what is false (Foucault, 1977a, p. 158). In this sense, ‘science’ does not discover ‘truth’ – it produces ‘truth’ according to specific rules that can be analysed:

‘There is nothing ‘scientistic’ in this (that is, a dogmatic belief in the value of scientific knowledge), but neither is it a sceptical or relativistic refusal of all verified truth. What is questioned is the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power’ (Foucault, 1982b, p. 781).

Looking closer at the way in which circulation of knowledge is organised in our societies (the *régime de vérité*), Foucault defines certain properties of science that seem important to understand the conceptualisation of this system in my research. He sees science – or in his words, the ‘political economy of truth’ – as the object of continuous incitement by both economy and politics, as both economy and politics need ‘truth’ or ‘knowledge’ for economic production and governing. Further, ‘truth’ or ‘knowledge’ is dominantly produced and circulated under the control of a few large political and economic apparatuses¹⁰ (e.g. universities, armies, media) and is the stake of political debate and social clashes (Foucault, 1977a, p. 158 f.).

With this, the way is paved to discuss the third epistemological rupture on which my research is based, namely that knowledge cannot be thought independently of power. In Foucault’s understanding, knowledge is neither outside of power, nor without power. Knowledge is linked in a complex and close interaction with political and economic systems that produce and reproduce it, and also with power effects to which it gives rise and is subjected to:

⁹ See section 3.6 below.

¹⁰ The use of the term ‘apparatus’ here is a translation of the French word ‘*appareil*’; and not to be confused with the term ‘*dispositif*’, for which I use the original French term (see footnote 29).

‘Maybe we should admit that power produces knowledge [...]; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no relation of power without the correlating constitution of a knowledge field, nor is there knowledge that is not at the same time supposing and constituting relations of power’ (Foucault, 1975, p. 36).¹¹

It is in this line of thinking that Foucault coins the term of power/knowledge; underlining that the two are mutually constitutive and cannot be conceptually disentangled in a meaningful way. This applies to scientific knowledge, but is also extendable to all sorts of knowledge or ‘truth’, no matter what its conditions of production are. If I take these considerations seriously, the critical gaze becomes omnipresent. It is not a perspective that one can turn on and off like a faucet. One begins to develop a critical distance towards all statements, writings, and practices – even the ones I produce myself. It becomes a mind-set that begins to permeate every reading of a document, every observation in the field, every conversation at work. The moment one starts to develop awareness for the fine grid of power that imbues all aspects of the social, one starts to constantly question the normal. What makes the normal something that we take for granted? How does it constitute the objects we are looking at? And, what are its structures that subjugate other possible accounts and interpretations, and make them sometimes even unthinkable?

Following this, my research project rejects the idea that science can uncritically be put to work to find ‘scientific’ solutions to social problems. While this idea has been echoing throughout the last decades and given rise to systems of thought like ‘social engineering’ or ‘evidence-based policy’,¹² it is not the position that I can take for my own research. To be clear: I neither doubt that science is put to work to solve social problems, nor that it sometimes actually does. What I doubt – following Foucault’s considerations – is science’s ability to provide ‘scientific’ solutions that are untouched by power, and thus technocratic. Although ‘scientific’ solutions for policy often present themselves as an alternative to normative, or ideological solutions (cf. Durnova & Zittoun, 2013, p. 571), or hide behind a ‘cloak of rational planning’ (Mosse, 2004, p. 641), I assume that they are not. Accordingly, the goal for my research is not to produce ‘knowledge’ that can directly be ‘transferred’ into policy. Following the considerations above, it rather becomes the task of my research to question this representation of research as non-political as a strategy – which is political in itself.¹³ This criticism of the pretended rationality of science thus bears similarity with the dialectic of enlightenment of the *Frankfurter Schule*. Horkheimer and Adorno (1969) describe that the rationality and non-partisanship of science and its language portray the existing structures of domination in society as reality, and thus unavoidable. It is the rationality and the pretended objectivity of science that makes its findings unquestionable, and hence, makes it an important instrument in reproducing domination. But while Horkheimer and Adorno (also Habermas, 1981) wanted to liberate enlightenment and rationality from domination, I am more interested in describing how these relationships between rationality, science, and power relations are produced and reproduced in a specific policy field.

¹¹ My own translation of the French original. In the following, translations into English all are my own, and italics are in the original – unless noted otherwise.

¹² For a discussion of these concepts, see section 3.6 below.

¹³ A more detailed discussion of this will follow in section 3.6 below.

Here, the difference between what Dean (1994, p. 3 f.) has named ‘critical modernist thinking’ (as exemplified by the works of the *Frankfurter Schule*) and the approach chosen in my research here (Dean (1994, p. 4) called it ‘problematism’) becomes evident; and also one of its implications: The problematising approach gives up on the promise of ‘emancipation’, or of ‘reconciling the subject with itself’ that is inherent to the ‘critical modernist thinking’. In Dean’s (1994, p. 4) words, the problematising thinking is rather a ‘disturbance of narratives of both progress and reconciliation, finding questions where others had located answers’.

As a consequence, this means that the system of science that reproduces knowledge, or truth, or evidence cannot uncritically serve as the base for my analysis. I cannot uncritically build on the ‘stock of knowledge’ that has been produced, to add my share of research on top of it. This would equate the understanding of a constant progression of scientific knowledge, untouched by power that I have rejected above. Rather, this very system of science, its constraints, and the processes that make the knowledge it produces accepted as something different, more ‘objective’, or more ‘true’ than other knowledge, are important parts of the analysis: They are one of the primary factors in the production and reproduction of power/knowledge networks that I aim to better understand. Accordingly, my ontological and epistemological perspective makes it possible to include ‘science’ itself into the analysis, rather than accepting it as a given speaking position from which I make my points. It becomes possible to move to the margins of this system, to analyse its structure, its contingency, but first and foremost, its role in structuring the relations of power the fields of interest for my research: peacebuilding and aid. Following this, the structure of my thesis slightly diverges from typical monographs: After setting out my considerations around the methodology and theoretical framework first, I will directly start the analysis with the academic literature. This is not only a stock-taking exercise to identify what has already been researched in order to identify the gap where a new contribution can be made. While this may be the case for some literature on which I draw to construct my theoretical framework of analysis, large parts of the academic literature also become object of analysis themselves.

Having laid out these basic assumptions on which my research project is drawing, it becomes clear that the considerations on epistemology are not only a formal requirement to be fulfilled. They play a more essential role in the conceptualisation of my overall theoretical framework: The notions of power/knowledge and the central role that the system of ‘science’ or ‘academia’ plays in its reproduction enable me to *problematise* science. This means to question the role it plays while it expands into other fields like policy, and its effect in structuring how actors think of, problematise, and legitimise their actions and concepts.

But this ontological and epistemological position has not only implications for my understanding of other’s academic research – these considerations apply to my own writing as well. Also my own production of knowledge or ‘truth’ takes place in specific context, in a specific place, in a specific moment. It is equally a product influenced by societal networks of power/knowledge that ‘determine the possible forms and domains of knowledge’ (Foucault, 1975, p. 36), and cannot claim to be untouched by societal structures, or relations of power. Put bluntly, my research (and more pronouncedly so, its reception) cannot be separated from my education, academic and disciplinary training; but neither from my background in terms

of work experience, cultural origins, or class; nor from aspects like my Gender or skin colour – to name just a few dimensions. Given the fact that this is another book written by a white middle-class male in a think-tank in Europe, it is to at least a certain extent inevitable that the mere fact of conducting this research is reproducing the power/knowledge networks that constitute the system of knowledge production commonly known as ‘science’ as superior to other ways of knowing, and contribute to the subjugation of the latter. If we think of science as performing a hierarchisation of knowledge that excludes other forms of knowledge that do not respond to a certain level of ‘scientificness’, it is hardly conceivable that producing more knowledge inside this system can avoid having these power effects. Flying to costly conferences to exchange with other critical members of this system in conference hotels usually doesn’t help: Even if the subversive exchanges on the concepts of power and knowledge in such a setting may inspire critical research, they reproduce the status quo at the very same time. A status quo that constitutes this exchange – in such a setting, among academics – as something more valuable or legitimate than a similar exchange among people outside of science.

That research cannot be thought as separate anymore has further consequences than the ones just described. In the first place, that the researcher is part of the subject of study raises a number of epistemological and methodical questions. As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, p. 124) put it, the researcher must take into account ‘that he himself is produced by what he is studying; consequently, he can never stand outside it’ (cf. also Jäger, 2006, p. 85). Maasen (2003, p. 125) proposes that while acknowledging that the researcher cannot position himself outside of what he or she analyses, it is possible to manoeuvre at least to the margins of the object of study to observe from there.

Also, as Marttila (2010, p. 91) notes, critical research is itself a social practice, that co-constructs the social reality it analyses. While this may be a rather theoretical consideration for research taking place in archives, it is a much more immediate consideration given the nature of my research. When interacting with actors in aid and peacebuilding, using my research findings to orient my own practice working as a program officer for a think tank, publishing with the aim to influence other’s practice, and using my knowledge to train practitioners in specific ways of thinking, the co-construction of the reality I try to analyse is almost tangible. While I would consider the gravity of these concerns negligible for the validity of my research findings, they raise ethical considerations.¹⁴

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the knowledge and statements my research produces here are subjective, thus arbitrary. Although my research does not strive to produce findings that are objectively ‘true’, the process of producing findings still attempts to be intersubjectively comprehensible. Following methodological guidelines in the process, and clearly describing the different steps that led to my findings is thus imperative.

That my research is produced from a perspective that is embedded in the subject it aims to examine has certain effects that cannot entirely be avoided. The question then is how to take these effects into account in the research process, and how to mitigate them. Besides the

¹⁴ See section 2.5.3.

methodological guidelines that I will elaborate below,¹⁵ the understanding of what critical research actually is, can, and should, is pivotal in this. If we acknowledge that the networks of power/knowledge that make ‘science’ a strong structuring force of societies (and arguably also of the entire globe), I see as critical research’s first task to be aware of science’s power effects, and the hierarchisation of knowledge it performs. This implies an imperative interest in knowledge that is mechanically subjugated by science: knowledge that is not following the procedures of science, not living up to the standards of scientificity, that is local, or ‘*mineurs*’ in the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1980). But this interest is not primarily rooted in the will to make those voices heard: The rationale of this interest is to shed light on the conditions and processes that make it possible that this knowledge is subjugated, or seen as inferior to ‘scientific knowledge’. Foucault (1997, p. 10 f.) puts this forward when he describes his genealogical¹⁶ project:

‘It is about playing a local, discontinued, disqualified, non-legitimised knowledge against a monolithic theoretical instance that pretends to filter, hierarchise, and order it in the name of the rights of a science held by a few. [...] It is about the insurrection of knowledge. Not so much about an insurrection against the content, the methods, or the concepts of a science, but first and foremost against the centralising power effects that are linked to the institution and the functioning of a scientific discourse [...]. Genealogy thus would be, in relation to the project of inscribing knowledge into the power hierarchy of science, sort of an enterprise to de-subjugate historical knowledge and set them free, meaning capable of opposition and struggle against the coercion of a theoretical discourse that is monolithic, formal, and scientific’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 10 f.).

For critical research understood in this way, the goal is thus not only to produce new knowledge, but also to make other, typically subjugated knowledge heard, and to draw attention to its subjugation – also in order to understand the formation of the dominant knowledge. For my research interest, this is one of the essential aspects: Not only being attentive to other, non-scientific forms of knowledge, and being interested in how it circulates, but analysing the very mechanisms of its subjugation, and the struggles that come with the reproduction of power/knowledge networks. This then translates into a basic, but continuously recurring question in my research: whose reality am I writing about? Are there any other accounts possible? Whose perspective is marginalised by my interpretation? And, how do these questions help me to shed light on the underlying processes that make that these perspectives are subjugated, that we see them as inferior? And, what are the consequences of these processes for how our societies are structured, and for what we see as ‘normal’?

While these considerations may be seen as abstract and more theoretical in nature, they can have very immediate, almost tangible effects for my field of research. In a country that has seen substantial armed conflict, and where there are conflicting interpretations of issues, problems, and history *per definitionem*, it becomes easily visible how powerful discourses are in structuring societal *rappports de forces*. For instance, it happens easily that for following a dominant interpretation uncritically, one gets associated with one side of the conflict. Whether this happens for negligence or in bad faith, the result is the same: following a dominant

¹⁵ See section 2.5 below.

¹⁶ See section 2.2.1 below.

interpretation always reproduces and legitimises it, and reproduces existing power/knowledge networks. Thus, I part from the assumption that there is no such thing as a neutral, objective, or ‘scientific’ position that is untouched by power – especially not in a war. The attempt by a range of institutions and actors to put forward the exact opposite of this assumption – as illustrated by the proliferation of so-called ‘scientific’ approaches to peacebuilding, conflict resolution or conflict management – thus becomes one of my fields of inquiry.

In turn, this has also implications for the way that I think the contribution of my own research to the practices of aid and peacebuilding. Following the considerations above, my research will not produce ‘scientific’ knowledge that can be directly ‘transferred’, or ‘translated’ into aid and peacebuilding policy and practice. Rather, the insights put forward by my research can ‘interact’¹⁷ with the latter: It can disturb certain narratives or problematisations in policy, or question the effects of certain practices, while at the same time being heavily influenced by my experiences in the field of aid and peacebuilding. But my research cannot pretend to make claims to provide a ‘scientifically’ derived better practice; of which aid and peacebuilding should take note. Also, it cannot promise to transcend the current ‘problems’ of aid and peacebuilding, to overcome its power hierarchies, or to reconcile these fields with their ‘original’ mission, or ‘right’ path that these fields purportedly lost over the years – as the critical modernist position would. Rather, my research offers entry points to rethink aid and peacebuilding as a messy complex of practices, concepts, struggles for legitimacy among different actors, which are precariously ordered by power/knowledge networks¹⁸, and which in sum, have a variety of effects – some could be seen as positive, some as negative. It is from this understanding that my research invites to reflect on entry points to do and think things differently; but it is not to finally get aid and peacebuilding ‘right’, or to make these fields ‘overcome’ their contradictions.

In the attempt to set out my epistemological and ontological position, and my understandings of ‘knowledge’ and ‘science’ above, I have already substantially ventured into describing aspects of my actual positions. After setting out the principles and ideas guiding my research in the form of rejections (*ex negativo*), I will now turn to the describe the elements of my ontological position that guide my analysis in positive terms – together with the methodology that allows me to make sense of them.

2.2 From language to practice: discourse analysis

Foucault’s writings hardly can be described as forming a coherent whole. Rather, he constantly reconsidered, developed, and re-invented his own reasoning. Also, he did not specifically develop a methodological guidance or proposition on how discourse analysis should be conducted (cf. Keller, 2007, p. 51). While methodological considerations taking

¹⁷ The distinction between knowledge transfer, translation, and interaction referred to here is taken from (H. Jones, Jones, Shaxson, & Walker, 2012). These authors put forward a categorization of different understandings of how ‘scientific’ knowledge can influence policy. They distinguish three different understandings: a transfer, where knowledge is directly applicable to policy-making; a translation, where researchers have an obligation to make the knowledge that they produced applicable; and an interaction, where ‘science’ and ‘policy’ enter a complex relationship with influences going back and forth between the two fields.

¹⁸ See section 2.2.2 below.

stock of his previous work are collected in *archéologie du savoir* (Foucault, 1969), the same attempt to create a systematic methodology is especially missing for his later work. The ambiguity of Foucault's concepts and writings may even be the reason why they have provided fertile ground for a range of different analyses that are dealing with power, knowledge, or the role of language in structuring societies. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon reception (cf. Cusset, 2003), Foucault's *oeuvre* is often seen as a box of tools that can flexibly be used and adapted according to different needs.¹⁹

But taking out of this toolbox what fits the analysis, and leaving aside what cannot made fit is not the approach that I will follow with this analysis. Rather, I will use a framework that makes use of different elements stemming from Foucault's writings at different points in time, but which tries to bring them in a broader logic. The goal of constructing such a framework is to ensure a more systematic and reflected use of the individual concepts, and also to bring them in an order that guides the analysis. Naturally, I am not the first to construct such a framework drawing on the works of Foucault (or other discourse theorists). Different approaches to (or even schools of) discourse analysis have emerged over the years: critical discourse analysis (CDA) mainly developed by Wodak and Fairclough (e.g., Fairclough, 1992; Wodak & Meyer, 2001); the work of Link (e.g., 1982) and the methodological contributions by Jäger (e.g., 2001) towards an analysis of *dispositifs*; the Anglo-Saxon branch of governmentality studies (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991; Lemke, 2000). Further, there are attempts to reconcile Foucault's writings with Bourdieu (Diaz-Bone, 2006); or approaches more focused on certain subfields like Howarth's (2010) proposition of a post-structuralist discourse analysis drawing on the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (2001).²⁰

The approach to discourse analysis that I am following here is for the most part directly drawing on the concepts and writings of Foucault, but integrates elements of methodological guidance developed by others (mainly Carabine, 2001; Diaz-Bone, 2006; Jäger, 2001; Jäger & Maier, 2009; Keller, 2007; Maasen, 2003). That I am not following a single guidance has its roots in my research questions, which include both structuralist and post-structuralist research interests. I am both interested in how discourses constitute the notions of development, or peace, but also in how these notions then realize their power effects and enable certain practices. It thus covers a broader analytical interest than most of the approaches cited above; and tries to use the Foucauldian instruments of analysis to approach the topic from different angles. Accordingly, I tailored my methodology and theoretical framework to meet the specific requirements of my analytical interest.

The foundation for such an approach is found in my understanding of the evolution of Foucault's *oeuvre*. Personally, I do not see the development in his writings typically described as going from structuralism to post-structuralism as a clear rupture in his concepts. The latter writings certainly have a different focus, but are not irreconcilable with his older writings. In this sense, I see the shift towards post-structuralism more as an opening of former structuralist concepts than as a clear break with them (cf. Diaz-Bone, 2006; Keller, 2007, p. 48). A

¹⁹ The work of Foucault has known a differing reception in different countries. For an overview, see Diaz-Bone et al. (2007).

²⁰ This list is far from exhaustive. For an overview of different approaches, see, for instance, Keller (2007).

discourse analysis that calls itself Foucauldian (as I am using the term) can thus draw on the whole range of his ideas; without necessarily restricting itself to a certain phase of Foucault's works. Hence, my approach is best described with the notions and concepts that are relevant for my focus of analysis, and a description of how I embed these in a research design; instead of an exact positioning of such a methodology in the philosophy of science. In the following, I thus proceed with the description of the concepts of my analysis, and describe the specific research design in section 2.4 below.

2.2.1 Discourses and their analysis

As a starting point, I assume that in all societies, speech and language are ordered by sets of rules determining how things are said, what can be said, and what is excluded from being said. Foucault (1971, p. 10) names these structures discourses, and posits their existence as the starting hypothesis for all his further analyses. These grids are constructed, but strongly influence our ways of thinking and acting. They influence what is considered 'truth', who is seen as being a legitimate speaker on certain subjects, and are constituting the things they speak of in specific ways. Although these structures often go unnoticed, they can be subjected to critical analysis (Foucault, 1969, 1971).

The first stage in my analysis is thus to look more closely at discourses in the fields of aid and peacebuilding. To discover the system of rules that orders speech in these discourses, Foucault (1971, p. 53 ff.) proposes different principles guiding the analysis in broad terms. Firstly, not to be overly focused on what is said, or the continuity of discourse production, but rather to be attentive to the mechanisms that exclude certain things from being said, or exclude certain actors from accessing a position where they could express themselves. More interesting than what there is in a discourse, is what there is not: what is excluded, and what is omitted from being said.

Secondly, one should not start from the idea to discover an underlying, pre-existing meaning that could be deciphered. There is no such thing as a pre-discursive meaning which could be discovered. Rather, 'discourses have to be conceived as a violence that we do to things, or at least as a practice that we impose on them' (Foucault, 1971, p. 55). From this principle derives that discourses are productive: they constitute their objects in a specific way, and thus produce our different realities in the first place. There is no clear or natural link between an object and what is made of it in a discourse; it is the productive force of the discourse that constitutes it in the first place. As Jäger and Maier put it:

'Discourses do not merely reflect reality. Rather, discourses not only shape but even enable (social) reality. Without discourses, there would be no (social) reality. Discourses can thus be understood as a material reality *sui generis*' (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 36).

Our realities are thus contingent: They are not following a natural law, or an objective truth, but are the result of the productive force of discourses. Further, discourses shouldn't be understood as necessarily following a bigger logic or as being part of a harmonious framework: They can also clash, ignore each other, or be mutually exclusive (Foucault, 1971, p. 54 f.).

In '*ordre du discours*', Foucault (1971, p. 62 ff.) distinguishes two sets of analyses following these principles. A first one, named 'critical', is tasked with analysing the different forms of exclusions, and limitation that discourses perform; it is thus focusing on the single discourse itself. A second set, named 'genealogic', is extending the analysis beyond the limits of the single discourse and tries to make sense of the relations among different discourses: how did they succeed each other, in which conditions did they emerge, and how did they grow.

What is in the centre of interest for the kind of discourse analysis I am practicing in my research is not to dissect a discourse, or trying to perfectly analyse and represent one discourse in its totality. The focus is to analyse the fragments of a discourse to get to a better understanding of how discourses constitute their objects in specific ways, and to underline the contingency of this exercise, to then move on to situate these discourse towards each other. Analysing how discourses relate to each other, how elements from one discourse emerge in another one, or how discourses try to appropriate themselves the power effect of other discourses is one of the key elements of my analysis. This also means to move outwards: from the discourse itself towards other discourses, and to the conditions that make them possible (Foucault, 1971, p. 55). Hence, it is the second set of analyses that my research gives more weight to.

On a more practical level of analysis – and maybe this is as practical he gets, ever – Foucault (1969) defines four fields of observation to analyse the surface of discourses in the *archéologie des savoirs*. He speaks of the formation of objects, of legitimate speaking positions,²¹ of concepts, and of strategies, that I will describe in more detail now.

The formation of objects is Foucault's (1961) main interest in his *histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. With the example of 'insanity', he shows how a discourse can define what it is speaking of, and thus give it the status of an object; he is interested in the way discourses *constitute* their objects by rendering them nameable and describable (Foucault, 1969, p. 57). But, the formation of objects also sharpens the gaze for the processes that delimit an object: what is part of it, and what is not? Thus, for my analysis, how do discourses define and delimit the objects that they are speaking of, e.g. 'development', or 'peace'? Or, to already make the link to the practices that are enabled in discourses; how do aid and peacebuilding constitute their domain, how do they delimit what is the scope of their responsibility?

The formation of objects thus reminds us of two considerations already mentioned above: Firstly, they produce the objects that they are speaking of. It is only through the productive force of discourses that they emerge and become part of our reality. Secondly, and following from the first consideration, is that the way these objects – and our reality as a whole – are constituted is contingent. 'Development', or 'peace' do not exist outside of discourses, and the discourses of aid and peacebuilding are forming their objects in specific ways. As I will posit in my analysis later, these two discourses have actually become dominant influences on how these notions are understood and practiced, and thus project specific power/knowledge on a global level.

²¹ Literally translated, the 'modalities of utterance'. I prefer the term legitimate speaking positions because I deem it clearer and more conducive to an understandable language in my analysis.

In *naissance de la clinique*, Foucault (1963) focuses on the formation of legitimate speaking positions with the example of the medical institution. Interested in the role that institutions have in ordering speech, he observes what he calls the scarcity of speaking subjects:

‘Nobody enters the order of a discourse if he doesn’t satisfy certain requirements or is not qualified. More precisely: not all regions of discourses are equally open and accessible; some are highly defended [...], while others are open to everybody [...] without prior restriction’ (Foucault, 1971, p. 38).

Each discourse thus constitutes what could be conceived of as an arena, in which legitimate speaking subjects are allowed to speak. But the access to these arenas is regulated. These rules of access define who is entitled to speak, or which status the person must have to be entitled – e.g., the role of the expert or the professional come to mind. They also comprise the setting of that person, the institutional affiliation that gives legitimacy to speak – e.g., the university, or the think tank, which also play a role in permitting or excluding from access. Important here to keep in mind is that these rules regulating access to the arena are not a given. To the contrary: they are the object of struggles among different actors to position themselves as legitimate speakers, to influence the rules according to their interests, and to change the game in their favour. Limiting access is an important mechanism of discourses in the reproduction of power hierarchies; and offers a primary field of observation to dissect the microphysics of power.

In *les mots et les choses*, Foucault (1966) turns more to the role of knowledge and science, and tries to analyse the formation of concepts of Western knowledge from a distant vantage point. He develops the concept of the *épistémè*, which postulates a deeper structure that orders (scientific) thinking in each epoch. He thus posits that the evolution of knowledge structures does not happen as a constant process of (scientific) accumulation and progress as it is understood in the tradition of the enlightenment. Rather, he posits it as a sequence of different *épistémè* that regulate knowledge in a given historic period (cf. Keller, 2007, p. 16). While fundamental for the forging of my epistemological and ontological positions,²² the formation of concepts is less relevant for the practical steps of my analysis.²³ On the other hand, it is clearly underpinning a part of my research question: It is the foundation to question the role of ‘scientific’ knowledge for aid and peacebuilding, and to guide the analytical gaze towards the contingency of science. If knowledge produced by science shows the traits of an underlying deeper structure, which is characteristic for a certain period, then one has to include science like any other societal institution into the analysis of discourses. And, although science is often presented as the solution²⁴ – for progress, development, a better society – I have to treat science as a part of the problem I am trying to understand.²⁵

²² See section 2.1 above.

²³ For my analysis, it is only as a part of the Foucault’s later genealogical project that the *épistémè* gains a broader relevance. This in the sense that Foucault (1977b, p. 300 f.) re-contextualises the *épistémè* as a more specific case of the *dispositif*, consisting exclusively of discursive (as opposed to non-discursive) elements.

²⁴ See my analysis of the role that is given to science in societal transformations at different times, section 3.6 below.

²⁵ See also section 2.1 above.

Finally, with the formation of strategies, Foucault (1969, p. 85 ff.) bridges his considerations on discourses and practices. He names ‘strategies’ the choices of themes and theories that are made in discourses; and he proposes to describe the different points where these choices are made in view of the role that a discourse is playing in relation to other, similar or neighbouring discourses. Not all possible formations of discourses actually take place, so the question is to determine why some emerge, and others not. Foucault (1969, p. 89) describes a process of delimitation between two discourses: each one gives itself a singularity by differentiating its domain of application, its methods, and its instruments, thus setting itself apart. These strategic choices in turn condition the discourse, and restrict its formation a priori. An important element to observe here are problematisations: The way a certain problem is described, the thematic choices made, and the methods for its analysis are conditioned by the formation of strategies. This means that according to the formation of strategies, a discourse would produce a very specific problematisation; and thus also propose very specific ‘solutions’ and instruments for its ‘resolution’. This opens another avenue of analysis, more closely linked to power: Foucault suspects an influence here of the function that discourse plays for practices, be it in a professional field or for political decisions. He thus observes a process of appropriation of discourses by different groups in society²⁶:

‘[...] in our societies (and without doubt, in many others), the ownership of discourses – understood at the same time as the right to speak, competency to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated utterances, and capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, and practices – is actually reserved [...] to a determined group of individuals’ (Foucault, 1969, p. 96).

By linking the formation of discourses to the structures of society, this marks the passage from the set of ‘critical’ analyses to those that are ‘genealogic’ in nature: the focus now rests on the relationship between different discourses, and the link of discourses to practices that dominated Foucault’s later writings.²⁷ Hence, it also marks the passage to the heart of my research interest.

All four of these fields of observation to analyse the formation of discourses are closely interlinked. Their separation in four different steps of analysis is not always possible, and rather conceptual in nature. However, following them as a first grid to guide the analysis helps with being more systematic when treating the different materials in the corpus.

²⁶ A turn which shows a certain similarity with the concept of symbolic violence of Bourdieu (1979).

²⁷ I will cover these in the next section.

2.2.2 Practices, dispositifs, and power effects

As I already hinted at in the previous section, discourse analysis in my understanding is not primarily concerned with language. Rather, it is analysing the structures in speech to understand how discourses structure societies, constitute something as ‘true’, and realise their power effects. Discourse analysis understood this way is much more concerned with very immediate effects of power or knowledge structures than one could assume when looking at the concepts outlined above. In the first place, this is due to the different conception of power that is underpinning it. This conception is directly linked to discourses:

‘Discourses carry ‘true knowledge’, and thus have power effects; and they wield power in the sense that they induce practices and (other) discourses. Thus, they contribute to structuring power relations in a given society’ (Jäger, 2006, p. 88).

This conception of power is subtler, more complex, and less immediate compared to other, more traditional conceptions – for instance, Weber’s (2002, p. 28) famous definition of power as ‘the chance to impose one’s will upon others in a social relationship’. When Foucault (1971, p. 12) writes that discourses are not only what ‘transmits struggles or systems of domination, it is how and what we fight for, it is the power we want to seize’, the difference to Weber becomes evident. Following a more traditional understanding of power, this statement would beg a simple question: So, who is at the origin of discourses, who makes them? Jäger answers to this point:

‘The individual is not making the discourse; rather the contrary is the case. Discourse is supra-individual. While all people contribute to the discourse, no individual or individual group determines the discourse or wanted its exact outcome. Usually, discourses have formed as the result of historical processes and have taken on a life of their own’ (Jäger, 2006, p. 88).

Power, in this understanding, is not something that an individual actor can have, or own, let alone control. In *volonté de savoir*, Foucault (1976) defines ‘power’ in certain length:

‘Power, it seems to me, has to be understood in the first place as the multiplicity of power relations²⁸ that are immanent to the domain where they are in effect, and who are constitutive of this domain’s organisation; as the game that by way of incessant struggles and clashes transforms, reinforces, and inverts them; [...] and finally the strategies, in which they take effect, and [...] whose institutional crystallizations take form in the apparatus of states, in the formulations of the law, in social hegemonies. The condition for the possibility of power [...] has not to be sought in the primary existence of a central point, giving a unitary home to sovereignty where its other deriving and descending forms radiate from; it is the shifting base of power relations that by their inequality continuously induce situations of power – but always local and unstable. [...] [Power] is produced in every moment, in every point, or rather, in each relation of one point with another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. [...] power is not an institution, it is not a structure, it is not a certain force that someone is equipped with: It is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society’ (Foucault, 1976, p. 121 ff.).

But this dynamic, unstable and malleable conception of power begs the question of how the order of things that we know – which seems everything than unstable – was able to

²⁸ *Rapports de force* in the French original. In the following, I will stick to using the original French term, which in my opinion better conveys the added meaning of power (im)balances than the English term ‘power relations’.

crystallize and stabilise itself over time. Or put differently, how do the formations of discourses – in which this conception of power is rooted – realize their power effects?

In this question, the difference between what I have described as two different sets of analysis above, one named critical, one genealogic, and which generally are described as Foucault's archaeological and genealogical project, comes to the fore. While the archaeological project is mainly concerned with the formation of discourses, and mainly conceives discourse analysis with providing a snapshot in a specific historic period, the genealogical perspective is more concerned with the process-related aspects of discourse formation (cf. Keller, 2007, p. 48). Thus, the historical processes that have led to the order we see today come to the centre of attention, and so do the practices and institutions that are implied in these processes.

To conceptualise the link between discourses and their power effects, Foucault introduces the idea of the *dispositif*:²⁹

'What I am trying to describe with this name is in the first place a heterogeneous ensemble, comprising discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific utterances, philosophic, moral, or philanthropic propositions, in short: discursive, but also non-discursive elements. The *dispositif* itself then, is the network on can establish among these elements' Foucault (1977b, p. 299).

To think of a network of different elements that consists of both discursive (speech) and non-discursive (non-speech) allows thinking how (abstract) discourses realize (tangible) power effects. They enable certain practices, embedded in a network of institutions and standards, which have not been possible before, and make them to be perceived as appropriate, or legitimate, ways of acting. What is important to keep in mind is the interplay between power and knowledge that takes place inside of the *dispositif*. As already stated above,³⁰ power produces knowledge, and the two cannot be thought independently of each other (Foucault, 1975, p. 36). *Dispositifs* play a crucial role in stabilising specific orders of knowledge, in the sense that they structure the ways that discourses are practiced, operationalized and supported institutionally, professionally, socially, legally and economically (Carabine, 2001, p. 276).

Further, Foucault (1977b, p. 299) writes that a *dispositif* has strategic function, which is at least at given historic moment, to respond to a societal or political urgency. But this function or strategic imperative is not necessarily stable: As soon as the *dispositif* properly constitutes itself, it enters into an interaction with the existing *rapports de forces* in a given society, which have given rise to it in the first place, but which now also are conditioned and influenced by the *dispositif* in turn. Two processes take place:

'a process of functional over-determination on the one hand, since every effect, positive or negative, wanted or unwanted, comes into resonance or contradiction with the others and

²⁹ Foucault uses the term *dispositif*, which is current in French language to describe an ordered ensemble or system of measures taken for a specific intervention. The expression is usually translated either with 'apparatus' or 'machinery', which in my opinion both have a mechanistic ring to them. I thus prefer using the original French term *dispositif*, also to clearly distinguish it from the French term 'appareil'.

³⁰ See section 2.1.

demands review and readjustment of the heterogeneous elements [...]. And a process of perpetual strategic completion on the other' (Foucault, 1977b, p. 299).

To illustrate this, Foucault (1977b, p. 299) gives the example of the resorption of a floating population that created the urgency and strategic imperative serving as the matrix for a *dispositif* that over time became the *dispositif* of control and subjugation of insanity. Also the example of the prison is telling in this regard:

At a given moment, this *dispositif* made all the measures of detention appear as the most efficient, the most rational instrument that could be applied to the phenomenon of criminality. But what did it produce? It produced an effect that was absolutely not expected [...], the constitution of a *milieu* of delinquents [...]. So what happened? The prison has played the role of a filter, concentration, professionalisation, of a delinquent milieu' (Foucault, 1977b, p. 299 f.).

What is particularly interesting for my analysis is a reflection linked to this unexpected effect of the prison, that one could name the 'perpetual failure' of this *dispositif*. Foucault (1975, p. 312 f.) notes that in reducing criminality, the prison has been a perpetual failure over the last 150 years; and that it has also constantly been subjected to periodic criticism in this regard. What is striking about the prison, and what underlines the use of understanding it as part of a *dispositif*, is that in response to criticism, the prison has been continuously rectified as its own remedy: The reactivation of penitentiary techniques have been posited as the only way to overcome the prisons' failure. The prison has thus entered a cycle of criticism and reform, where each reform was restricted to a formula of 'more of the same'. Foucault explains this continuity with the prison being part of a *dispositif* he names the penitentiary system, which not only comprises

'the institution of the prison, with his walls, his personnel, his rules and his violence. The penitentiary system also encloses discourses, architectures, coercive regulations, and scientific propositions, [...] programs to correct delinquents and mechanisms that solidify delinquency. Thus, is the purported failure also a part of the function of the prison? [...] If the institution 'prison' has survived a long time in such an immobility, and the principle of detention has never been questioned, it is because this penitentiary system has become deeply rooted – and fulfils precise functions' (Foucault, 1975, p. 316).

At a certain point, the *dispositif* has established and stabilised a certain order of knowledge, where the penitentiary system itself is perceived as being without alternative. Hence, Foucault (1975, p. 317 f.) asks what the functions of the perpetual failure of the prison are. He identifies the main function not in the elimination of crime, but in the management of delinquency: The prison serves as an instrument to differentiate among illegalities, 'to draw the limits of tolerance, to give space to some, and apply pressure to others, to exclude one part, make another part useful, to neutralise this aspect, and to make profit of another. [...] [And] the differential management of illegality by the means of the penitentiary system is part of the mechanisms of domination' (Foucault, 1975, p. 317). If a system is surprisingly stable over time despite its apparent and criticised failure, the suspicion is near that it is stabilised by a *dispositif* that masks its contingent nature, that it is part of a formation of discourse strategy that presents it as being without alternative, or the only 'solution' to the 'problem'.

It is in the concept of the *dispositif* where Foucault's *oeuvre* develops its main thrust for my analysis: For the better part of this book, I am aiming to make sense of the manifold practices, concepts, and institutions that have been introduced over the last decades to make aid and peacebuilding more 'efficient', 'effective', or to 'increase impact'. It is the concept of the *dispositif* that enables me to establish a conceptual network among these practices, concepts and institutions, to link the daily practice of filling in an extensive donor reporting sheet in a small NGO in Myanmar to broader societal developments that have taken place in the West over the last decades – namely the rise of managerial tools inspired by 'New Public Management'.³¹ It is the concept of the *dispositif* that further enables me to link these practices on the ground and broad developments in international discourses to the agendas of different local and international actors in Myanmar that struggle to construct legitimacy for their approaches, solutions, and problematisations. It is in the concept of the *dispositif* where I found a framework to link these – seemingly disparate – observations into a framework. And, it is this framework that allows analysing the broader effects of these practices, concepts, and institutions, which go way beyond their initial, self-declared goal to make aid and peacebuilding more efficient.

2.2.3 Governmentality and resistance

But the main fields of analysis for my research – aid and peacebuilding – just mentioned, and the practices, concepts, and institutions supposed to make them more efficient are also linked to notions that appeared in Foucault's later works: governmentality and bio-power. Governmentality describes a specific form to organise and exercise power, which relies on the organised practices, institutions, and knowledges that come in certain *dispositifs*. Foucault (1997) distinguishes three different forms to exercise power, which have developed in specific historical periods in Western Europe; but which have not completely replaced one another. He distinguishes sovereignty, discipline, and bio-power. While the first form of governing is mainly centred on the sovereign, and the second one centred on the individual body, the form especially relevant for my analysis is bio-power. The latter is centred not on the individual body, but on the body of the whole population; thus, intervening on the population to maximise the forces of the population collectively (Foucault, 1997; cf. also Rose, 1999). For this form of exercising power, statistics, scientific measurements, and forecasts are pivotal technologies that enable to 'manage' a population. Bio-power is thus not a direct exercise of power, but indirectly produces governable populations and subjects that also auto-correct and self-optimize. Most academic attention has attracted Foucault's (2004) analysis of bio-power in the specific form that emerged in Western societies, or in Rose's (1999) terms, in 'advanced liberal democracies': neoliberal governmentality.

Neoliberal governmentality relies on an indirect exercise of power, and was mainly used to conceptually grapple the changes of how the image of the state has evolved in Western Europe and the United States from the 1970s onwards.³² The basic feature of this form of governmentality is an overarching mistrust towards the effectiveness of state action. Instead

³¹ See section 3.2 below.

³² See also section 3.2.

of conceptualising the state as an actor that organises society, neoliberal governmentality relies on specific technologies to manage populations and to produce self-reliant citizens. Extensive welfare states were thus denounced as a thing of the past, and every form of (social) policy is submitted to the sneaking suspicion of being ineffective; that there might be more efficient ways to address a specific problem with market-based solutions. In short: While in Keynesianism, the state was thought to oversee and regulate the market, neoliberal governmentality proposes that the state is overseen and regulated *by* the market. The *laissez-faire* has been converted in a '*ne-pas-laissez-faire le gouvernement*' (Foucault, 2004, p. 253), and market principles are now applied to judge the necessity and effectiveness of state actions. Furthermore, these same principles of market rationality, schemes of analysis, and decision-making criteria, are extended to the sphere of the political, but also to society (Foucault, 1989, p. 119). In sum, it is thus not only the state that is directly governing a society anymore. Rather, it is through a network of institutions and both state and non-state (e.g., private organisations like NGOs) that power is exercised in in-direct ways. Further, it also entails that individuals 'govern' themselves, and are constituted as self-reliant citizens (Foucault, 1982a, p. 1604). Noteworthy for my analysis are especially the different technologies that neoliberal governmentality enables, e.g. tools and frameworks to assess the efficiency of state action, or audits to ensure that the implementation of specific policies follows the principles and guidelines that are now set as 'best practices'. The important point about these technologies – as I will argue throughout my analysis – is that they are not neutral add-ons to specific practices. Understood in the framework of neoliberal governmentality, they also constitute and produce the objects that they are supposed to assess, evaluate, and improve (Dahler-Larsen, 2012; Power, 1996). In this sense, these technologies, and the practices and institutions that are linked to them, are forming a *dispositif* that governs in new, indirect ways.

The order of knowledge underpinning neoliberal governmentality, and the *dispositifs* just described may appear as stable; and because they are supported by networks of power/knowledge, they even may appear as unchangeable. But they never totally are. 'Discourses carry and product power; they reinforce, but also undermine, expose, render it fragile' (Foucault, 1976, p. 133). While in Foucault's archaeology, the discourse formation often appears as stable, the genealogy opens the perspective on how different discourses evolve over time; and also, how they relate to other discourses. The point is that it is exactly in these struggles that they are actually changing, as the current formations always carry the marks of past struggles.

A useful metaphor to illustrate my understanding of discursive fragments and their link to discourses is the human DNA. Over millions of years, human DNA has become interwoven with remnants of different retroviruses; passing on the debris of humanity's past struggles against different diseases to future generations (Bannert & Kurth, 2006). Similarly, discursive fragments can be seen as bearing the traits of past and present political struggles: they integrate elements of different discourses, competing framings, and different interpretations. They take up elements of competing discourses to strengthen their own stance, and already bear the traits to subjugate competing interpretations.

Thus, discursive fragments can be analysed to deconstruct the traits of discourses that they bear, which, in turn, can be seen as a crystallisation of past societal struggles for legitimacy. As Ferguson (1990, p. 13) puts it, it is in the discursive struggles that existing structures are reproduced. It is thus through the analysis of discursive fragments, and the networks they form, that one can analyse discourses, and societal struggles for legitimacy. And, it is exactly in these struggles and instances of resistance that power/knowledge becomes observable. In this vein, Foucault (1982b, p. 780) proposes to use acts of resistance as a strategy to guide discourse analysis:

‘I would like to suggest another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analysing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analysing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. For example, to find out what our society means by sanity, perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of insanity. And what we mean by legality in the field of illegality. And, in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations’ (Foucault, 1982b, p. 780).

Resistance in this understanding does not take necessarily the form of organised resistance against the state, as in demonstration, or an armed movement, as more traditional conceptions of power would imply. It is the equivalent – or rather a part – of Foucault’s (1976, p. 126) dispersed and de-centred understanding of power: ‘If power is everywhere, also resistance is dispersed’. Power here is strictly relational, and power relations can only exist in function of points of resistance. Resistance in this understanding is rather small:³³ it can be little acts of re-interpreting, tweaking, or using elements of power/knowledge networks in new ways. Discourses are forming a part to the arena where resistance takes place; ‘[i]t is not the discourse of power on one side, and on the other side, another one opposing it’ (Foucault, 1976, p. 134). Thus, actors in this arena would use certain elements of discourses for their resistance, while at the same time, being subjugated by other elements of them. And, it is in these struggles that discourses actually become observable: if there is no resistance, there is no discourse.

The concepts of governmentality and resistance thus allow me to counter the understanding of power/knowledge networks as static, and as depriving actors of all agency. Rather, governmentality, and *dispositifs* offer the background of the societal arena where struggles for legitimacy take place. In this sense, they allow not only examining how power effects are realised, but also how they are altered, how they evolve, and are conditioned in turn by resistance of specific actors.

Thus, it becomes clear why I chose Foucault’s specific conception of power, or power/knowledge, for my analysis. Having a notion of power as decentred, but omnipresent

³³ In this sense, the understanding of resistance in Foucault’s oeuvre bears similarity with Scott’s (1985, 1990) concept of ‘everyday resistance’.

enables me in my analysis to challenge systems of practices like aid or peacebuilding that present themselves as quasi-untouched by power because they are working to achieve everybody's 'greater good'. It is this understanding that enables me to show the power effects of the systems of thinking that make us take things for granted that we should not, that make us accept things as inevitable that are not, and that present us solutions that are posited to be without alternative – when there are alternatives. It thus enables me to make sense of a network of institutions, practices, symbols, concepts, rituals, documents, plans, truths, evidences, white cars, flipcharts, and logframes that we know as aid and peacebuilding; which set out to make the world a better place by constituting populations, governments, and armed conflicts as problems that they have to act upon.

2.3 The making of the Third World, the anti-politics machine and the constant failure of peacebuilding: applications of Foucault to aid and peacebuilding

By renouncing a series of epistemological assumptions on which many other scientific contributions are based, my approach may appear as relatively free-floating. This is certainly not the case. Clearly, it builds on a disciplinary, epistemological and ontological tradition, and the according stock of literature. But I decided not to engage in a comprehensive overview of the existing literature in a singled-out chapter that would review a current state of the art. Rather, I will restrict myself in the following to forging a synopsis of concepts and ideas guiding my analysis, and to describe the sources of the different elements that I use for this endeavour. The reason why I restrict myself here is simple: When faced with the problem to decide on which pieces to put in a literature review, and which ones to put into my analysis, I had to give up on the idea of sharply distinguishing between the two. 'Scientific' literature is not only a stock of 'objective knowledge' I can uncritically build upon, it is equally an object of my analysis. 'Scientific' literature is constituted by and constitutes certain orders of knowledge, legitimises certain practices and de-legitimises others, and is implied in the formation of discourses like every other human activity. Most of the literature I use for my research is thus in a grey zone: I draw upon it, but equally try to situate it in the broader discourses relevant for my analysis. Most pieces, although giving an overview and idea of the topic, are also of analytical value in my analysis. They contain debates that are not prior to my analysis, but that I try to situate with a discourse analytical perspective. I thus decided to embed further relevant literature that helps to contextualise my analysis directly in the different chapters; but always closely interwoven with points that I am making, to give an immediate context to better understand the formation of discourses and to situate the *dispositif* I am examining in its historical and geographical environment. I chose this approach not only in view of the epistemological considerations above – namely that I cannot uncritically build on existing 'true knowledge' produced by an 'objective science' – but also in view of the readability of my analysis as a whole.

The foundations of my theoretical framework rely on Foucault's *oeuvre*, as outlined in the sections above. Following the epistemological and ontological perspective embedded in this

methodology, a theoretical framework cannot be considered a theory that is tested, falsified, or confirmed by empirical data in the classical sense. Rather, I aim to outline how I am using Foucault's different concepts for my analysis, and thus refine his broader analyses for my specific research interest – also by drawing on the important works of other authors, who have used a similar perspective for my research field. The theoretical framework that follows can be seen as guidance for my analysis; inspiring and broadening my analysis with elements to observe, but also helping to focus on the most important aspects to enable coherent analysis. And, in the attempt to remain faithful to my approach of problematising existing academic literature – as opposed to 'falsifying' it, or confront it with my 'better' argument – the academic literature that takes on positions contradicting the Foucauldian ontology and epistemology I follow in my research will be presented along the way of my analysis of the international discourses of aid and peacebuilding in the following chapter.³⁴

To most broadly situate my analysis, it could be understood as being a part of the strand of literature that has been labelled as 'critical policy studies'. This label encompasses a strand of literature that draws on discourse theorists like Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe (2001), or Gramsci (1971) to depart from the dominant theories of public policy inspired by rational choice (Durnova & Zittoun, 2013). Critical policy studies understand both policies and practices as constituted and produced by power, and emphasise their historical contingency (Howarth, 2010). Policy formulation, making and implementation are thus not primarily seen as the result of (collective) rational choice, but are imbued with power both in the problematisations that call for new policies, and in the formulation of specific policy solutions (Durnova & Zittoun, 2013). It is in this line of argument that the very foundations of the policy process can be analysed as a historically specific way of understanding the role of the state in society that is otherwise easily taken for granted and. The specific understandings of public policy along the lines of managing populations already analysed by Foucault (2004) gives rise to specific ways to exercise power and to specific ways of understanding the policy making process. Foucault (2004) has analysed this specific way of governing as the rise of the 'neoliberal governmentality', which brings to the fore the problematisation of public policy along the lines of their efficiency – especially when compared to market-based solutions. The system of new practices of governing commonly subsumed under the label of managerialism that this neoliberal governmentality produces have been critically analysed by a range of authors in different policy fields.³⁵ In the following, I will give a short overview of the authors that have used this understanding to analyse my main fields of interest, namely aid and peacebuilding, and show the parallels to my following analysis.

Escobar (1984, 1995) was among the first authors to apply Foucault's ideas to analyse the relations between Western countries and the so-called 'Third World'. He highlighted the role of discourses in constituting the problem of 'under-development'; which he identified as a strategy by Western countries to effecting domination over 'third world' countries. He shows that with dominant discourses positing 'third world' countries' 'under-development' as their first and foremost problem, these countries are made amenable to the solutions and practices

³⁴ See mainly sections 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, and 3.9 below.

³⁵ See section 3.2 below.

proposed by specialized institutions and development policy. What is particularly interesting for my analysis is how Escobar (1984, p. 387 f.) analysed the deployment of development. According to his analysis, this happens in three strategies: Firstly, there is a progressive incorporation of problems; meaning that development created new categories of ‘abnormalities’ like the ‘malnourished’ or the ‘illiterate’, which it would later treat and act upon. In this sense, development produces the very need to act upon these problems in specific ways, and creates an ‘ever more encompassing domain of intervention’ (Escobar, 1984, p. 387). With the second strategy, he also problematized the role of the emerging development studies³⁶ and the ‘scientific’ solutions it proposes. With the ongoing professionalisation and technification of development, as illustrated with the emergence of ‘development studies’ as an academic discipline, a specific order of knowledge that reproduces the notions of ‘under-development’, and he proposed solutions to it. With this specific order of knowledge, the problems of ‘under-development’ are removed from the political realm, and are constituted as ‘technical’ problems to which science can find the appropriate policies. Thirdly, he observes an institutionalisation of development in different sites and institutions that are now ‘in charge’ of bringing about development. These institutions form a *dispositif*, whose apparent purpose is to develop ‘third world countries’ and solve the problem of ‘under-development’, but which mainly reproduces the domination of Western countries over ‘third world’ countries. In my analysis, I observe similar developments when analysing how ‘development’ integrates the ‘fragile state’ into its domain of intervention, and makes it amenable to its ‘solutions’.³⁷

In a similar vein, Ferguson (1990) has drawn attention to the particular understandings of the ‘problem’ of development by important actors in this field. In his analysis of international aid efforts in Lesotho, he shows how their conceptualizations of and actions upon these problems project bureaucratic power and de-politicise development.³⁸ He showed that their discourses constituted the ‘problems’ they were aiming to solve as ‘problems’ residing inside the country. Accordingly, the ‘solutions’ proposed were excluding aspects going beyond its borders – namely Lesotho’s relation to South Africa under apartheid – and were thus constantly failing. Discourses structuring speech on Lesotho’s situation were thus only presenting possible solutions to a very specific and narrow interpretation of the problem – to which more ‘development’, and the practices of development are the solution. This is typical for the function of a *dispositif*: In establishing power/knowledge networks that regulate speech, practices and institutions, reality or ‘truth’ is always narrowed down to a certain set of accepted interpretations and solutions. Ferguson (1990) thus argues that in the development discourses, criticism can only take place in the name of doing development ‘better’ – but not as criticism of ‘development’ *per se*. Questions outside this narrow frame are excluded from being asked by the development discourse; thus, larger political or ideological considerations are ignored and replaced by the specialized knowledge of development experts. The consequence is a de-politicisation of development, where debate is restricted to improving technical ‘solutions’ without revisiting larger, underlying assumptions, ideologies, or

³⁶ On this, see also Kothari (2005).

³⁷ See section 3.9 below.

³⁸ For a newer, similar argument in the same vein, see Hagmann and Korf (2012).

worldviews. Development, in this sense, acts as a sophisticated anti-politics machine, which suspends politics in the areas it touches. Thus, although development discourse operates with broad, transformative notions of equal development, inclusiveness, or even empowerment, it often focuses on narrow problematisations that stifle the broader changes these notions entail. In this sense, the *dispositif* of development is often reproducing the same order and ‘problems’ it aims to ‘solve’ in the first place.³⁹ In my analysis, especially the projection of the government’s bureaucratic power through ‘development’ into the areas where the government’s influence was limited so far is observable. Similarly to Ferguson’s (1990) observations, also in Myanmar the question of ‘development’ in the aid discourse can only be asked in order to make development ‘better’ – while the more fundamental questions criticising ‘development’ *per se* are excluded.⁴⁰

Adjacent to these questions is a thought that follows from both Escobar’s (1984) and Ferguson’s (1990) analyses, and that has been made more explicit in the analysis of Li (2007). She analysed how the notion of ‘development’ was used throughout the history of Indonesia to legitimise the respective elites in power – ranging from the colonial administration, to the military regime after independence, up to the more recent discourses of the United Nations and other international actors. Astonishingly, she argues that the basic notions of these discourses were similar; all of them used the larger goal of ‘development’ as a legitimising strategy for all kinds of policies.⁴¹ Also in Myanmar, a similar formation of discourse where the overarching goal of ‘development’ is legitimising a range of policies can be identified throughout different historical periods; and is present in the discourse of the colonial government, the Burmese socialist regime, the transitional government after 2011, and in the discourse of international organisations.⁴²

Similar criticisms have also been levelled at the peacebuilding field. Heathershaw (2008) identifies the production of ‘solutions’ that are constantly failing to live up to peacebuilding’s self-proclaimed ideals, and are not addressing the core of the conflicts they are trying to resolve. By merging different political agendas in the name of finding pragmatic ‘solutions’, peacebuilding discourses exclude larger political or ideological questions from the debate. Thus, the neoliberal foundations and technologies of governing (cf. Ong, 2006) of mainstream approaches to peacebuilding cannot be questioned anymore; and the power effects of the specific notions of ‘peace’ or ‘development’ they convey are projected into developing countries. Also important for my analysis is Heathershaw’s (2008) distinction between three different forms of peacebuilding. As a first form, he identifies peace-via-democratic-reforms, which relies on the assumption that more democratic systems bear higher prospects for the peaceful solutions to conflicts. Secondly, he speaks of peacebuilding-via-civil-society, that parts from the assumption that civil society is an important part for more transformative societal changes, that lead to ‘more justice’ in a society and thus give people less reasons to

³⁹ A conclusion similar to Foucault’s (1975) observation related to the constant failure of the prison in solving the problem of criminality; which contrasts with its long-term stability as an institutional solution to the very same problem.

⁴⁰ See chapter 5 below.

⁴¹ This finding also echoes in the work of Barral (2015) on the political economy of the large plantations in Indonesia and Malaysia.

⁴² See chapters 4 and 5 below.

resort to violent conflict. Thirdly, Heathershaw (2008) speaks of peacebuilding-as-statebuilding, an approach that is mainly concerned with order, and focuses on the strengthening of the state institutions' capacities and their legitimacy. What is noteworthy about these three different forms of peacebuilding is that although discursively, they are all lumped together under the label of 'peacebuilding' they are following different political ideologies, offer different recipes to 'build' peace, and might even have clashing objectives. For instance, the transformation of a society through civil society is clearly at odds with the emphasis on order of the statebuilding agenda. Nevertheless, in the peacebuilding discourse, 'peace' is constituted as the result of peacebuilding; hence containing progress on all three approaches. In my analysis, the possible clashes between these different understandings, and how they are discursively glossed over in the peacebuilding discourse, are one of the main fields of observation. The case of Myanmar shows that especially when the central state is contested, the statebuilding agenda becomes much more evidently political, as strengthening the state mainly means strengthening one side of the conflict (namely the central government). But in my analysis, I will also show how the power effects of international discourses of aid and peacebuilding exclude these questions from being asked, and posit the framework of the Western, 'Weberian' state⁴³ as the boundaries in which discussion can take place.⁴⁴

Also other scholars have critically analysed the notions underpinning these three strategies from a critical perspective. They especially point out that the assumed separation of state and civil society is not accurate, as governmentality operates through both state and non-state institutions (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Mbembe, 2001); and Chandler (2010) argues that civil society is also serving the purposes of statebuilding. Nonetheless, the peacebuilding discourse upholds and reproduces the assumed separation of state and civil society; as it enables peacebuilding to act upon both 'entities' with specific practices, as I will show in my analysis.⁴⁵

These criticisms thus renew a point already made by Foucault (2004), who argued that civil society is also part of the neoliberal governmentality. In this regard, Duffield's (2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007) analyses are noteworthy for my argument, as his points are more directly related to the new models and processes of bureaucratization and technification that have come to play in aid and peacebuilding. He stresses the advent of ever more complex subcontracting arrangements, auditing techniques and what he calls 'the introduction of 'new public management' [...] to the public-private networks of aid practice' (Duffield, 2001b, p. 316). He observes increasingly close relationships between international NGOs and bi-lateral donors, which help Western states to intervene in other societies and act upon their population – in the sense of Foucault's (2004) 'bio-power'. Accordingly, he sees the manifold programs, projects and other interventions as Western states that learn to govern anew. A similar point is made by Abrahamsen (2004, p. 1454; cf. also Lie, 2015), who argues that the aid relationship represents a form of governmentality. The partnerships aid usually favours cannot be understood as on equal footing; rather, they are power relationships, but invoke specific

⁴³ On this notion, see section 3.9 below.

⁴⁴ See section 5.4 below.

⁴⁵ See chapter 5 below.

techniques of cooperation and inclusion instead of pure coercion. Thus, this relationship produces ‘both new forms of agency and new forms of discipline’ (Abrahamsen, 2004, p. 1454). In this light, the fields of peacebuilding and aid, which are usually seen as untouched by power, and acting on the principles of participation, cooperation and empowerment, do not seem as innocent anymore. Also for peacebuilding, it has been asserted that its design is based on a distinctly late modern understanding of government, which produces populations that are governable in a biopolitical sense. Jabri (2013, p. 13) notes that this understanding relies on the deployment of technologies of ‘meticulous planning and calculation, including the incorporation of gender and culture awareness, so that ‘pedagogy’ is as significant a factor as is the insertion of funds into particular initiatives’ (also Jabri, 2007). In my analysis of the specific case of Myanmar, I use this perspective to show how the deployment of international aid and peacebuilding puts into place a hierarchical structure, and gives rise to a set of specific practices to act upon the local organisations identified as ‘partners’.⁴⁶

The role of these managerial tools, instruments, and technologies that make such neoliberal governmentality possible in the first place is pivotal for my analysis. Easily to mind comes the myriad of practices like project cycle management, evaluations, audits, contracts, and planning tools that are used in aid and peacebuilding. Recently, the increasing use of these tools has been pointed out again by different scholars of peacebuilding: This strand of critical literature speaks of processes of ‘bureaucratization’ (Goetschel & Hagmann, 2009) through the use of managerial tools and the focus on effectiveness (Denskus, 2007), or even a ‘technocratic turn’ (Mac Ginty, 2013). At the heart of this argumentation is that peace is increasingly framed as an apolitical concept, which can be ‘built’ and ‘measured’ following a ‘managerial project logic’ (Goetschel & Hagmann, 2009).

But overall, these last-mentioned criticisms remain largely abstract in nature; and are not necessarily interested in the effects that specific (micro-)practices and technologies have in a specific context. Overall, these criticisms largely label a myriad of practices and concepts as ‘problematic’, but are not unpacking the black box of how these practices become possible, how they are linked to discourses and power/knowledge networks, or how they are used in the struggles for legitimacy of different actors. Exactly these questions are at the core of my research interest. To better understand the specific power effects of these technologies in practice, I will have to follow an approach that is not only drawing on classical discourse analysis, but also integrates similar thoughts that have been used by social anthropologists, especially in the strand of literature that calls for an ethnography of aid.

In a seminal article, Mosse (2004) starts from considerations on the nature of the link between policy and practice in development. He identifies an ‘instrumental’ and a ‘critical’ view of policy. While the first conceptualizes policy as rational problem-solving directly influencing practice, the latter sees development policy ‘as a rationalizing discourse concealing hidden purposes of bureaucratic power and dominance, in which the true political intent of development is hidden behind a cloak of rational planning’ (Mosse, 2004, p. 641). Following this, he calls for more attention to actual practices in the form of an ethnography of development, and research to gain a more nuanced understanding of ‘policy as institutional

⁴⁶ See section 5.3.2 below.

practice' (Mosse, 2004, p. 644). This call for more attention to how power and especially resistance are playing out on the micro level is also present in the political ethnographies of Scott (1985, 1990, 1998). Similarly, it is present in critical peace research, for instance, in Richmond's (2010) emphasis on the study of everyday practices; Denskus' (2012) attempt to challenge the dominant peacebuilding evaluation discourses with ethnographic vignettes; or Goetschel and Hagmann's (2009) call for a rejuvenation of critical peace research, combined with an ethnography of peacebuilding.

2.4 The *dispositif* of managed pacification: theory operationalisation and research design

If I attempt to summarise the different contributions outlined above, the *leitmotif* that emerges revolves around a singular finding, that is common to all the authors above: It is the presence of power/knowledge in fields that present themselves as untouched by power. The discourses of aid and peacebuilding constitute aid and peacebuilding as endeavours based on norms and values of participation, inclusivity, empowerment, equality, local ownership; implying that the collaboration between different actors takes place on an equal footing. Based on my epistemological and ontological assumptions outlined above, I posit that this is not the case: I take an analytical perspective that assumes an omnipresence of power/knowledge, although not in the classical understanding of power as means of coercion, or discipline. Rather, I see aid and peacebuilding as powerful *dispositifs* that enable the projection of specific, historically grown and contingent Western knowledge hierarchies into the global South and East. This is made possible by discourses that are specific to these disciplines, and which regulate speech and enable the deployment of specific technologies of power in the countries of the global South and East.

For this, my understanding of how different discourses relate to each other is important, and merits further specification: I part from the idea that the specific order of knowledge that enables neoliberal governmentality is realising its power effects on a global scale.⁴⁷ Although certain scholars have argued that the concept of governmentality can only be meaningfully applied in context that have reached an 'advanced liberalism' (e.g., Joseph, 2010), and Foucault (1977a, p. 160) has usually shown himself hesitant to extend his analyses to other, non-European contexts, I would argue with Death (2013) that the power/knowledge networks that enable governmentality 'travel well'.⁴⁸ While I consider their origin in the global West, these networks are projected into countries of the global South and East by the means of *dispositifs* that realise their power effects virtually worldwide. The aid and peacebuilding *dispositifs*, and the specific practices, discourses, and institutions that are forming them, are

⁴⁷ This understanding of how discourses link relate to each other is partly drawing on the extensive work of Link (e.g., 1982, 2006), who distinguishes an inter-discourse and specialized (academic) discourses, and the works of Jäger (2001; Jäger & Link, 1993; Jäger & Maier, 2009), who speaks of a global discourse, made up of different discourse threads. In my analysis, I use the term 'discourse' similar to Jäger's notion of the 'discourse thread'; which refers to a discourse that is regulating speech for a certain community (self-identified or ascribed), e.g. 'development practitioners'.

⁴⁸ Death (2013) argues that an 'analytics of government' derived from Foucault's work can offer significant insights into contexts in the Global South and East.

particularly instrumental in stabilising, producing and reproducing neoliberal governmentality and the application of its technologies in other parts of the globe.

Aid and peacebuilding both can be seen as *dispositifs*; which are formed of their specific practices, discourses, and institutions. Both have their strategic imperative, meaning a certain societal need that they are supposed to address, i.e. overcoming ‘under-development’ (cf. Escobar, 1984) or ‘building peace’. At the same time, their power effects are more far reaching than ‘simply’ bringing about development or building peace. For instance, Escobar (1984) sees ‘development’ as primarily stabilising and perpetuating Western domination of ‘under-developed’ countries; and Ferguson (1990) has described the de-politicising effects of the aid *dispositif*.⁴⁹ As I will argue in my analysis chapters below, the highly professionalised discourses that regulate speech in aid and peacebuilding have increasingly become more imbued with the elements of the order of knowledge of neoliberal governmentality.⁵⁰ While these elements have been present for some time, the technicality of these discourses has reached a new materiality over the last years; to the point where their original strategic imperatives are hardly recognisable anymore. At the same time, the previously separate discourses of aid and peacebuilding have increasingly converged under the power effects of the set of practices and concepts associated with neoliberal governmentality.⁵¹ I thus argue that they have been merged into something new: the *dispositif* of managed pacification. With the increased application and deployment of the specific technologies of neoliberal governmentality in aid and peacebuilding, they now form a *dispositif* whose primary strategic function is to control and stabilise societal change processes by the means of technical management. It thus projects the specific order of knowledge underpinning these technologies of neoliberal governmentality into countries of the global South and East, and subjugates more radical or far-reaching societal change processes.

From a pragmatic perspective, positing such a strategic function of this *dispositif* I am recognizing in the multitude of elements subsumed under aid and peacebuilding has its merits in making a key message of my research easier to communicate. But it also comes with certain challenges, which are also visible in other authors’ work. If for instance, Duffield (2001a, 2001b) claims that it is via the ‘securitisation of aid’ that ‘metropolitan states’ learn to govern the ‘borderlands’ anew, this makes an interesting contrast to the self-perception of the actors present in this *dispositif*, and certainly opens a fertile perspective for analysis. On the other hand, it also reduces a decidedly multifaceted phenomenon to an apparently singular decision in the past, where the overall rationale of this *dispositif* was ‘decided’. This in turn easily gives rise to the misunderstanding that somewhere in the past, there was an individual actor or group of actors that decided to put this *dispositif* into place, which would be diametrically opposed to the understanding of power/knowledge underpinning an analysis of *dispositifs*. It thus makes sense to further clarify my understanding of the *dispositif* for my further analysis.

⁴⁹ See section 2.3 above.

⁵⁰ See particularly chapters 3 and 5.

⁵¹ See section 3.9 below.

Foucault (1977b, p. 300) acknowledged problem just mentioned when saying that ‘if the *dispositif* is essentially strategic, this supposes that there was a certain manipulation [...], a rational and concerted intervention into the *rapports de forces*’. If one wants to be faithful to the understanding of power/knowledge stated above, the discursive event or practice that over time gave rise to this historical process that formed what can now be recognized as a *dispositif*, must have been minimal. A little act of resistance, or a re-interpretation of a practice, lost like a drop in an ocean of constantly shifting societal *rapports de forces*. Further, it has to be noted that the *dispositif* is a conceptual construction of the researcher, which links different elements to form a relatively coherent whole, and which had an initial strategic function to address a societal problem. In my case, these are the different (managerial) concepts, practices, and institutions that aim to make aid and peacebuilding more efficient – which may almost look like a pre-planned, relatively coherent agenda. But, this would be oversimplifying the point I am making with my research. *Dispositifs* cannot be understood as static: Rather, there is an evolution of the *dispositif*, or the historical processes of its self-constitution – in which the *dispositif* gains a life of its own, that gives rise to the production of new power effects, and which in turn, condition it (cf. Foucault, 1977b, p. 300). This means on the one hand that the *dispositif* I analyse now is not the product of any singular, powerful actor or group that use it for their specific purposes and interests. It is the product of historic processes that formed to its current *gestalt*; which themselves are the products of smaller or larger discursive contributions of all actors. On the other hand, the effects of this *dispositif* cannot be understood as determining behaviour or thinking of different actors, or group. Rather, this *dispositif* is offering a framework within which struggles for legitimacy among different actors take place; who resist to certain elements, are subjugated by certain elements, and manipulate and re-interpret others, which in turn slightly changes the overall *dispositif*. In short, it is a messy arena, where different actors are trying to make their position appear as legitimate. But it is exactly in such an arena, and in these struggles that the structures of power/knowledge are re-produced. And, it is also the place where power/knowledge structures are constantly re-forged, where discourses are at work to uphold their internal coherence, and where they can be observed. The objective of my analysis is thus to delve into the microphysics of power, the struggles of actors for legitimacy, and their resistance, to better understand the broader framework and functioning of the *dispositif* of managed pacification.

Along these considerations I have structured my research design. In the first part of my analysis, I sketch out the different international discourses of aid and peacebuilding, in order to show how it became possible to deploy the technologies of neoliberal governmentality; and these technologies are constituted as legitimate ‘solutions’ to the ‘problems’ of countries of the Global South and East. The main focus in this part is the different problematisations, standards, and ‘scientific’ notions of what aid and peacebuilding should look like. This is thus a mostly asynchronous analysis of different discourse fragments to show how these discourses evolved over the last years, and how they gradually enable the merging of aid and peacebuilding under the *dispositif* of managed pacification.

In the second part of my analysis, I take Myanmar as a specific case to examine how these discourses realise their power effects ‘on the ground’. Concretely, this means to analyse to what specific problematisations they give rise, which positions of certain actors they make possible, and which practices they enable and produce legitimacy for. But a country case also gives me the opportunity to delve into the microphysics of power, to more closely examine the different discursive struggles for legitimacy, instances of resistance, and specific practices in detail; which in sum make up the *dispositif* of managed pacification.

I consider Myanmar a case of how such a deployment of neoliberal governmentality can take place; but not in the sense that a generalisation of my findings to other countries would be unproblematic. As any other country, Myanmar has a range of idiosyncrasies: specific historical conditions, a specific configuration of actors, and a specific position in the international (geopolitical) arena. All of these factors – as in every other country – have clearly influenced the ways that the *dispositif* of managed pacification is deployed.

One of these idiosyncrasies is the country’s history. Its specific history of long-standing, in parts autarkic authoritarianism clearly sets Myanmar apart from other countries and is also the reason why I chose it as a case in the first place. This specific situation has led to ideal conditions to observe in Myanmar what is my research interest here: For decades, the country has only seen little exposure to the manifold international actors and organisations of aid and peacebuilding, with only a small number of organisations working within the country.⁵² But after the declaration of Myanmar’s transition in 2011, a vast number of international aid and peacebuilding actors flocked to Myanmar.⁵³ Thus, the full deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification has been taking place over a few years only, but with great intensity.

This is an ideal situation to observe the discursive struggles that come with such a deployment. Myanmar is an arena where the discursive struggles for legitimacy among the different actors are still virulent, and openly take place. These struggles are thus easier to observe – especially when compared to other countries, where the *dispositif* of managed pacification has already stabilised itself, crystallised its structures, and is mostly taken for granted. In Myanmar, on the other hand, the increasing permeation of a country with the global order of knowledge that enables neoliberal governmentality is still a relatively young process, whose power effects are still questioned by different actors. But also other considerations make Myanmar an ideal case for my observations: it combines an increasingly large community of both aid and peacebuilding actors, and has been the object of immense international interest over the last years. My analysis in this second part thus focuses on how different discourses ‘work’ the situation or ‘reality’ of Myanmar to make it amenable to their problematisations and the solutions they entail. This means a mostly synchronous analysis across different discourses, e.g. the discourses of peacebuilding, aid, or the government, to work out their contingency. At the same time, the analysis of discourse fragments produced by different actors also allows showing how discourses are ‘at work’ to uphold their inner coherence, and to subjugate other perspective to their order.

⁵² See chapter 4 below.

⁵³ See chapter 5 below.

Noteworthy here is that I do not rely on a comparison of what could be called a ‘local’ discourse to an ‘international’ discourse. Although it has been subject and centre of interest for a lot of academic debate over the last years,⁵⁴ I deem the understanding of the ‘local’ as a distinct sphere untouched by the ‘international’ is problematic in a number of ways. Even if one puts aside the romanticizing aspect that comes with understanding the ‘local’ as a distinct category – as opposed to the ‘international’ (for instance, cf. Carl, 2003) – and the reproduction of alterity this ensues, there are implications for the analytical use of the concept. My overall argument is that the *dispositif* of managed pacification structures the framework of discursive and non-discursive action for all actors. This means that my main interest of analysis lies in this framework; and how different actors use it strategically to position themselves as legitimate speakers, to put forward their claims and propositions, but also how they simply ignore it. Assuming that stemming from a local context automatically comes with certain positions, worldviews, or ways of thinking would thus deprive the local actors I am looking at from the agency necessary to ‘enter the game’. In this conception, they would necessarily assume a certain position called ‘local’. This in turn would mean to turn a conceptual blind eye to the nuances and their agency in the discursive struggles around development and peace; and one of the most important parts of my analysis would be glossed over. As Jabri (2013, p. 13 f.) puts it:

‘In this governmentalising design imperative, no easy distinction can be made between ‘locals’ and ‘internationals’. These may indeed be both, drawing on ‘hybrid’ discourses geared towards ‘effectiveness’; what works best. Thus, local actors, including women, youth, elders, workers and NGOs, may well draw on the ‘international’ and its normative ordering to make local claims, to negotiate locally or nationally for rights violated or for access to resources’.

Hence, I deem an artificial separation of the ‘local’ and the ‘international’ for my research not only as simplifying, but as glossing over the influence of international discourses in a specific country context. The ‘local’ is not ‘untouched’, ‘different’, or a ‘source of traditional and potentially better peacebuilding practice’ (cf. Carl, 2003). If actors present themselves or their approaches as ‘local’, they follow a discursive strategy and use it as a resource to position themselves as legitimate speakers in a certain context. But this can only be meaningfully understood if one contextualises it in the broader debates around different approaches to development and peacebuilding, where the ‘local’ has gained a position of influence over the last years thanks to its constant invocation by (Western) scholars and practitioners.⁵⁵ Thus, the ‘local’ itself and its invocation are constructed, rather than inherent attributes, and merit to be analysed as such.

In my perspective, already the global order of knowledge that enables neoliberal governmentality is made up by different discourses that are not necessarily coherent; and which are constantly evolving to uphold their inner coherence and subjugate other accounts. Delving into the microphysics of power that these discourses structure is thus much more

⁵⁴ As epitomised by the scholarship on local, international, or ‘hybrid’ peacebuilding (cf., for instance, Hellmüller, 2014; or Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013).

⁵⁵ As illustrated by the so-called ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013); see also section 3.7.

fertile an approach for my analysis than resorting to generalisations and simplifications that oppose a supposedly unified ‘international’ to a supposedly unified ‘local’.

Overall, the chosen methodology, case and research design allow linking seemingly unrelated events in a coherent framework of analysis: Firstly, it allows to examine how networks of power/knowledge structure the fields of aid and peacebuilding – fields that present themselves often as ‘untouched’ by power. Secondly, it allows making sense of the myriad of managerial practices, tools and concepts that have become a strong characteristic of these fields over the last years. This entails placing them in their historically and spatially specific conditions of origin, and showing how they realise power effects of influential discourses in the global West in the global South and East. Thirdly, it allows showing the effects of the discourses and practices that form the *dispositif* of neoliberal pacification for the specific case of Myanmar: how they influence the societal *rappports de forces*, how they structure the discursive environment, and how they shape the societal change processes in Myanmar’s current ‘transition’. In sum, my research design allows linking the theoretical considerations and the analysis of concepts with a clear focus on specific practices, and thus, examining the fields of aid and peacebuilding in an innovative, critical way – linking discourse analysis with ethnographic methods.⁵⁶ Hence, the findings this endeavour produced are relevant to the academic fields of critical policy and peace research, but due to their clear link to certain practices also can provide fertile ground for the reflection of practitioners in these fields. For the fields of aid and peacebuilding, whose self-declared goals comprise notions like democratisation, fostering societal transformations, equal development, or empowerment, a more fine-grained understanding of the power effects of its concepts, practices, and institutions would be the least to live up to these lofty ideals.

2.5 Researching aid and peacebuilding with discourse analysis: Methodical considerations

The re-construction (or rather, the co-construction) of discourses that are present around the fields of aid and peacebuilding both in the international sphere, and specifically in Myanmar, is an enormous task I put as the objective of this research project. If one considers the sheer number of actors whose interactions, acts of speech, practices, and institutional structures dynamically form, alter, and reproduce what can be termed a discourse from an analytical perspective, it becomes clear that an exhaustive representation is elusive. Following the ontological and epistemological considerations above, I thus consider every such attempt as a subjective (re-)construction. This also applies to my own analysis, and especially the choice of discursive fragments that constitute my corpus. Already with the decision to integrate one piece, leaving out another one, digging deeper on one aspect and putting another one aside, simplification occurs. Not to say that simplification can be avoided: it is inherent to all sort of reasoning and analysis, and necessary. And simplification necessarily follows a subjective ranking of priorities for analysis. Taking this into account, the standard I set for my analysis is thus not to be exhaustive, or ‘objective’, but that the choices I made during this

⁵⁶ On this point, see section 2.5 below.

research process are inter-subjectively comprehensible. Following this, my research attempts to put out in the open the reflections I made when constructing my corpus. Not only to respond to scientific standards, but also to be transparent of the natural limitations of this research project, and its gaps.

In the same spirit, I also took conscious choices for the writing style of this dissertation. The active voice I predominantly use emphasises the substantial role of my very own constructions and interpretations for my research, and makes the language more accessible. The goal I set for this dissertation is that its language – although academic in nature – aims to be still understandable for other interested audiences. Hence, I tried to resist the temptation to hide my claims in an overly complex sentence structure and ‘discourse analysis-speak’ to insulate them from criticism. A main point of the criticism I voice in this dissertation is directed towards the exclusionary nature of expert debates. I thus try to avoid falling into the same trap with my own work; and try to avoid as much as possible the excluding language that is often found in academia’s writing style.

2.5.1 Corpus construction

The ontological, epistemological and theoretical choices and assumptions I have outlined above also have implications for the use of sources, and how this dissertation is structured. In the attempt to be faithful to these assumptions and consistent in my analysis, no document, writing, or finding can be considered as being ‘objective’, or ‘neutral’. As mentioned above, the production of knowledge cannot be separated from the *rappports de force* in which its production takes place. This implies that this cannot be the case for academic works either; although many dominant philosophies of science rely on exactly that assumption. Accordingly, I cannot uncritically consider academic works as ‘truth’, and take the stock of academic knowledge as an accumulated given on which my analysis builds. To the contrary: I have to explicitly consider large parts of academic work on peace and conflict research, aid, and literature on Burma as the object of my analysis, and subject it to the same grid of analysis as other sources in my corpus.

The only academic works that I use in a less critical way is the literature that I use to form the methodological and theoretical framework for my analysis. But to be consistent, this is not because I would grant them a different status and consider them to be ‘truth’. It is because the selection of this literature follows a different logic: I selected it not on the basis that these pieces would be ‘truth’, but because they offer a fruitful perspective for my analysis. Accordingly, the construction of a coherent and useful corpus is a pivotal step for my analysis, and the process merits description in detail. For this research project, this process came in different phases that enabled me to deal with the different sources, fields of knowledge and strands of literature that I pulled together to form a coherent whole in my analysis. In many ways, these phases also represent how my research question and understanding of the topic has evolved over the years.

I have started of this process with different readings in the academic literature on peace and conflict, which could be subsumed under the label of the ‘liberal peace’ debate. In this strand of literature, a growing number of scholars have started to be interested in the set of

practices and concepts that have been gaining more and more attention since the end of the Cold War. Overall, these authors criticise the underlying assumptions of peacebuilding and the international community.⁵⁷ With the evolution of the debate over the last years, and especially with different academic disciplines entering the field, it has clearly diversified, but remained mainly on a broad, conceptual level when it comes to make sense of the specific practices in peacebuilding I was interested in. As a consequence, its relevance for my analysis was mainly in the form of a starting point.

At the same time, I started to read into a more practice-oriented strand of literature, namely into the field of peacebuilding evaluation. As the question of how to evaluate peacebuilding has only quite recently emerged, relatively few publications in this strand are available, and only few academic publications. This strand thus quickly formed relatively coherent discourses, which were also clearly linked to problematisations, and practices. In contrast to the part of the corpus above, the documents in this part of the corpus are mostly not academic, but consist of manuals, lessons learned, reports, and similar kinds of publications. They thus offer a clear thread running from their problematisation to their proposed solution, which facilitated their analysis considerably. To expand this relatively limited part of my corpus, I soon complemented it with literature from the broader field of evaluation research and organisational sociology, which provides the backdrop for peacebuilding evaluation in terms of approaches, concepts, and methods. This helped to work out the struggles between proponents of different approaches inside of the peacebuilding field, but also to situate their debates in the broader context of social policy debates that took place over the last decades.⁵⁸

With these two strands as a base, I started to further expand my corpus into material which is more directly linked with guiding practice. With this, I refer to the large part of my corpus that consists of manuals on good peacebuilding practice, of international best practices, agreements, standards and frameworks, which define the problem and prescribe the solution for practitioners to ‘improve’ peacebuilding and aid. This part of the corpus equally consists of self-representations of institutions, mission statements, or programme documents, which have proven to be equally fertile ground to re-construct problematisations, or an organisation’s strategies to legitimise its practices. This part of the corpus forms the integral part for my analysis of what I termed the ‘international’ discourses.⁵⁹

At this point, I started to ground my analysis in a specific context. Although I would explicitly refuse to call myself an expert of Burma’s history, nor its people or politics; I had to build up a solid enough background in these topics to be able to situate the different discourses against the backdrop of this country. Or, to put it with Carabine (2001, p. 281), to be able to ‘contextualize the material in the power/knowledge networks of the period’. Thus, emerged a part of my corpus containing mostly academic literature, but also various reports by research institutions or NGOs on the situation in Burma to cover the most recent period. Initially, it mainly served as background information. But over time, it started to reveal analytical value going beyond a better understanding of the context. After a period of where I

⁵⁷ See section 3.7 below.

⁵⁸ See section 3.6.

⁵⁹ See chapter 3.

had to accept more or less every piece of information published on the current situation in Myanmar, increasing familiarity with the context started to trickle in the critical gaze onto the myriad of situation reports. Over time, it thus became possible to develop a certain distance to the way that different organisations – but also academics – write on the topic of Myanmar, and to distinguish typical patterns in problematisations, framings and solutions, in short: discourses. The background chapter on Myanmar's recent history is thus not purely informational, but already contains elements for my analysis that allowed contrasting today's discourses with other historical periods.⁶⁰

Finally, the last part of my corpus consists of a variety of data sources that are held together by the bracket which could be named 'today's discourses' on and in Myanmar. This comprises documents published by different actors in peacebuilding and aid, but also government statements, and news reports. Further, it is in this part of my corpus that I integrated interview data with different actors, as well as the data from observations and participant observation that allows analysing the actual effects of discourses on practices and institutions in the current situation.⁶¹

Put together, these five parts of my corpus should enable me to re- or co-produce current discourses in Myanmar, but also to situate them against different backdrops: Against Myanmar's history, against international standards and international actors' discourses, but equally against their backgrounds and foundations in Western social policy debates and the academic realm. Overall, I forged this corpus to meet the needs of my analysis: Namely to be able to show how the *dispositif* of managed pacification is linking its specific historical origins and discourses in the global West and reproduces these structures and their power effects in the global South and East.

As a consequence, the elements included in my corpus are diverse, and so is their analytical handling. But this form of analysis stems from a conscious choice: A choice that prioritizes breadth over depth, which constantly aims to move to the margins of discourses by contrasting sources with elements from different discourses, and which draws its strength from jumping from one end to another – rather than trying to reconstruct a single discourse in-depth, as a whole. In this sense, my analysis – or at least, the research design – may more closely inspired by what is usually referred to as Foucault's post-structural phase. It is clearly more interested in contrasting different discourses, to highlight their struggles and actor's strategies that dominates Foucault's later works (e.g., Foucault, 1976) than to elaborate on the deeper structures of certain *épistémè* that he prioritized in previous writings (e.g., Foucault, 1966, 1969).

A problem that comes with this research focus is to decide on the point where the corpus is complete – or rather, sufficient for the analytical purpose. If one focuses on a single discourse, there seem to be several ways to delimit the corpus. One could think of defining clear lines like a certain period in time (e.g., documents published from 2013 to 2015), before or after a certain discursive event (e.g., after elections 2010), or a certain set of institutions (e.g., international NGOs working in Myanmar). Inside of these lines, the researcher then would

⁶⁰ See chapter 4.

⁶¹ For more detailed information on the ethnographic data production, see next section 2.5.2.

aim for a relative exhaustiveness in creating the corpus. Compared to a clearly delimited analysis aiming to reproduce a single discourse, the selection of documents for the different parts of my corpus necessarily forms a less coherent whole. Given my research design, and the specific research question for my analysis, this can hardly be avoided. A more in-depth analysis of the different fields that my analysis brings together would simply not be feasible, nor would it be conducive to the quality (let alone readability) of the analysis. In this sense, the diverse character of my corpus stems from conscious choices in research design, and is not resulting from a general scepticism or relativism towards methodological considerations of which post-structural discourse analysis is often accused (e.g., Diaz-Bone, 2006, p. 267 ff.). My epistemological position is not radically post-structuralist in the sense that I would dispute the possibility of a reflection in terms of methods, or analytical steps. Rather, the choices I made in terms of constructing a corpus, selecting interview partners, or in proceeding in the analysis are informed by and tailored to the theoretical framework outlined above. And, as this framework defines a range of aspects to be covered, I had to come up with ‘good enough’ criteria to decide when I had enough material on one field, one actor, or one event.

Given that my analysis covers different discourses, professional fields, and even continents, my strategy to identify relevant material quickly moved to the margins: I started to identify extreme examples, which radically pushed the discourses I was analysing. This helped to develop a critical distance to what is perceived as ‘normal’ in (professional) field, and quickly helped to become aware of certain rules for how speech is structured – or put differently, discourses (cf. Maasen, 2003, p. 125). This allowed moving rapidly from deconstructing the structure of certain discourses to my main research interest, namely the power effects of the discourses analysed. The ‘sampling’ strategy for the material in the corpus could thus be described as looking out for deviant or extreme cases, until a point of theoretical saturation – in the sense of the grounded theory – was reached (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; also Oberhuber & Krzyzanowski, 2008). If the addition of more material did not contribute new insights to my analysis anymore (cf. also Jäger, 2006, p. 104), I considered the point of theoretical saturation to be reached and moved on to the next field.

2.5.2 Ethnographic field work

What sets my research project apart from many other contributions in this field is the substantial part of ethnographic material I produced for my corpus. While discourse analysis is mostly associated with working on documents, I did not want to restrain my corpus to what is written or published. I was following the idea that there is a hierarchy in whose statements will find entrance into written form and published documents, and that typically marginalised perspectives and subjugated knowledge are less likely to do so. Or, to put it in the words of Scott (1990, p. 2): ‘The public transcript, where it is not positively misleading, is unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations.’ Thus, I decided to deliberately unearth what is not part of the easily accessible ‘official story’. This implied that I could not just rely on the medium of the written or published document, but that I had to dig deeper, and go to the field to get accounts that are typically subjugated by the dominant ones. There was thus a ‘warrant’ (Katz, 1997) for ethnographic methods.

On the one hand, this allowed increasing my corpus with new and original material, and extended my analysis considerably. On the other hand, it also raised challenges to integrate these materials stemming from formal interviews, informal conversations, and participant observation. When combining different methods for data collection or to build a corpus, careful considerations on each method's underlying epistemological assumptions are necessary to ensure that they fit the overall theoretical, ontological, and epistemological framework of the analysis (cf. Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). If there is no such fit between method and theory, one risks to either engage in a methodological form of 'anything goes' (cf. Diaz-Bone, 2006, p. 270 f.), or possibly worse, in the view that all sorts of methods can be combined as long as they imitate and follow the standards set by quantitative epistemologies (cf. Schatz, 2009, p. 2).⁶²

For the use of ethnographically inspired methods to complement the corpus for more classical discourse analysis, such a fit between theory and method can be constructed due to similar epistemological grounds on which these methodologies draw (cf. Oberhuber & Krzyzanowski, 2008; Smart, 2012). A range of scholars in different disciplines have engaged in ethnographic methods, or fieldwork in the broader sense over the last decades (cf. Beaud & Weber, 2003); and compelling points and examples have been made for the ethnographic perspectives on aid (Ferguson, 1990; Mosse, 2004; Mosse & Lewis, 2005) and peacebuilding (Autesserre, 2014; Denskus, 2012; Goetschel & Hagmann, 2009). Also certain concepts or entire research agendas stemming from political ethnography travelled to other critical disciplines more associated with discourse analysis; one can for instance think of the recent popularity of Scott's (1985, 1990) concepts of 'hidden transcripts' and 'resistance' in critical peace research.⁶³ And, not least, there are convincing points made (cf. Mosse, 2004) that for going through with my research design foreseeing to study the actual power effects of the dispositives, I will have to go beyond policy papers to observe what their effects on the ground are.

What might be linking the ethnographic method and discourse analysis is that they both imply 'taking a distance' from the field that one wants to study (cf. Abélès, 1991, p. 343). In classical ethnographies, this implied mainly studying exotic fields, to which a certain distance or outside perspective comes more naturally. But with the development of the last decades that have seen ethnography more and more applied 'at home' (Burgess, 1984)⁶⁴, discourse analysis and ethnography now often face the same advantage – or rather, challenge: to manage the balancing act between distance and immersion in certain field. Immersion, to be able to understand the codes and rituals of a certain field, and to develop a sensibility that enables 'to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality' (Schatz, 2009, p. 5). Thus, the researcher has to be 'neck-deep' in a research context. Having said that, the researcher also has to be able to create a distance to his field: If

⁶² Exemplary for this perspective is the book of King et al. (1994), which was one of the forerunners to the boom of 'mixed-methods' in political science. For a salient critique, see J. Johnson (2006).

⁶³ Scott's (1998) later work on states in South-East Asia is another example that a match between my theory and ethnographic methods can be constructed; as there are important similarities in Scott's descriptions of statehood and Foucault's concept of *bio-pouvoir* (see section 3.5 below).

⁶⁴ One of the most prominent examples being Latour and Woolgar's (1986) study of a research laboratory with an ethnographic perspective.

one is completely immersed and working in the field of aid or peacebuilding, a lot of the discourses in these fields are easily perceived as ‘natural’, or ‘professional’, and do not spark the critical interest for their contingency anymore. While immersion is useful to gather and make sense of material, it can equally become hindering when analysing it. Hence, it remains a balancing act between being close and being distant – a continuous struggle to move to the margins.

Given these similarities between the ethnographic method and discourse analysis in the classical sense, ensuring a fit between theory and method thus mainly comes down to the choices on how they are used. Hence, to ensure the same treatment of my ethnographically produced material and the other material in my corpus, I subjected both to the same strategies for selection, and also to the same steps in the analysis.⁶⁵ Still, there are specific points about the ethnographic material in my corpus that I will describe in more detail in the following.

Firstly, the definition of the term ‘field’ merits closer attention for my analysis. In my research, I look at discourses in the professional fields of aid and peacebuilding, and how they are linked to broader discourses on societal level both in the global North and in the country of Myanmar. Hence, a narrow definition of the term ‘field’ constraining it in geographical terms (e.g., to Myanmar) would be misleading, or even counterproductive. Even though this would more clearly match a traditional understanding of field work – in the sense of boarding a plane that takes one to the field – I rather find broader definition of field more appropriate. A definition that includes the whole micro-cosmos of aid and peacebuilding, both ‘at home’ at headquarter level, and ‘on the ground’ – to use the *in vivo* term – in the global South and East. I consider these geographical contexts as linked through a *dispositif*, which realises power effects in the global West, South and East. As a consequence, it would not make sense to leave the different practices, standards, and institutions that are taking place in the global West, or the ‘donor’ countries, out of the picture – especially given the fact that as a researcher and as a program officer, I am immersed in this community. And although I did not plan to formally include these experiences in my research, it would be naïve to believe that they are without influence on my research. In this sense, I think my research has gained a lot of the effects that Schatz (2009) subsumes under the labels of ‘immersion’ and ‘sensibility’; even if I did not produce material in the formal sense during these periods when I was working at headquarters. And finally, while my main research interest was to analyse the power effects of discourses ‘on the ground’ in Myanmar, being based in a practice-oriented research institute working in the same broader field clearly helped at least to contextualise these discourses.

To give an example of this: While I was working on the analysis of the historical conditions that made the ‘focus on results’ possible, and the manifold pressures for practitioners to demonstrate what difference they make,⁶⁶ I was subject to these pressures and reproducing its categories at the same time: I was working as an advisor to establish a project logic for a peacebuilding intervention to demonstrate its ‘results’, or asked to provide a detailed account of how I think a certain research project would make an impact. Thus, if I

⁶⁵ See section 2.5.1 on corpus construction above.

⁶⁶ See chapter 3.

take this broad conceptualisation of the term ‘field’, it is mainly because I consider that participant observation took place throughout the years of my doctoral research. What differs in my approach from a more classical ethnographic setting can be exemplified with the help of the following quote of Evans-Pritchard (1973) on the problems of field research:

‘One enters into another culture and withdraws from it at the same time. One cannot really become a Zande or a Nuer or a Bedouin Arab, and the best compliment one can pay them is to remain apart from them in essentials. In any case one always remains oneself, inwardly a member of one's own society and a sojourner in a strange land’ (Evans-Pritchard, 1973, p. 3 f.).

While perfectly grasping the fine line of immersing into a ‘strange’ culture and withdrawing at the same time from it, the situation described here differs in an important aspect from the one I encountered in my research. If I consider aid and peacebuilding my field, a milieu, or a subculture, rather than a certain geographic context, it was not a strange land that I entered for my research. Rather, it was my own professional field that I was encountering, and my own daily practices that had to become my main research interest. For a large part of my research, it was not about remaining oneself, but about creating the necessary distance to oneself and the environment I have been socialised to. In this sense, I consider the concept of a researcher’s multiple identities (Loftsdóttir, 2003) more useful than a simplifying binary opposition between a researcher and his subject of study. As Loftsdóttir (2003, p. 304) puts it, ‘fieldwork is not acted on passive subjects, but involves complex relationships, which have to do with various kinds of power relationships and interactions’. In the interaction with other people in my research I played various roles; as a practitioner, as a researcher, as a colleague, a subordinate, or as an external advisor. Similarly, different traits or social constructions based on skin pigmentation, gender, or age influence the interaction with people in the researched milieu, along with disciplinary, religious, or ethnic background. In sum, which ones of various traits become salient for the mechanisms of distinction and association (Bourdieu, 1979), and for structuring interactions along power relationships depends on each specific situation. As all of these experiences have influenced my understanding of this field, I assume the same situational complexity of interaction to be found in all relationships. Hence, I vigorously reject simplifying binary oppositions as between researcher and researched; local and international; or self and other. Rather, I am trying to analytically disentangle the complexity of fine grained power relations that are structuring discourses and practices in the fields of aid and peacebuilding. The problem is, if one is socialised into these fine-grained webs, they are easily taken for granted and hardly questioned anymore. The analytical task is thus less to immerse or describe an exotic culture, but to move to the margins of the familiar and the intimate; to establish a critical distance to and to be taken aback by ‘standard’ practices again.

The fieldwork in the narrower sense of the word, in Myanmar, took place in three phases adding up to a total of seven months ‘on the ground’ over a time span of two years. The first phase consisted of one month exploratory research in January 2013, mainly to establish networks and to ‘test the waters’ for the relevance of my research questions. After the preliminary analysis of a few first interviews and mainly promising reactions to the topics I raised, I confirmed my selection of Myanmar as a case for my research. The next phase thus

held the main part of the production of ethnographic material for my corpus, and took place from August to October 2013. A presence in Myanmar to fill identified gaps in my material, but also to feed back preliminary results and to refine my analysis took place from September to November 2014. Finally, these presences in Myanmar are complemented by additional (short term) visits, and by my move to Myanmar in September 2015, where I have been living since and where most of the editing process of my research has been done.

During all these presences in the field, I collected non-formalised data through participant observation by attending coordination meetings, exchange fora for practitioners, or by facilitating workshops and trainings for local partner organisations in the context of my work for swisspeace. But the main emphasis was clearly on identifying interview partners for open ended, semi-structured interviews. The sample of people that I interviewed was aiming to cover as many different perspectives as possible. I thus started off with a grid of organisations or typical actors of aid and peacebuilding that I wanted to cover; namely a certain number of national NGOs, international NGOs, bi- and multilateral donor organisations, as well as the government actors. In the process, further categories emerged as important, and I subsequently integrated them into my corpus: political activists, independent consultants, and government related think tanks.⁶⁷ To identify these I used networks of colleagues as entry points, but could also rely on my own networks from previous work experience in other contexts. Snowball sampling⁶⁸ brought up more organisations and possible interview partners, until I considered a category of actors as theoretically saturated (similarly to the strategy to construct the overall corpus).⁶⁹ What was different compared to the construction of my overall corpus was the larger role that interview partner's knowledge played in further guiding my research. In identifying further salient categories of actors for my research, I relied heavily on interview partner's in-depth knowledge of how their professional fields are structured; and what kind of positions and discourses specific actors would be likely to reproduce. My research strategy thus followed the very simple assumption of sociological sampling, namely 'that the people whose society is to be studied are the very best source of information on how to put together and empirically grounded, representative sample of that society' (Gold, 1997, p. 390).

In total, I conducted 71 interviews with 81 people, lasting mostly for one hour to one hour and a half.⁷⁰ Naturally, this sample is also the result of practical constraints, and not exclusively guided by theoretical considerations. A major practical limitation in the choice of interview partners was language: As my command of Burmese is not sufficient to conduct meaningful interviews, I had to restrict my interview partners to people who speak English, French, or German. While this could be a major flaw for study with a primarily social anthropological rationale, I consider it to be justifiable for my research focus: As I am

⁶⁷ The categories of actors ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), Burmese military (*tatmadaw*), and the government have not been covered with interviews due to access problems; either because of the political climate in Myanmar at the time or constraints in terms of time and resources for travelling. The reconstruction of the their (official) discourses thus relies on public statements, newspaper interviews, and similar sources.

⁶⁸ Snowball sampling means to ask every interview for contacts or introduction to further possible interview partners that they could think of.

⁶⁹ See section 2.5.1 above.

⁷⁰ For a breakdown of interview partners and their categories, see appendix 8.1.

studying the discourses and power effects in professional fields where the main language is English, the interview situation to a certain degree can be seen as reproducing other typical situations where the interviewees have to make their points in English. This thus enabled me to observe and analyse the concepts they use and the discursive strategies they employ in a situation similar to their professional setting. Although it can be seen as imposing a foreign language to interview partners, which in itself is likely to reproduce a clear power differential between the researcher and the interviewee, it is exactly this situation that my research aims to analyse. It is the struggles for legitimacy that take place in a realm that is dominated by the English language. Although the extension of these struggles taking place in different fields (that would most likely be dominated by Burmese or other local languages) would be interesting, including these arenas would give my analysis another direction. Rather, confining my analysis to discursive fragments produced by people that have at least a minimal command of English allowed focusing the analysis on the specific actors that are directly involved in the arena of the struggles for legitimacy in aid and peacebuilding in Myanmar.

Furthermore, one has to be cautious not to romanticize local languages as a resort where ‘locals’ would be able to speak more freely, or less constrained by power structures. If one considers the societal *rappports de force* in Myanmar’s society, or rather, societies, Burmese (Bamar) has an equally – or even more – subjugating force *vis-à-vis* the ethnic minority languages like English. Language is one of the main issues in Myanmar’s longstanding armed conflicts, and has been used as a political strategy to constitute Myanmar according to different elites’ images.⁷¹ Approaching this issue with the belief that speaking Bamar would create a space for conversation that could be less touched by power structures separating a ‘Westerner’ from a ‘local’ would be both grossly simplifying and naïve. Pragmatically speaking, this would rather open up a plethora of nuances in discourses that are structuring the interactions between different groups inside of what is often perceived as being the ‘local’. And this would face me with a field to analytically make sense of for which I am much less equipped than for analysing discourses specific and limited to aid and peacebuilding. Nonetheless, the restriction to material that is available in English or other Western languages is a limitation of my corpus, and has thus has to be acknowledged.

Also, I would like to emphasize that the interview situation cannot be understood as a space free of the structuring forces of discourses that my theoretical framework assumes to be at work in society and on a global level.⁷² Asad (1979, p. 91) reminds us that the encounter in an ethnographical setting is as much structured by the encounter of the researcher and the researched, as it is structured by the global power relations that gave rise to the discipline of anthropology and its status today. Power/knowledge and the structuring force of discourses are not miraculously suspended in such a situation. It is thus not a situation where I assume that interview partners would speak an objective ‘truth’, or where I can apply certain methodical measures to make them be more ‘truthful’ and ‘honest’. Many considerations in literature on ethnographical are discussing the issues of building a close enough relationship with a community, so that interview partners are willing to share things they would not give

⁷¹ See chapter 4.

⁷² See also considerations on page 55 above.

away on the first encounter. The relationship of trust seen to be particularly crucial in highly conflictive environments, where sharing one's perspective and position always goes hand in hand with security considerations. Thus, it is generally advised to have several interviews over a certain timespan to ensure the quality of information, but also to build up trust (e.g., see Wood, 2006, p. 375).

For my research purpose, I turned this problem into an opportunity; starting from considerations formulated by Mosse (1994) when he critically looked at the situation of information gathering facing 'local' communities with external researchers or development practitioners. He is starting from the very foundations of constructivist ontology:

'I suggest a view of local information and knowledge itself which differs from that commonly held in practice. Information does not just exist 'out there' waiting to be 'collected' or 'gathered', but is constructed, or created, in specific social contexts for particular purposes' Mosse (1994, p. 499).

Thus, interview partners will always follow certain discursive rules that they deem appropriate for this very situation of the interview; and their speech will always have more to do with an official statement than a private, confiding conversation. It will necessary be more of the official transcript than of the hidden one in the sense of Scott (1985, 1990). But this is exactly what my research is interested in. To a certain extent at least, the interview situation reproduces a situation that takes place on daily basis when working in the aid or peacebuilding field: To explain and justify one's ideas, approaches, projects, by relating to the language of professionals.⁷³ Be it by appropriating this language as a resource, or by openly criticising its concepts – in both cases, the professional discourse is providing the framework in which the exchange takes place and thus allows to observe discourses 'at work'. My analysis of the interview material produced can thus be understood as delving into the micro-physics of power, trying to consciously take them into account; rather than the quest to access a hidden transcript, or an objectively 'truer' statement by an interview partner.

Interviews were in most cases recorded, except the interviewee did not wish to go on tape. Given the large amount of interview material, and that they only represent a part of the material in my corpus, I did not transcribe all interviews in their entirety. Rather, I screened the recordings and selected extreme or outstanding cases to be transcribed as a whole interview, while for others I only marked key passages for transcription. The so-collected discourse fragments were then integrated into my corpus like written sources.

2.5.3 Ethical considerations

In the specific environment of a society that has seen armed conflict and authoritarian rule for decades, research is confronted with a range of ethical considerations that have to be taken into account from the outset. The basic imperative to follow is to do no harm (AAA, 2012). But what does that mean in practice? In the spirit of transparency, I outline my considerations

⁷³ This effect of people being used to give a specific representation they deem relevant to the outsider interviewing them has also been observed by Prasse-Freeman (2014b, p. 113) when doing field-research in Myanmar.

and measures taken to mitigate possible negative repercussions over the course of my research project in the following.

In the complex environment of conflict, it is clearly naïve to think that as a researcher, every possible negative repercussion can be foreseen. Also the belief that informants can be fully protected is a treacherous one (Pettigrew, Shneiderman, & Harper, 2004, p. 23). ‘Doing no harm’ thus demands a constant reassessment, and a sensitivity to identify negative effects when they take place – even if they happen in unexpected ways. Further, one needs to be in continuous dialogue with one’s ethical code of conduct, and assess for each situation whether measures to mitigate harm can be taken – or whether the research should be stopped. Although harm can be done in many ways, there are specific areas that demand increased intention, as they are known as the most problematic ones. Particularly, this concerns the questions around informed consent, anonymity and protection of informants, repatriation of data, and dissemination of findings (cf. Wood, 2006).

Myanmar has known authoritarian rule for decades, and also had an elaborate system of informants in society that brought every kind of behaviour to the attention of authorities.⁷⁴ Traditionally, this came with negative consequences for people that were seen or believed to speak with outsiders, or who engaged in any kind of behaviour that was considered political. Although Myanmar entered into a phase of transition, where the government allows for more liberties than hitherto, my research still took place in a grey zone. While most interview partners considered my research questions to be unproblematic, I still took precautions aiming at sheltering them from negative repercussions caused by their participation in my research. And this may not only concern negative effects from the side of the government. Given the critical perspective of my research on aid, it could also mean negative repercussions from their employers, donor organisations, or other actors.

Firstly, I sought informed consent from all interview partners in a conversation before the interview. This meant to explain them my role as a researcher, their role in my research, and what will happen to the data they produce. This included the question whether they are willing to have our conversation recorded. If they agreed, I made it clear that they can feel free to interrupt the interview at any time if they should feel uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation, and placed the recorder within their reach after showing them the ‘stop’-button.

Part of the informed consent was to guarantee full anonymity to my interview partners. Although full anonymity can be considered elusive in such a context, I made my best efforts to anonymise names, organisations mentioned, and other quotes that would easily allow identifying an interview participant. Interviews and quotations from interviews have been coded in an anonymized system, with the key to attribute names to the numbers saved in a separate, encrypted, and password protected file.

In some instances, the guarantee for anonymity conflicts with the research’s need to contextualise a person’s statements in the specific power/knowledge networks of its environment (Pettigrew et al., 2004, p. 23). Usually, I thus provided the organisational

⁷⁴ See chapter 4.

background in broad categories like ‘local NGO’ or ‘donor organisation’. This should give enough background to position their statements in the discursive environment, but not enough to attribute certain quotes to a certain person. One of the drawbacks of this is that it easily creates the impression that I am assuming for certain groups of actors to automatically follow certain discourses. This is unfortunate, especially because in my analysis I invest a lot of efforts to work out the more active, individual positioning and deviations from discourses of certain actors. But when faced with the trade-off between more nuanced representation of my analysis and better protection for my interview partners, I chose the latter.

For the dissemination of the findings, I consciously kept a low profile. I fed these back to interview partners where possible in private conversations, and only used the anonymized data for publication purposes. Also in exchange events in country, where I was giving inputs based on the findings of my research, I carefully made sure that I made no specific references that would facilitate an identification of my interview partners. Finally, for the repatriation of the data, I encrypted and uploaded the audio files to a secured cloud storage if internet connection in country permitted. After this, I wiped the files from my hard drives and audio recorders. If internet did not allow uploading the files, I encrypted and stored them with anonymised file names on my computer’s hard drive.

While these are the areas where harm can be inflicted most directly, there are also secondary effects to take into account, which might not be as directly visible. If one goes through the typical areas of causing negative unintended consequences identified for humanitarian aid (Anderson, 1999), one can easily see areas that are also of concern for research activities. First of all, my very presence as a researcher has an effect: it adds to the influx of expatriates into Yangon, which has had considerable effects on local prices, wages, and rents. Living in an apartment contributes to the overheating of Yangon’s real estate market, where prices have risen exorbitantly over the last few years – coming with the usual effects of enriching a small elite and increasing gentrification in the city. While I tried to mitigate this effect by sharing apartment for my research visits, it is clear that my effects on price levels cannot be fully avoided. Even the most notorious haggler will pay a higher price for many commodities compared to a local – as soon as she or he is recognised as an expatriate.⁷⁵

Secondly, my activities as a researcher – mainly to meet people from national NGOs to conduct interviews – contributed to the strain that is put on these organisations by the constant influx of new INGOs, donors and other organisations. In the current situation, national NGOs spend a considerable amount of time to meet representatives of newly arrived organisations to explore new partnerships. This practice has reached a level where it effectively keeps the staff of these organisations from doing their actual work. Thus, it has become detrimental to the causes these organisations are trying to address. While I tried to limit the time that I claimed on my interview partners, and showed as much flexibility in terms of meeting over lunch or out of office times, also this negative effect could not be fully avoided.

⁷⁵ These and the following considerations have also been developed in a working paper to inform swisspeace’s engagement in Myanmar: see Bächtold, Gasser, Palmiano, Alluri, and Stein (2014).

Finally, the overall setting in which my research took place can be considered as problematic. Having a Westerner embarking on researching a developing country inevitably carries the notion of the Westerner looking at the other, using an institutionalized framework imbued with power/knowledge to make sense of the other (Asad, 1979), and thus reproduces a system of global structures of power hierarchies. As outlined above, even if one tries to meet on an equal footing, the structuring forces of a *dispositif* that foresees clear hierarchies in the encounter of the researcher or practitioner from the Global North with the researched from the Global South are not suspended. Even in the attempt to mitigate them, I necessarily related and thus reproduced them.

That even a research project aiming to deconstruct these structures of power/knowledge reproduces them – at least to a certain extent – is ironic, but can hardly be avoided. As for all the considerations above, I tried to mitigate negative effects through constant re-assessment and increased sensitivity to possible negative effects. But a concluding judgement of whether the positive effects of my research outweigh the negative impacts remains elusive.

3

broad lines: aid, peace, and results in international discourses

This chapter aims to provide an outline of the global discursive ‘landscape’ of aid and peacebuilding. It attempts to give the reader an overview of an immense field; spanning the globe through a variety of discourses, practices, and institutions. Proceeding with this task from a discourse analytical point of view is not exactly limiting the scope of such an endeavour: Rather than limiting the necessary elements to be elaborated on, the discourse analytical methodology expands on the elements that could be incorporated in such an overview: Not only by linking the discourses firmly rooted in this field to other discourses in other fields, but also by sharpening the gaze for how these discourses are the result of historical processes. Analysing discourses in the fields of aid and peacebuilding is thus an immense task, and I cannot realistically start from the idea that my following attempt will be exhaustive in any way. My re-constructions (or co-constructions) of the discourses present in these fields will necessarily will be sketchy, and I will have to limit myself to elaborate on a few aspects of these discourses. Of utmost importance then is the decision on a central theme, running like a thread through the different elements I would like to cover.

I took the decision on such a thread based on the function that this chapter has in the overall framework of my analysis. As a reminder, I proceed from a global level of discourse formation to the power effects and practices in one specific country context. At the same time, this means proceeding from the abstract to the concrete, from the generalized concepts to their application in a particular geographic context. Accordingly, and to make this task achievable, I will restrict my overview to the elements that are important for my analysis of the more concrete effects in Myanmar to which I will proceed in the following chapters⁷⁶. It is thus setting the stage for the more fine-grained analysis that is to follow by sketching out the bigger framework or global context that the processes in Myanmar are situated in.

Ordering element in this chapter, but also my research as whole, will thus be the ‘focus on results’. It is a simple concept, but an immensely powerful one, as I will show throughout my analysis. Since its emergence, it has unfolded an immense effect on the discursive ‘landscape’ that revolves around the fields of aid and peacebuilding. The ‘focus on results’ as a *leitmotif*

⁷⁶ Namely chapters 4 and 5.

allows tying together the vast array of elements that make up my corpus into a framework for analysis, but also a sequence of a narrative that makes sense. As I will argue throughout this chapter, the ‘focus on results’ can be seen as an archetype of the deployment of neoliberal governmentality; and as such, realises its power effects in enabling specific understandings of aid and peacebuilding, and in legitimising a set of specific practices.

In the following, I will thus work out the defining elements that have led to the current formation of the discourses of aid and peacebuilding. Using mainly discourse fragments stemming from the context of the UK for this suggests itself, as it can be seen as the epicentre of many of the specific historical processes that made the ‘focus on results’ a reality today. In the following sections, I will examine the different understandings of accountability, and also turn to different understandings of the role of science in public policy that have been instrumental in shaping today’s discourses. After sketching out of these different elements that have been influential in forging today’s aid discourse, I will then turn to the discourse of peacebuilding, and show how the elements of neoliberal governmentality also have become an important part of this discourse. Finally, I argue based on the findings in this chapter that the discourses of aid and peacebuilding nowadays are both part of the same, more recent *dispositif* of managed pacification.

3.1 Setting the stage: the failure of aid

Among bilateral donors, the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) is a particularly interesting actor for the analysis of the discourses in international aid and peacebuilding. In comparison to other bi-lateral donors, its statements, documents, reports and guidelines are particularly illustrative⁷⁷ in the task of re-constructing the system of rules regulating speech. A paragraph from DFID is thus perfectly suited as a starting point for my analysis. In their organisational results-framework, DFID states that

‘DFID’s Business Plan sets out a commitment to make British aid more effective by improving transparency and value for money. Improving the measurement, management and reporting of the results achieved through the aid programme is an important part of this agenda. By measuring results we can get a much better idea of what works and what doesn’t and can refine our programmes accordingly. Monitoring results provides us with an incentive to look at the evidence, innovate and learn. This helps ensure that our aid is focussed on the best value poverty reduction programmes. With a growing aid budget in the current financial climate we also have a particular duty to show that we are achieving value for money for every pound of taxpayers’ money that we spend on development’ (DFID, 2012b, p. 1).

Although only a short statement, these lines already show the most important traits to describe the formation of this discourse: thematic choices, the problematisation of international aid, the relationship to other discourses, and the link to practices which are enabled in this discourse.

At the first glance, most striking about this paragraph is the specific problematisation of aid. The choice of words like ‘value for money’, ‘best value’, ‘aid budget’, ‘financial climate’,

⁷⁷ Conservative newspapers like *The Economist* (2012) consider DFID a ‘trendsetter in the aid business’; and their focus on results has been described as ‘bullish’ (Tavakoli, 2012).

and finally, ‘every pound of taxpayer’s money’ makes clear that aid has to be understood chiefly in monetary terms. Overall, these lines read like a defence; a defence against the allegation that aid is not effective, that aid is not transparent or accountable, and that aid is not value-for-money. Every paragraph, even every single phrase seems to be dripping with the affirmation that aid is, indeed, not just a big waste of money. Thus, a range of measures to improve aid are proposed: Improving measurement, management and reporting – which all deserve closer analysis below. For the moment, important to take from this that each of these propositions reinforces the impression that aid so far has been a failure; but that now – finally – the necessary steps are taken to improve it. But, with the promise to be accountable ‘for every pound of taxpayers’ money’ it is still presented as a potentially wasteful part of government spending, and thus there has to be a possibility to keep it under close supervision.

One could argue that this document is the justification for a specific range of measures to be taken, and thus very pronounced in its problem statement. But this tone is much more systematic for the publications of DFID. As an example, the short self-description of DFID on its webpage reads as follows:

‘The Department for International Development (DFID) leads the UK’s work to end extreme poverty. We’re ending the need for aid by creating jobs, unlocking the potential of girls and women and helping to save lives when humanitarian emergencies hit’ (DFID, 2015b).

Usually, self-descriptions of organisations on their webpage emphasize the importance of their work, the relevance of their mission, and the need for the work they do. If a department tasked with providing aid promises to end ‘the need for aid’ itself, this is telling. The promise to end the need for aid is nothing less than a promise of DFID to make itself obsolete in one of its core domains. This may not necessarily be surprising for someone who is used to the different discourses around aid. For a long time, aid has been constituted as a necessary evil at best, or worse, as a complete waste of money that achieves nothing. Its abolition or a situation where there is no need for aid anymore at the nearest possible point in the future is thus a logical consequence.

That this is to be achieved with giving the aid professionals the ‘incentives’ to improve is not a coincidence, either. It implies that to make aid better, a solution from the economic realm is best suited – programmatic, as I will show below.⁷⁸ But it also has a different effect: invoking that incentives are needed to ‘look at evidence, innovate, and learn’, and that ‘monitoring results’ finally provides these incentives identifies the problem in the realm of aid itself. It is aid, or more precisely, bad aid, non-effective aid, non-innovative aid that is responsible that poverty has still not (been) ended. Other explanatory factors for the persistence of poverty are excluded by the choice of theory performed by the discourse – e.g., a highly unequal and exploitative global economic system, the historic heritage of colonialism, or the wars that have been waged in ‘poor’ countries (sometimes even by the aid-providing country itself).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ See next section 3.2.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Eyoh and Sandbrook (2003).

The statement that aid is failing occurs regularly, and it is an important characteristic of the discourse of aid. It is widespread in problematisations of aid by politicians of different ideological backgrounds, in bi-lateral donor's documents, in practitioner's accounts, but also among scholars. For example, in her book *dead aid*, Moyo (2009) prominently declared that aid is not working, and that market-based approaches would be the solution for poor countries to prosper. As another example, the economist Easterly (2006b, p. 3) opens the very first chapter of his book – saliently entitled *the white man's burden* – by referring to a speech by later British Prime Minister Gordon Brown:

‘[H]e gave a compassionate speech about the tragedy of extreme poverty afflicting billions of people, with millions of children dying from easily preventable diseases. He called for a doubling of foreign aid, a Marshall Plan for the world's poor, and an International Financing Facility (IFF) against which tens of billions more dollars toward future aid could be borrowed to rescue the poor today. He offered hope by pointing out how easy it is to do good. Medicine that would prevent half of all malaria deaths costs only twelve cents a dose. A bed net to prevent a child from getting malaria costs only four dollars. Preventing five million child deaths over the next ten years would cost just three dollars for each new mother. [...]

Gordon Brown was silent about the other tragedy of the world's poor. This is the tragedy in which the West spent \$2.3 trillion on foreign aid over the last five decades and still had not managed to get twelve-cent medicines to children to prevent half of all malaria deaths. The West spent \$2.3 trillion and still had not managed to get four-dollar bed nets to poor families. The West spent \$2.3 trillion and still had not managed to get three dollars to each new mother to prevent five million child deaths. [...] It's a tragedy that so much well-meaning compassion did not bring these results for needy people.

The use of the word ‘tragedy’ is symptomatic here. While Gordon Brown calls extreme poverty a tragedy, costing the lives of millions of children, Easterly situates the tragedy somewhere else. According to him, the ‘real’ tragedy lies in the fact that ‘the West’ spent \$2.3 trillion on foreign aid, and did not manage to accomplish something with it. Simply put, because aid is failing, the ‘needy people’ still suffer. To be clear: Easterly is not opposed to the ‘well-meaning compassion’ he sees as driving aid *per se*. What he is criticising, is the current way that aid is provided, and is proposing a different approach to it. Still, his problematisation could easily be used by a politician calling for the abolition of aid – once and for all. That this problematisation is both acceptable and used across different (political) positions towards aid shows not that it is objectively ‘true’, but that it is part of a larger discourse of aid regulating what can be said, and how.

So far, I have fished in the waters of professional's discourses, and academic publications. A short glance into media's discourse in Britain helps understanding the defensive stance that seems inherent to the formation of the discourse of aid professionals. An article in the conservative British tabloid newspaper *Daily Mail* (2014) is illustrative for the tone in that discourse. In the aftermath of a flood in the UK, the tabloid published an article entitled: ‘Put UK flood victims FIRST: As flood-hit Britons endure unimaginable hardship, the Mail launches a petition calling for cash to be taken from the foreign aid budget to help them’. The readers were invited to sign a petition launched by the same newspaper, reading:

‘Dear Prime Minister,

I strongly urge you to divert some of the £11 billion a year spent on overseas aid to ease the suffering of British flood victims, and to build and maintain flood defences to prevent a repetition of this crisis.’

Further, it cites a local conservative Member of Parliament (MP) saying:

‘We could do a lot of good work with not very much money here. We need the money now to repair this – if we can sort the system out, dredge the rivers, we won’t need it again. So many millions of pounds of our foreign aid budget are just wasted’ (Daily Mail, 2014).

It goes on by quoting another conservative MP with:

‘Charity begins at home. There’s a real emergency. The overwhelming majority of my constituents would like to see this money spent on alleviating the misery of the people in the West Country’ (Daily Mail, 2014).

This is followed by a list pointing out ‘how they’ve squandered your billions on vanity projects’, which is introduced by the statement that

‘Britain’s £11 billion overseas aid programme has become a byword for waste, inefficiency, and political correctness. Critics say much has gone on vanity projects or to countries that don’t really need it’ (Daily Mail, 2014).

While the overall tone pointing out the ‘waste of money on foreign aid’ of this discourse fragment is already illustrative in itself; there are a few more nuanced elements that I would like to emphasise. Firstly, this discourse fragment operates from a distinction that separates the ‘real emergency’ at home from the ‘emergency overseas’. It opposes the ‘not very much money’ that could be spent to help the flood victims in Britain, to the ‘millions’ and ‘billions’ that are spent overseas in vain, or to ‘countries that don’t really need it’. If one looks at the following list pointing out how aid money is ‘wasted’, it mentions ‘[m]illions towards disaster recovery following floods abroad, including £42.5 million to aid agencies in Pakistan in 2011’ (Daily Mail, 2014). Here, there is not even an explanation why this money has to be considered as ‘wasted’; the fact that these amounts of money have been spent abroad (and not at home) is already enough to make the point. The discourse of aid in this article is following thus constitutes the emergency at home as the ‘real’ one, while the emergency abroad is denied the status of a ‘real’ emergency. The ‘misery’ at home thus is constructed as meriting more attention than the ‘misery’ abroad; and this is performed without any reference to the scope of each flood.

Also the response to the flood at home is constructed in a different way: After ‘dredging’ a few rivers, there will be no more need for aid. It thus assumes that the communities in the UK are able to quickly solve the problem they have been struck with, while the situation in overseas becomes a bottomless pit into which millions have been thrown over decades. The underlying problematisations for ‘at home’ and ‘overseas’ are fundamentally different: At ‘home’, the problem is easily and quickly solvable; while ‘overseas’ such an attempt happens in vain. It is this problematisation that enabled the discourses of aid to build up the ‘focus on

results’ – to show that aid spent overseas is not a doomed endeavour from the outset, or a complete ‘waste of money’.⁸⁰

But there also rings a second nuance in this discourse fragment of the *Daily Mail*. The list of points goes on with ‘enormous sums’ that go to China and India, although both of them have ‘space programmes’, and the ‘[l]avish salaries for aid officials’. Both of them rely on the criticism that aid is ‘just not done the right way’. As this implies, either aid is not stopped when not needed anymore, or there is even self-interest of the ‘aid officials’ to draw a benefit from ongoing expenditure on aid. The people in the ‘aid industry’ are thus not doing their jobs the right way, or are even deliberately not doing them the right way. Both versions enable the establishment of stricter control measures to be seen as a legitimate and appropriate response to this problem. And the emphasis on being accountable for ‘every pound of taxpayer’s money’ is clearly visible in the discourse of development professionals.

One might say that the influence of such a tabloid claim is negligible. I would object vigorously: The formation of discourse that this article is drawing on is not only influential for tabloid news. This tabloid article is following discourses that structure the statements of politicians⁸¹ and scientists as well. If one assumes that discourses structure how we say things, what can be said, and what is excluded from being said, then it is not the influence of this tabloid article that matters. The point here is that this statement is enabled in a discourse that gives rise to it; and a broader and specific order of knowledge without which it would not make sense, would not be seen as appropriate, or even be considered. And, it is the discursive environment that produces actors’ strategies, and shapes their practices. Therefore, it is the same discourse that makes the American researchers Bütte, Major, and de Mello e Souza (2012) publish a study that examines the ‘common claim that aid NGOs systematically prioritize their organizational self-interest when they allocate private aid’ (Bütte et al., 2012, p. 571). And even if they don’t find evidence to support this hypothesis in their study, already their research question is enabled, made relevant or topical by this very discourse of aid.

This doesn’t necessarily mean that everybody agrees with the political positions that are embedded in such a formation of discourse. A short glance at the over 2600 comments by readers of the online article quoted above quickly makes clear that not everybody shares the point of view of the article (although quite a few commenters seem to vocally do so). Also, the article in the *Daily Mail* was subjected to a few satirical responses that put it into perspective,⁸² but it is still evident that the formation of discourse underlying this article is highly influential: With every response to it, the discursive formation gets reproduced, stabilised and legitimised. Thus, the question remains: What are the societal conditions and broader discourse structures that enable the formation of discourse that the article in the *Daily Mail* is drawing on? How did it become possible to be outraged about expenditures on foreign

⁸⁰ See section 3.4 below.

⁸¹ These discourses also provide the background for a statement like the one by a UK right-wing MP who sees expenditure on foreign aid primarily to keep ‘Guardian-reading, sandal-wearing, lentil-eating do-gooders with a misguided guilt complex’ happy (Mason, 2014).

⁸² For example, one widely circulated response by the satirical online newspaper the *Daily Hawk* (P. Wilson, 2014) claimed that the African Union pledged aid to flood struck Britons who lost their ‘second homes’.

aid in the context of a (minor) flood in the UK? And, if aid is seen as a constant failure, why has it not been abolished?

This formation of the discursive strategies on aid – here, its problematisation as an expensive failure – also has another effect: It constitutes aid as the ‘thing’ that is supposed to end poverty, and to bring about development. Aid is the system of institutions, actors and practices that was put in place by ‘rich’ countries to end poverty in ‘poor’ countries. Hence, if poverty persists, it is the failure of aid to blame. This provides the rationale that submits aid to a continuous, never ending circle of criticism and a constant pressure to improve. While aid cannot realistically be expected to deliver on the goal to end poverty – after all, aid is just one factor in a complex interplay of global historical processes that created today’s situation – it is still measured and measuring itself towards this benchmark. The set of institutions, actors and practices that make up the system of international aid has become surprisingly willing to integrate the element of the criticism addressed at its core: Not in the sense that it would accept the proposition that it should be abolished, but in the sense that it comes up with a constant proliferation of new concepts, approaches or technologies to improve its deployment, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, or its management.⁸³ The focus on results is one example of how the ‘will to improve’ others inherent to aid (cf. Li, 2007) has now also turned onto aid itself.

If one considers the network of INGOs, donor institutions and local partner organisations, the practices of assessment; capacity building, and training, the documents of poverty reduction strategies and logframes, and maybe even the big white Toyotas and Land Rovers as a part of an *dispositif* whose initial strategic function was to help the poor,⁸⁴ the continuous criticism and the sequence of reforms have to be considered a part of the *dispositif* as well. Similar to Foucault’s (1975) observation that the continuous criticism towards the prison for its failure to eliminate criminality never entailed serious consideration of alternatives, also aid is facing continuous criticism for its failure without being challenged in its core. But if the aid *dispositif* is producing constantly failing ‘solutions’ (cf. Ferguson, 1990; Heathershaw, 2008) to the problem it was installed for, this begs the question of what its strategic function ‘actually’ is.

The answer to this question can only be given after I analysed the various consequences of this *dispositif* realising its power effects. I will thus first turn to a more detailed description of the formation of discourses embedded in this *dispositif*, the practices they enable, and their contextualisation in broader networks of power/knowledge.

⁸³ On a side note, aid has been surprisingly willing to integrate other criticisms before, and managed to integrate them into its discourses and standard practices. A good example for this is the issue of participation of ‘those to be developed’. With the creation of a specific set of tools (in this case, participatory rural appraisal), the aid *dispositif* manages a criticism without changing at its core. On this issue, see Cooke and Kothari (2001), or Mosse (1994).

⁸⁴ I’ll come back to point on this strategic function and how it has evolved later in this chapter (section 3.5).

3.2 The rise of neoliberal governmentality

To better understand the problematisation of aid sketched out in the section above, I now proceed to situate this specific formation of discourse in the broader discursive environment on which it is drawing. This aims at giving a clearer idea on the discourses and historic processes that make such a problematisation possible in the first place, before I analyse the practices or ‘solutions’ that are already embedded in this formation of discourse. That the whole discourse of aid is shaped by the underpinning allegation that aid is a failure is not an isolated phenomenon. It is part of a broader shift in the order of knowledge that structures our understanding of the role of the state, basic assumptions about the nature of society, and what it means to govern.

Overall, the formation of the discourse of aid can be situated as part of a larger development that Foucault (2004) has analysed as the rise of neoliberal governmentality.⁸⁵ Every form of (social) policy is submitted to the sneaking suspicion of being ineffective, and that there might be more efficient ways to address the identified problem with market-based solutions, and principles and technologies from the private sector are now applied to judge the necessity and effectiveness of state actions.

Noteworthy here is that the emergence of neoliberal governmentality cannot be understood exclusively as the ideological program of a specific government – usually identified as the British conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. Rose (1999, p. 27) argues that it was as much the availability of certain new technologies and instruments to govern that enabled the rise of neoliberal governmentality that went beyond just one party’s program. He speaks of

‘contingent lash-ups of thought and action, in which various problems of governing were resolved through drawing upon instruments and procedures that happened to be available, in which new ways of governing were invented in a rather ad hoc way, particular locales, and various other existing techniques and practices were merely dressed up in new clothes. But, in the course of this process, a certain rationality, call it neo-liberalism, came to provide a way of linking up these various tactics, integrating them in thought so that they appeared to partake in a coherent logic’ (Rose, 1999, p. 27).

As a consequence, discourses drawing on these principles have realized their power effects in virtually every domain of policy-making, including the fields of aid and peacebuilding.⁸⁶ The forces behind the rise of neoliberalism as a political ideology, as well as its effects have been extensively documented, discussed, criticised, and defended from a variety of perspectives (see, for instance, Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2010; Ponte, Gibbon, & Vestergaard, 2011; Prasad, 2006; Rose, 1999; Žižek, 1989). Hence, I restrict myself to the aspects that are important for my analysis and concentrate on the implications for the discursive environment for social policies.

⁸⁵ See section 2.2.3 above.

⁸⁶ For instance, Duffield (2001b, p. 316) observes ‘the introduction of ‘new public management’ [...] to the public-private networks of aid practice’. Also for the field of peacebuilding, scholars have noted an increasing bureaucratization (Goetschel & Hagmann, 2009), or a ‘technocratic turn’ (Mac Ginty, 2013).

The discourses on the state in this neoliberal governmentality have quickly changed the problematisation of all kinds of social policies: in terms of their costs. As Foucault expressed it already in 1979,

‘the economic criticism that the neoliberals try to apply to the policy of the government means to filter [...] all activity of the public authorities in the terms contradiction, lack of consistency, in the terms of non-sense’ (Foucault, 2004, p. 253).

Accordingly, the rise of neoliberal governmentality comes with a formation of discourse of social policy that, as a thematic choice, puts its cost first, and, as a theoretic choice, puts its cost in the argument of the budgets of the state that have to be reduced, and that ‘less government’ is better for society (cf. Di Palma, 2013; Garapon, 2012). What is certainly noteworthy about this broad argument is that it has become a deeply embedded part of the current order of knowledge.⁸⁷ This shift in the formation of discourse of social policy has become so deeply entrenched over a few decades that it has become something we take for granted; a premise that we are not questioning anymore (Rose, 1999, p. 98 ff.). While this discourse was championed by the governments of Thatcher in the UK, or Reagan in the United States, also the parties of the left that succeeded these governments followed the same foundations for the problematisation of social policy (Peck, 2010). One could think, for instance, of the New Labour government that was elected into office in the UK in 1997 (Schmidt, 2002), or the German social democrats that formed the government together with the Green party in 1998 (Butterwegge, 2001), whose programs and understandings of the role a state should play in society contrasted not with their neoliberal predecessors, but rather with their own historical positions.

Noteworthy about the overall phenomenon of neoliberal governmentality is that it is not actually reducing the amount of governing. Not only in the sense of Foucault’s (2004) analysis, who observed that a constant governmental intervention to guarantee the liberties for economic liberalism becomes necessary. It is also in a more direct sense: in the attempt to make government activity more efficient, accountable, and less wasteful, government activity overall increases through practices of audit, targeting, benchmarking and accountability (Broome & Quirk, 2015; cf. MacKinnon, 2000; Power, 1994; also Rose, 1999; C. Shore, 2008). The constant mistrust towards all form of state intervention has by extension led to a crisis of trust towards most professions that are linked to such interventions (Power, 2004). Accordingly, a machinery of disparate and diverse practices of government, of control and audit has been installed. Hibou (2012, 2015) describes the current situation as marked by a ‘proliferation of, indeed the invasion of our everyday lives by norms, procedures, rules, operations of coding and categorization’ (Hibou, 2015, p. vii).

These practices and specific institutions that have emerged with this shift, stabilised it, and were stabilised in return, are particularly important for my analysis. It is in this historical context that the specific order of things that structures the relation between the state, its practices, and science has emerged that is my main research interest here. To subsume all of

⁸⁷ Although some of the elements of the formation of these discourses are older, as shown by Somers and Block (2005) in their analysis spanning 200 years of welfare debate in America.

these developments under the term of New Public Management would be too short-sighted; although it covers many of the different aspects. As New Public Management, I understand a specific set of techniques and practices aiming at slowing down or reversing state activities' growth, mainly in terms of budget. These mainly rely on the models adopted from the private sector, emphasizing the 'efficiency gains' of competition and measures of performance (cf. Hood, 1991, p. 3). Thus, they intersect with and put the practices of evaluation, reflective practice and constant self-improvement that I will discuss later in this chapter⁸⁸ in a new context. But there is also another aspect to it: through different practices, the formation of discourses embedded in the rise of neoliberal governmentality constitute a new notion of 'accountability' for all kinds of social policy, that I will examine now.

3.3 Value for taxpayers' money

After contextualising the initial discourse fragment of DFID and 'the failure of aid', I will now turn to a closer analysis of the implications that come with the emergence of this network of discourses, practices and institutions that are enabled with the rise of neoliberal governmentality. If the formation of discourse is dominated by the general tone and the problematisations sketched above, aid professionals and their superior politicians find themselves in the situation to justify their mere existence. Over time, this gives rise to specific practices, and even institutions that are put in place to defend aid's legitimacy, to justify its existence, or at least, to make it look bearable to what is assumed to be the greater public. Aid was thus subjected to the same general, sneaking suspicion as every other social policy: that a market-based solution would be more efficient.⁸⁹ Over time, this criticism took different forms; ranging from claims that aid is overly bureaucratic and spending too much on administration (Jordan, 2005; D. R. Young, Bania, & Bailey, 1996); up to the claim that aid professionals or organisations mainly follow a self-interest in their work (Bob, 2009; Vaux, 2001).

For this section, my analysis will thus mainly circle around the practices that are found in the last element from the initially quoted DFID document:

'With a growing aid budget in the current financial climate we also have a particular duty to show that we are achieving value for money for every pound of taxpayers' money that we spend on development' (DFID, 2012b, p. 1)

On the most fundamental level, the elements at play in this statement can be put as follows: The 'financial climate' that provides the context for the discourse fragment quoted above refers to the specific political climate the UK has seen in the aftermath of the financial crisis that hit Europe in 2008. In reaction to the economic situation, the conservative Cameron government started a programme of unprecedented austerity measures (Farnsworth, 2011; Sawyer, 2012). But while virtually all kinds of public expenditures were faced with massive

⁸⁸ See particularly, sections 3.6 and 3.7.

⁸⁹ As put forward e.g. in Moyo's (2009) book *Dead Aid*.

cutbacks, DFID's budget increased. Accordingly, DFID finds itself under increased pressure to justify this expenditure; as illustrated by the *Daily Mail* article cited above.⁹⁰

To counter the claim that aid is inefficient, the discourse fragment by DFID quoted above thus promises 'to be accountable' for the 'taxpayer's' money spent. It promises to show the taxpayer what is happening with his money, and gives the impression that the latter thus has an overview. While this intuitively seems like a rational solution to counter mistrust towards the way that aid money is spent, it relies on different aspects that merit closer examination. Firstly, it constitutes the relationship between the taxpayer and the receiving agency – in this case, DFID – as a relationship where the former has a right to information and the latter a 'duty' to demonstrate that it is using the former's money in an appropriate way. This implies a relationship that resembles a direct 'principal-agent' model, or more appropriately, the relationship of a client with a service provider. It implies that the client pays for a service, or a product, and the service provider delivers this product and provides proof for the delivery.

The understanding of accountability underpinning DFID's construction is thus a very narrow one: It is exclusively about the so-called 'upward' accountability towards the entity that 'pays the bill'. Other forms of accountability that are upheld as standards in aid and peacebuilding, namely towards peers, partners ('horizontal' accountability) and towards the populations in developing countries ('downward' accountability or 'democratic' accountability) are conspicuously absent.⁹¹ It is thus clear towards whose interests this form of accountability is designed to cater to: towards the need for oversight and control by the funding entity. Improving aid is thus not the highest priority for the practices that are enabled with this problematisation of aid; rather, it is to prove that the money is not 'wasted' through bureaucracy or corruption. In the words of Prime Minister David Cameron (2012):

'It also means driving improvements in transparency and accountability to ensure that corrupt elites cannot waste our aid money. I want people to see exactly where every penny is going'.

A first step on the way to being accountable for 'every penny' is to ensure access to information for the broader public. Former secretary of state for international development, Andrew Mitchell thus promised to

'publish detailed information about all our aid programmes under our new UK Aid Transparency Guarantee – so that anyone, anywhere, can hold us to account for the work we do. The new Independent Commission for Aid Impact will scrutinise our work and report directly to Parliament' (DFID, 2011b, p. 5).

Remarkable is the mistrust that is casually implied towards the ministry Mitchell himself is heading. It is not only the Independent Commission for Aid Impact that is constituted as an oversight for DFID's activities – DFID has to be able to be held accountable by 'anyone, anywhere'. Independent oversight is constructed as the solution, or rather; a necessity to keep an eye on a ministry that is potentially wasting its budget. Internal mechanisms of control and accountability – which, by the way, have steadily increased in number over the last decades –

⁹⁰ On the justification of this increase and its repercussions, see section 3.4 below.

⁹¹ For an overview of these concepts, see Ebrahim (2003); Jordan and Van Tuijl (2006), and also the more in-depth discussion of accountability and learning in section 3.6 below.

apparently are not sufficient to respond to the need for accountability. Full-fledged transparency, giving anybody the means to track DFID's activities is what this strategy aiming for. In practice, this means that each project transaction over £500 has to be published – on a total budget of around £11 billion (DFID, 2012c, p. 3). Impressive efforts have been undertaken to ensure this: Websites like the 'Development Tracker' (DFID, 2015a) allow to dissect the spending of UK aid to a detailed level.

Mitchell's successor Justine Greening even declared Aid transparency UK's top priority (Greening, 2012), based on the claim that

'This is the best way to fight corruption and monitor progress. By giving ordinary people access to information, they can and will hold those in power to account'.

But DFID goes even beyond the numerous mechanisms and institutions of oversight proposed to make aid more transparent. In the appendices to their Business plan, DFID (2012c, p. 7) proposes to '[c]reate new mechanism to give British people a direct say in how an element of the aid budget is spent'. DFID is thus not only promising the availability of information on how aid is spent, and for what purpose, but also a right to actively influence decisions on aid allocation to the wider population. No matter how far reaching or influential this mechanism will be, it shows how influential the discourse of aid (and its failure) is: Without being elitist, I would doubt that the average British citizen is able to make a 'better' decision on where to spend aid than DFID staff. Given the highly complex structure of the matter, decisions on aid allocation are usually reserved to senior professionals. The formation of aid professional's specialised discourse is narrowing the legitimate speaking positions in these questions based on specialised education, continuous training, and years of experience. Further, these decisions are informed by standards that demand specific practices like different forms of assessments and analysis, a certain reference to 'scientific knowledge', and a range of other considerations. That this whole bundle of orders, knowledge, legitimacies and rituals – that has crystallised over decades – is simply 'trumped' by another 'legitimate' speaking position that exclusively relies on 'being an average Briton' is remarkable. That this option is still considered shows the strong influence of the formation of discourse that portrays ministries as useless bureaucracy. The extent of the mistrust towards 'aid officials' and their ministries that is prevalent (or assumed to be prevalent by DFID) must be immense among the British population; otherwise such a proposition would not be seen as appropriate.

But the effect of such practices enabled in the discourse of aid is more far reaching: It symbolically (re-)produces a clear hierarchy, which is one of the characteristic features of aid: the accountability chain. It constitutes the receiver of funding as clearly subordinated to the funder, to which the former has to be accountable. Through the arrangements that form the common model in today's aid system (see e.g. Duffield, 2001b), the same relationship is reproduced at every step of a chain linking – in 'downwards' order – donor organisation, INGO, and local partner organisation. The order in this chain is – as the example above shows – not a question of expertise. In the example above, the expertise lies clearly on the side of DFID. Still, the proposition is to give the lay knowledge of the average Briton more weight. This is running contrary to a range of elements in the *dispositif* of aid, which usually

meticulously shields interventions from non-development experts, as I will show in the following chapters.⁹² It is a chain that is drawing on formation of the discourse of aid that constitutes this relationship of accountability towards the top of the chain as legitimate; because it is drawing on the narrow notions of accountability that derive from the dominant (neoliberal) framework of understanding public policy.

In a similar line of thought, Hattori (2001) describes the relationship of donor and recipient as material dominance and subordination, which is masked by gestures of generosity and gratitude. In a field that usually emphasises that everybody is working together for the same greater good, such a hierarchy offers a striking contrast to the common rhetoric. And, as I will discuss in the following chapters, it is also one of the areas where struggles for legitimacy and discursive strategies are easily observed; as this hierarchy is far from uncontested.⁹³ What is particularly noteworthy for the moment is that the average Briton that is constituted as the top of the chain is not the only available option for someone with lay knowledge in this setup: Usually placed on the bottom of this chain, there is a group of people to be found that is called the target population, the beneficiaries, or the people of our concern – depending on the political standing of the organisation. These would have lay knowledge, and plenty of experience with the direct effects of aid. But it is not a coincidence that the average Briton is placed on top of this chain; and the ‘poor’ at the bottom. A ‘downward’ accountability towards the last recipients of aid exists conceptually,⁹⁴ but is barely present in the discourse of donor agencies; which makes more think of a relationship of symbolical domination in the sense of Hattori (2001) than of an equal ‘cooperation for a greater good’.

But I have to be more precise here: The reference to the ‘British people’ in the document quoted above is actually the exception in the discourse of aid. Rather, another entity is constituted to be on top of the accountability chain: the ‘taxpayer’. The ‘taxpayer’ is presented as the entity towards which DFID has to demonstrate the efficient use of its budget and to which it is portrayed as being directly accountable.

The origins of the formation of discourse that enables the ‘taxpayer’ as a legitimate entity to which aid has to be accountable to are easily identified: It bears the DNA of the neoliberal governmentality, and the fundamental stance towards public policy embedded in the latter. With the overarching problematisation of all kinds of public policy or state action in terms of their impact on government spending and the budget, it seems only natural that expenses have to be justified towards the ‘taxpayer’. This construction is noteworthy in different aspects:

The manifold links to the administrative and organizational bodies to which DFID is directly and formally accountable to are left out of the picture and replaced by the ambiguous category of the ‘taxpayer’, towards which a particular ‘duty’ to be accountable is purported. Importantly, the reference category DFID constructs here is not called the ‘British citizen’. One could argue that the British citizen is the legitimate ultimate reference group at the end of the accountability chain, because the British citizens elect the parliament – to which DFID is officially reporting. But to the contrary of this position inspired by democratic ideals, the

⁹² See sections 3.5, 3.6, 5.3.1, and 5.4.5.

⁹³ See section 5.4.5 on these struggles in the case of Myanmar.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Edwards and Hulme (1996).

reference category of the ‘taxpayer’ covers only one fraction of the British citizens; namely the one that is constructed as paying the bill for DFID’s activities. This separation of the British population along monetary lines – into those that are paying taxes and the significant proportion of those who do not – creates an imaginary direct link between the taxes that are collected from the taxpayer and the funds spent by DFID. In a way, the relationship between the taxpayer and DFID is portrayed as showing traits of the relationship of a client to a service provider mentioned above. In reality, important assumptions for this do not hold: Neither can the taxpayer/client choose another, competing institution in case he is not satisfied, nor does he have the possibility to have a direct say on the implementation of DFID’s operations. And, even if DFID ‘guarantees’ a maximum of transparency in all its operations and public access to data; only a small part of the taxpayers can be considered to be willing to consult this information and have access to the specialised knowledge to make sense of it. Realistically, the taxpayer’s only sanctioning possibility consists of electing a different government out of protest – but even for this measure, he has to share it with the non-taxpayers.

But despite these conceptual flaws in constructing the ‘taxpayer’ as the ultimate reference group for aid to be accountable to, the metaphor is extremely popular. The same construction is easily dropped in informal conversations, meetings, interviews, and official documents throughout the material in my corpus; both by aid and peacebuilding professionals. It seems that the order of knowledge in which this metaphor has its origin has become so deeply entrenched that it is taken for granted. As another example, also the German government has recently created an independent institute tasked with the oversight and evaluation of German aid. In a newspaper article (Bauchmüller, 2012), one of its chairs describes the rationale of the institute as ‘looking over everybody’s shoulders in this field’, which he sees to be ‘in the interest of the taxpayer’. The then minister for foreign aid, Dirk Niebel, even describes this institute as the apex of his institutional reform that saw three state institutions merged into today’s GIZ. The motivation driving this reform was to ‘streamline these organisations, but also to break their individual influence’. ‘Now, the dog wags the tail, and not the tail wags the dog’ Niebel is quoted (Bauchmüller, 2012, p. 4). The underpinning image drawn by these wordings is that of aid ministries that are in dire need for more oversight; and is reminiscent of the discourse of aid in the UK. And, also on the website of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2014), one reads that ‘taxpayers are entitled to demand results’. The metaphor of the ‘taxpayer’ has thus a structuring force in the discourse of aid that goes way beyond the UK.

3.4 The promise to the ‘poor’ and the pact with the ‘taxpayer’

In the last section, I have showed how discourses narrowly problematise aid in terms of its implications for government spending, and how this enables a range of practices to make the delivery of aid more efficient. Now, I want to examine another element that is present in today’s discourses, which is guiding the attention more towards the question of what aid is actually achieving: the focus on results. To clearly distinguish and disentangle the two elements is a difficult task. Although the focus on results – historically speaking – seems to have emerged later, it has not clearly replaced the formation of the discourse before. Rather,

the two elements now coexist, draw on similar origins, and the formation of the discourse of aid has become a mix of the different elements. Accordingly, the elements have become embedded in the power/knowledge networks structuring aid, and enable sometimes different, sometimes similar practices. I would argue that it is exactly in this kind of evolution of discourses in relation to other discourses where their force lies: in their capacity to constantly subjugate, integrate, or transform elements of other discourses. It is in these processes that the arena of possible discontents is further constrained: older elements are already taken for granted and providing the framework into which new elements have to be positioned. Still, I will now attempt to disentangle the formation of discourse that enables the focus on results from its quasi-predecessor, the focus on efficiency.

The first thing that is striking when looking at the basic formation of the discourse of aid is the omnipresence of the notion of results. When looking at the self-representations of donor organisations, they are prominently featuring their commitment to results – usually on the landing page of their websites. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2015b) tells us about their ‘impacts around the world’, and updates their ‘impact blog’ regularly; the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT, 2015) clarifies how they ‘measure performance’ as the first point on their landing page; the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD, 2015) tells about ‘Results & Stories’; the European Commission (EC, 2015) presents ‘projects & results’; and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC, 2015) gives an overview over ‘results and impact’.

Also DFID’s (2012a) old website introduced ‘how we measure results’ prominently in their self-representation. But the new homepage is even more telling in terms of the importance of results. Under the responsibilities of the department, the first three points read:

‘We are responsible for:
honouring the UK’s international commitments and taking action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals
making British aid more effective by improving transparency, openness and value for money.
targeting British international development policy on economic growth and wealth creation
(DFID, 2015b).

The first point that has something to do with concrete aid practice is only point number five: improving the lives of girls and women. Results have become an inevitable element of the discourse of aid. The report on the ‘future of UK aid’ even bears results in the title: *UK aid – changing lives, delivering results* (DFID, 2011b).

The self-representations of the large INGOs and non-state actors give a similar impression: Oxfam UK (2015) shows ‘the impact of our work’; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2015) quotes Bill Gates with ‘[t]o turn caring into action, we need to see a problem, find a solution, and deliver impact’, which is accompanied by a short video asserting that the Foundation ‘is focused on outcomes’; and Save the Children US (2015) advertises with the slogan ‘together, we achieve results for children’.

Achieving results, delivering impacts, and matching these with animated infographics showing impressive numbers of children vaccinated, girls sent to school, and people supplied

with food aid seems the predominant way that aid justifies its existence – at least in the external representation. But how did this problematisation of aid, that the organisations of the aid *dispositif* seem to shift towards what results they achieve – as opposed to apologise for their failure of ending poverty – become possible in the first place?

As I will argue in the following, there are different formations of discourses involved in the process of anchoring results deeply in the order of knowledge embedded in the aid *dispositif*, and make these practices meaningful: Firstly, the problematisation of aid as a costly failure, enabled in the discursive environment created by the rise of neoliberal governmentality I already outlined above. But also the discursive constitution of the world as marked by new threats, instability and insecurities, and the globalisation of problems through the increasing inter-connectedness of the world play an important role. Taken together, they create an environment in which there is no alternative to the focus on results.

In the UK, as I have shown initially in this chapter, the discourse of aid is building from a mainly defensive position. Under the influence of neoliberal problematisation of public spending, every social policy has to justify its existence, and deliver value for ‘taxpayer’s money’. Overall, this discourse is structured along the economic and financial questions of investing taxpayer’s money – and if an investment is made, there better be a return on this investment. Accordingly, this discourse is also structuring the rationale for aid. Then Prime Minister Tony Blair’s statement in 2006 brings this rationale of aid deriving from this problematisation to the point:

‘Eliminating world poverty is in Britain’s interests – and is one of the greatest moral challenges we face’ (DFID, 2006).

This statement may seem counter-intuitive. Historically speaking, aid has been mainly understood as a moral obligation, and rooted in various norms framework provided by different religions or the ‘civilising mission’ in colonial times (Cowen & Shenton, 1996; Kothari, 2005; Li, 2007). This common understanding has also been stabilised in the discourses of charitable organisations for decades, if not centuries.⁹⁵ To justify aid as self-interest – as opposed to moral obligation – substantially differs from this traditional rationale for aid. It is a change enabled in the economised discourses of neoliberal governmentality and their problematisation of aid in terms of an ‘investment’. It is effective: If aid is in Britain’s self-interest, an investment in aid is in principle worth the budgetary expenses. And as I will show in the following, it also contributes to making a range of new practices possible – not least the focus on results in its current form.

But with this new rationale, the ‘old’ understanding of aid as a moral obligation is not disappearing: It is the friction between these two poles that becomes the trademark of the discourse of aid, and which makes the productive force of discourses visible and observable. When reading on in the same white paper on development where the above quoted statement originates from, both elements are present. But, I would argue, the moral obligation as a

⁹⁵ Although this is currently changing with the stronger emphasis of aid organisations on entitlements to certain services, which are more drawing on a human rights based perspective.

rationale for aid is slowly declining in the discursive environment structured along neoliberal lines.

For example, the moral obligation is present when the current state of poverty is outlined, and entitled the ‘scandal of poverty’:

The scandal is not only that so many lack the chance to fulfil their potential for want of an education, basic medical care or a functioning economy. Nor is it only that each day one in six human beings has to live on less than one dollar or that 30,000 children die needlessly; or that each year half a million women still die in pregnancy or childbirth; or that we could give AIDS treatment to every single person in the world that needs it, but have not.

No, for me the greatest shame is that all this happens not in an age of famine and world war, but in an era of unprecedented plenty and potential, in a world eight times richer than it was 50 years ago’ (DFID, 2006, p. iii).

It implies the moral imperative that in times of plenty, helping the poor is not only possible, but an obligation. But this rationale is clearly subjugated to a new, dominant rationale that is built on self-interest. This new rationale mainly relates the institutions and practices of aid to the ‘solution’ of new problems. The white paper goes on:

‘the foremost challenges in mind would be trade and investment, climate change and scarcity of resources, state failure, conflicts within states, the movement of people, international corruption and terrorism’ (DFID, 2006, p. viii).

These problems are drawing on the construction that in the new millennium, problems are not confined into a nation state, or a particular region – they are global. This applies to the scarcity of resources, climate change, but also to the ‘failure of states’ and terrorism, that are now increasingly perceived as ‘everybody’s problems’ (cf. Duffield, 2010).

In another white paper on development, then Prime Minister Gordon Brown adds that this also means a ‘responsibility’ to act upon these problems:

‘While others might be tempted to shy away from their development responsibilities, the United Kingdom will keep the promises we have made. We will do so because it is morally right. But also because our prosperity, security and health are increasingly inseparable from events far beyond our borders’ (DFID, 2009, p. 5).

Biccum (2010) offers an interesting take on this shift in vocabulary. She sees the invocation of the interconnection of today’s problems as enabling new forms of intervention, but also new formations of ‘self’ and otherness, and the creation of imperial subjects both overseas and at home:

‘So it would seem that the shift in vocabulary in the mainstream discourse of development has also been accompanied by metropolitan attempts in popular and public discourses on the centre and right of the spectrum to normalize the ‘new’ imperialism, justify the (re)colonization of the Middle East, pose neo-liberal capitalism as the only option for global governance, and narrate this contemporary moment as a rupture from its past through a repackaging of British colonial history in an apologetic frame’ (Biccum, 2010, p. 1).

If one looks at the statements of politicians, the new vocabulary indeed seems to enable a new political ‘middle ground’, which can be mobilised to justify different actions and

different rationales for these actions: ranging from increasing aid to waging war;⁹⁶ and from decreasing immigration to ‘keeping the promises made as a country’. A debate in the British parliament on the aid budget is illustrative to show how deeply entrenched and common this problematisation of the world and its relationship with aid has become:

‘Swayne⁹⁷ said international development aid was not charity, but money spent in the national interest to help make the world a safer place and bring down immigration. ‘I have no doubt that this is money well spent and in the taxpayers’ interest,’ he said. ‘We live in a dangerous and disordered world. We are beset, one only may look at the port of Calais, to see how many people from all sorts of desperate circumstances in desperate countries all over the world, where poverty and injustice and misgovernance has reigned for generations.’ If we wish to see those movements of population reduced then it is in our interest to invest in good governance, to invest in economic growth in some of those countries’ (Mason, 2014).

And another MP of the liberal democrats goes on:

‘[...] the problems of other parts of the world do not stay local for long. Whether it is migration, whether it's conflict that draws us in, whatever it might be all of that affects us every day. ‘I would therefore argue this is not a choice between what is morally right and what is in our self-interest. There is no awkward choice here – this is in our interest and it is the right thing to do’ (Mason, 2014).

While this combination of self-interest and moral good was first introduced by New Labour, it is easily upheld and integrated by the following coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. Prime Minister David Cameron:

And this aid commitment is not just morally right – it is also firmly in our national interest. We live in an increasingly interconnected world, where problems in faraway places can reverberate back home. Aid is vitally important to tackling the root causes of those global problems – disease, drugs, terrorism, climate change – that threaten our own future’ (DFID, 2011b, p. 2).

The basic rationale for aid constructed by Cameron is the same as for his predecessors – almost word by word. It becomes evident from this that the formation of discourse of aid now includes this specific problematisation of the world’s problem as everybody’s problems, and that it becomes inevitable for speakers who want to be taken serious when speaking of aid have to relate to it – in one or the other way. On the other hand, this does not mean that the discourse is now completely prescribing every possible element. As Cameron shows in the following statement, it is still possible to give more or less weight to different aspects inside of the broader lines that are prescribed. Accordingly, while also emphasising that aid is in Britain’s interest, he puts more emphasis on the accountability to the taxpayer:

‘So increasing UK aid is not just the compassionate thing to do, it is also the sensible thing to do. But in these tough times we are also acutely aware of the duty we have to the taxpayer, to ensure that every penny of this budget is well spent. That’s why as soon as we came into government we commissioned root and branch reviews of where our aid goes and how it works’ (DFID, 2011b, p. 2).

⁹⁶ On a side note, a debate that was also enabled by this problematisation was the ‘war on terror’.

⁹⁷ A conservative international development minister.

He thus connects the ‘failure of aid’ I analysed at the outset of this chapter with aid as Britain’s self-interest. This makes clear that aid *per se* is not questionable anymore, but that the government will make sure that the money invested in aid is well spent and not ‘wasted’. The debate that is possible now is thus evolving around how to make sure that taxpayer’s money is well invested. This formation of discourse is now setting the lines for the discourse for the administration – in this case – DFID, as well. While adhering to the broad lines set by the discourse, this now gives rise to the following construction from DFID :

‘The Government is rapidly scaling up its programmes to deliver on international commitments and the Millennium Development Goals. In doing so, the Government has made a pact with the taxpayer that this will be accompanied by greater transparency and commitment to results and measurable impact. Evaluation plays a central part in this undertaking’ (DFID, 2012e, p. 2).

This ‘pact with the taxpayer’ is a useful metaphor to understand the way that the discourse of aid now constitutes its role – towards its government and the taxpayer, but also towards the work of its institutions. The basic formula of the ‘pact with the taxpayer’ is simple: in exchange for growing budgetary expenses on aid, DFID makes sure that it delivers results and is also able to demonstrate them. This enables a range of practices that are at the centre of my analysis: the practices of evaluation and of ‘proving’ measurable impacts.⁹⁸

This marks the growing influence of the focus on results; or, what Eyben (2010) describes as the ‘substantialist’ interpretation of what aid does. What she observes is a growing dominance in aid of seeing the world as specific entities, for instance ‘poverty’, or ‘basic needs’. She distinguishes this understanding from seeing the world in ‘relationalist’ terms, where the focus lies on the process, and the relationships that are built on the way. While both these interpretations are present in aid, the focus on results clearly puts the main importance on the substantialist dimension: What counts is what comes out in the end and not the process on the way to get there. It is important to note that the focus on results is not simply a neutral, new way of making aid ‘better’, or ‘managing’ aid more efficiently. By emphasising results, it excludes good processes as a goal in themselves. With the focus on results, aid thus tends to become seen as a unidimensional endeavour that focuses on the delivery of items, or on achieving simple goals without taking into account the complex relationships in which they might be embedded.⁹⁹

Slim (1997) describes this in the terms of moral philosophy, by distinguishing a deontological ethic (duty-based) and a teleological ethic (goal-based). While for the first position, some actions (e.g., feeding the ‘poor’) are seen as good in themselves, for the second position, actions can only be good when their consequences are good (e.g., feeding the ‘poor’ leads to better nutrition of the poor, and does not push them into an aid dependency that is reinforcing the problem). In these terms, the focus on results thus marks the transition to the teleological position; where aid has to be judged on the grounds of what final consequences it has. This distinction is also clearly present in the following discourse fragment stemming from DFID:

⁹⁸ See section 3.6 below.

⁹⁹ On this point, see section 3.8 below.

‘Yet we know that to make real progress in the fight against poverty, good intentions will not be enough. That is why we are pioneering a new approach to development, based on the understanding that aid is a means to an end, not an end in itself’ (DFID, 2011b, p. 4).

When aid is a means to an end, it is the dimension of its consequences that is mobilised to judge its value. Accordingly, this also implies that there is a greater goal for aid, which it will have to reach at some point. Hence, DFID promises that the need for aid will end when the greater goal of aid is achieved. But speaking of this greater end, what exactly does the discourse of aid constitute as its greater goal?

This presumably simple question is As shown above, one could speak of a discourse coalition spanning over different actors from different sides of the political spectrum; who are all adhering to the same discourse of aid. From a discourse analytical perspective, a situation like this immediately begs the question: If the main actors are all adhering to the same discourse, which other possible accounts are then excluded by this discourse coalition, and which parts are omitted? As I will argue, it is both the broader goal of aid in itself that is excluded by the discourse, but also the larger strategies to get there.

As with every problematisation, also the rationale for aid outlined above constitutes both aid and the problem it is supposed to solve in very specific ways. What is particularly striking about the overall problematisation of aid is that it focuses the overall discussion the ways that aid is brought about, delivered, and its performance. On the other hand, what is conspicuously absent from the discourse of aid now are its overall, bigger strategies it employs to bring about development. While in the 1990s, public debate focused on the prescriptions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund,¹⁰⁰ and also gave rise to an international social movement of the globalisation critics and ‘altermondialistes’; these debates have largely disappeared.

I would argue that with the shift of the debate towards *how* development has to happen – namely in a measurable, transparent, and efficient manner – the question of what broader recipes or strategies development should use is omitted, and not questionable anymore. In its self-description, DFID gives an idea that these broader strategies to bring about development are mainly focused on the economic aspect of development. In its slogan, DFID (2015b) makes clear that it is ‘ending the need for aid by creating jobs’, and in the description of its main responsibilities, it prominently states ‘targeting British international development policy on economic growth and wealth creation’. In its operational strategy, DFID Burma makes this strategy and the priority areas it prescribes even more explicit:

‘The UK Government is determined to help reduce the inequalities of opportunity we see around the world today. We believe that promoting global prosperity is both a moral duty and in the UK’s national interest. Aid is only ever a means to an end, never an end in itself. It is wealth creation and sustainable growth that will help people to lift themselves out of poverty’ (DFID Burma, 2012, p. 1).

The discourse of aid thus increasingly posits the creation of wealth – in the sense of economic growth – as the larger end of aid to achieve. Simultaneously, this also narrows

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance, Ferguson (2007a).

down the larger strategies to get there. As Ferguson (2015) shows, the debate on development over the last decades has mostly excluded solutions that are not in line with the recipes of the neoliberal order of knowledge.¹⁰¹ But that ‘development’ *per se* and broad strategies are removed from the realm of what can be discussed in aid is not a new finding in itself (e.g., cf. Escobar, 1984). What is noteworthy here is how it is mobilised by the current discourse of aid in connection with the construction of aid as being in the self-interest of the ‘giving’ country. A discourse fragment produced by USAID is illustrative how this new formation of discourse is linked to self-interest. While the examples quoted so far have mainly centred on self-interest in terms of security, there is also self-interest in more economic terms present here. When presenting the progress achieved by USAID, they write that

‘Forty-three of the top 50 consumer nations of American agricultural products were once U.S. foreign aid recipients. Between 1990 and 1993, U.S. exports to developing and transition countries *increased by \$46 billion*’ (USAID, 2015a).

What can be observed here is the formation of the concept that economic growth of all countries is in the greater interest of everybody. It posits that increasing ‘poor’ countries wealth also makes them a potential market for American products; enabling exports for the U.S. industries. This coupling also works in the other direction; as illustrated by the increasingly important phenomena around ‘compassionate consumption’, aid has become increasingly linked to commerce as a marketing strategy or ‘corporate social responsibility’ area (Richey & Ponte, 2011). In this perspective, economic growth or consumption also directly help aid in return, by generating funds for aid based on the consumption of specific goods from sponsoring brands. The economy, aid and development are thus discursively forged into a mutually reinforcing, virtuous circle, where growth in one supports growth in the other.

Criticisms to this model, that posit that there are also clear contradictions between economic growth and development, are left out. The criticism of the anti-globalisation movement – which claims that globalisation in its current form is clearly not in the interest of the developing countries – or of the environmentalists – who claim that there are natural limits to growth – are omitted. Rather, the goal of economic growth is constituted as in everybody’s interest; divergences and contradictions between different actors are glossed over. The debate that is allowed in the discourse of aid is now confined on how aid is supposed to reach the goal of economic growth for developing countries, and how it can more efficiently and effectively get there.

The claim that this emphasis of bringing about development – coupled with an emphasis of the economic self-interest of Western countries – crowds out criticism of the neoliberal economic model of globalisation has been made by several authors. Chandler (2007) argues that this new emphasis should be seen as an ‘anti-foreign’ policy, which is more concerned with appearances of political actors for a domestic audience. Biccum (2007; cf. also S. Mitchell, 2005) argues that especially the UK seems to be using an aggressive self-representation as a ‘beacon’ of overseas aid that is producing a new ‘global citizen’ at home.

¹⁰¹ More concretely, Ferguson (2015) observes the quasi-exclusion of welfare schemes based on unconditional cash transfers by the Northern aid discourse; which posits micro-credit schemes, or capacity building to integrate people into the economy via paid labour as the most effective ‘solutions’ to poverty.

The latter is marked by a positive attitude towards neoliberal globalisation and acts as a ‘bulwark’ against protest directed at international institutions of global governance. In this sense, the greater prominence of the aid discourse inscribes itself in the larger shift towards global neoliberal governmentality, and is domestically brought into position to exclude the criticisms formulated from positions other than aid ‘experts’. What remains objectionable is the procedures and means to get to a specific form of development along neoliberal lines, but not the overall goal *per se*.

At the same time, this shows that discourses (let alone whole *dispositifs*) are never fully coherent. For instance, one can observe an exclusion of most people (the ‘non-experts’) from the position as a legitimate speaker able to criticise the larger strategies of aid. On the other hand, as discussed above,¹⁰² the inherent mistrust towards bureaucracies and development experts inherent to the aid discourse also leads to specific practices to disempower these ‘experts’ and to give a greater role to the layperson’s (the ‘taxpayer’). It is this kind of tensions that are a distinctive trait of discourses’ productive force, and that are a sign that discourses are ‘at work’; struggling to integrate contradicting elements of how different legitimacies are constructed.

3.5 Big plans, big pushes and eliminating poverty

As the sections above have shown, the way the aid discourse structures speech is hardly flattering for the overall endeavour of aid. But the combination of different concepts that this discourse merges into one – namely the rather widely accepted idea that aid *per se* is a moral obligation and the constitution of aid as a failure – enable also a wide range of new practices, conceptualisations, and institutions, aiming to make aid ‘better’. For the moment, I will mainly focus on dissecting the images of social change processes that are present in the statements of big aid ‘players’; before I turn to the smaller-scale and more concrete practices of ‘improving’ aid or peacebuilding.¹⁰³

Despite the continuous stability that the aid *dispositif* has shown over the last 50 years, the self-description of DFID already cited above¹⁰⁴ promises that it will ‘end’ the need for aid. The problematisation of aid as an expensive, potentially wasteful endeavour makes the promise that ‘at least, it will be over soon’ appear as a legitimate compromise. DFID thus presents its activities in aid as a temporary fix, which is only needed until the ‘problem’ is ‘solved’ – or the necessary results achieved. This further contributes to the constitution of aid as the ‘thing’ that is tasked with bringing about development. But it also constitutes the problem of ‘underdevelopment’, ‘poverty’, or the ‘poor’ as something that actually *can* be fixed. Over the last decades, aid’s goal has become more ambitious: from poverty alleviation, or poverty reduction, a number of large campaigns have contributed to a change in the vocabulary by demanding to ‘make poverty history’¹⁰⁵, or, in the case of the UN Millennium

¹⁰² See section 3.3 above.

¹⁰³ See section 3.7 and 3.8.

¹⁰⁴ See page 64.

¹⁰⁵ See <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/takeaction>.

Campaign, to ‘end poverty 2015’.¹⁰⁶ Usually, these campaigns featured a range of celebrities, important sponsorship by private companies, and enjoyed high media coverage (Richey & Ponte, 2011). The Canadian NGO End Poverty Now, Inc. (EPN) is illustrative of this underlying change. While their name already bears the change of wording, their mission states:

‘The West has often given aid, hand-outs, and temporary solutions often causing more problems than solutions. We seek to make sure that our projects and partners are using sustainable models that will keep going on there [sic] own. [...] We also greatly value impacting the root of problems’ (End Poverty Now Inc., 2015).

Starting from the common problematisation of (previous) aid as a failure, the overall rationale of the organisation is to reach a point where aid is not needed anymore. By tackling the root causes of problems, it promises to reach a point where the targeted populations are able to keep going on their own. This mission statement is thus mobilising support based on the promise of a ‘new’ strategy that promises to – finally – succeed in bringing about development.

DFID’s statements are similar in this regard. This way of problematising aid as something that can be ended, or made history, has a longer tradition in the UK. It was in 1997 that Clare Short, then Secretary of State for International Development and thus minister for the newly formed DFID, declared that ‘we can succeed’ (DFID, 1997, p. 5). It was in the first of a series of White Papers on international development, that were all entitled ‘eliminating world poverty’ (DFID, 1997, 2000, 2006, 2009). This was followed by the declaration by then Prime Minister Tony Blair that

‘[t]he new millennium offers a real opportunity to eliminate world poverty. This is the greatest moral challenge facing our generation’ (DFID, 2000, p. 6).

The idea that ending poverty is within reach – combined with the urge to act upon this moral challenge – has several effects. On a very elemental level, this produces the legitimacy for aid to solve this problem – and at the same time, constricts the space of what can be said in the discourse of aid. What can be discussed is not whether aid itself is the right strategy to solve the problem; it is only which strategies aid can use to solve the problem. The formation of discourse is thus excluding other possible interpretations of ‘poverty’ that would put into question that aid has a role to play in that problem at all. As an example, one could think of the global economic structures that maintain domination and exploitation of ‘developing’ by ‘developed’ countries – a system reproduced and stabilised by aid (cf. Escobar, 1984, p. 378). But such an interpretation – that would make aid a part of the problem rather than the solution – is excluded from the discourse of aid. That aid and its actors have this role to play is a part of a deeply entrenched and crystallised order of knowledge, which is stabilised by the aid *dispositif*. This is reminiscent of what Ferguson (1990, p. 284) has already observed in the beginning of the 1990s: that propositions that are seen as legitimate can only be made on how to ‘do development better’ – which usually leads the discussion down the alley of technical debates that are only accessible to development professionals and experts themselves.

¹⁰⁶ See <http://www.endpoverty2015.org>

On the other hand, if one thing on this planet is equally or even more stable than the aid *dispositif* – understood as the system of discourses, institutions and practices, but also its ongoing criticism and adaptation – it might be the ‘problem’ it is trying to ‘fix’. So, if debate in the aid discourse is restricted to the strategies on how to do development or aid better, this debate will never run out of material to continue. Rather, it gives rise to a cycle of criticism, integrating criticism with the creation of new concepts, practices, and technologies to ‘improve’ aid – followed by new rounds of criticism. Overall, these cycles reproduce and further crystallise the basic structures of the *dispositif*.

Leaving aside the post-colonial criticism accusing the above-quoted campaigns of neo-imperialism (Biccum, 2007, 2010) and the questionable quality of the songs¹⁰⁷ that usually come out of these endeavours; what merits attention here for my analysis is another point. It is the understanding of social change that is underpinning these campaigns, which could be named the ‘big push’.

It is an understanding reminiscent of the campaigns to eradicate smallpox: If we eliminate the disease once and for all, it won’t be able to come back.¹⁰⁸ Needed for this is a concerted effort – a big push – that will then make future effort unnecessary. It is the idea of a certain threshold that has to be reached, and which is already enshrined in DFID’s self-description: ‘We’re ending the need for aid by creating jobs [...]’ (DFID, 2015b). Jobs help people, communities, or whole countries to become ‘self-reliant’:

‘Our aim is to help poor countries reach the point where they no longer require our support and can meet the needs of their own people with their own resources. In Ghana, we’re working with the government to secure maximum benefit for their citizens from their oil reserves. We believe that Ghana will be transformed, and within a few years will no longer require aid from the UK’ (DFID, 2011b, p. 8)

Being successful is thus, among others, a question of scale – to reach that threshold, and to ensure that results are ‘sustainable’. It is in this logic that Gordon Brown called for a doubling of foreign aid to eliminate poverty, a ‘Marshall plan for the poor’ (Easterly, 2006b, p. 3).

This understanding of social change as a concentrated, temporary, unpopular effort necessary for a bigger transformation that is then sustainable is an element that can be found in endeavours of social engineering throughout the last century. It can be understood as part of a specific order or knowledge that Scott (1998) calls a ‘high-modernist ideology’.¹⁰⁹ He identifies this way of thinking in a range of giant, planned transformations undertaken by regimes of both the political left and right: The great leap forward in China, collectivization in Russia, and compulsory villagisation in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Ethiopia, the large agricultural schemes undertaken by many developing countries in the 20th century (Scott,

¹⁰⁷ UK singer Morrissey is (in)famously quoted on one of the first of these endeavours, the BandAid song by Bob Geldof: ‘One can have a great concern for the people of Ethiopia, but it’s another thing to inflict daily torture on the people of Great Britain. It was an awful record considering the mass of talent involved. And it wasn’t done shyly; it was the most self-righteous platform ever in the history of popular music’ (Time Out Magazine (1985), quoted in: Poplak, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ The similarities of how discourse of public policy treat poverty and disease have a long tradition (cf. Dean, 1991). See also the statement on social science quoted in section 3.6, p. 94.

¹⁰⁹ Also Dean (1994, p. 3) uses the term of the ‘high modernism’ to describe this model positing social progress through the use of technology, production, and science.

1998, p. 3), but also in Nazism (Scott, 1998, p. 89). He describes this ideology as a view that society can be improved by certain schemes that are plannable and rationally organisable; and which are usually popular among and put into practice by ‘engineers, planners, technocrats, high-level administrators, architects, scientists, and visionaries’ (Scott, 1998, p. 88). He sees this kind of thinking rooted in the scientific progress of the age of industrialisation, which gave rise to the belief that science, together with improved administration and bureaucratic procedures can be used to make visions of a social utopia reality – and to ultimately succeed in this.¹¹⁰

But while Scott’s (1998) analysis mainly centres on the utopias (or dystopias) of authoritarian states, I would argue that this order of knowledge that society can be modelled, planned and improved following a scheme of rational organisation is not limited to authoritarian regimes. This order of knowledge is underpinning a lot of the understandings of social change that can be observed in the actors and organisations that make up the aid *dispositif*. In this sense, there are a lot of astonishing similarities and continuities when one compares the discourses of aid with the discourses and practices of authoritarian or colonial regimes (cf. Barral, 2015; Kothari, 2005; Li, 2007; Sabaratnam, 2013). As I will show in my analysis of the more specific discourses in Myanmar, statements of the Burmese socialist regime dating from the 1960s are hard to tell apart from today’s statements by aid organisations.¹¹¹

The idea of a ‘big push’ that is using the progress of science, administration, and planning to improve the human condition – once and for all – is also present in one of the most influential reference documents for international aid: The United Nations millennium development goals (MDGs).

With the MDGs, the United Nations have declared a set of clearly defined, measurable goals that are seen as the planned and managed way forward for the new millennium (cf. Maxwell, 2004). Also in this declaration, the basic elements of the ‘big push’ are evident. Hence, the declaration is framing the ‘problem’ as follows:

‘We reaffirm our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which have proved timeless and universal. Indeed, their relevance and capacity to inspire have increased, as nations and peoples have become increasingly interconnected and interdependent’ (UN General Assembly, 2000).

When nations and people become interconnected and interdependent, so do their problems. And accordingly, the solutions to these problems must be thought big:

‘Thus, only through broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future, based upon our common humanity in all its diversity, can globalization be made fully inclusive and equitable. These efforts must include policies and measures, at the global level, which correspond to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition and are formulated and implemented with their effective participation’ (UN General Assembly, 2000).

¹¹⁰ On this belief and the role of science in social engineering, see section 3.6 below.

¹¹¹ See chapter 4 below.

In his report on the progress on achieving the MDGs, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan drew on a similar understanding of social change. He makes clear that the different aspects of the problem ‘poverty’ are interrelated:

‘[C]ountries which are well governed and respect the human rights of their citizens are better placed to avoid the horrors of conflict and to overcome obstacles to development. Accordingly, we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed’ (UN Secretary-General, 2005, p. 6).

So, if problems are inter-related, their solution must be coordinated. In his book – aptly – entitled *the end of poverty: How we can make it happen in our lifetime* development economist Sachs (2005, p. 256) thus emphasises the need for systematic interventions, because ‘success in any single area, whether in health, or education, or farm productivity, depends on investments across the board’. Because success can be jeopardised by regress in another policy field, e.g. alphabetisation rate can fall because of setbacks in public health, it is in all areas that intervention needs to be successful, that the threshold has to be reached – ideally in a coordinated manner.¹¹²

It is in this understanding of social change that the ‘big push’ differs from more conservative approaches to social change; and this is also the entry point for criticism of other economists (e.g., cf. Easterly, 2006a; Easterly, 2006b). Reviewing Sachs’ book, Easterly (2006a) points out the strong beliefs in central planning and coordination; as opposed to approaches that rely on incremental, small changes, which are managed in decentralised manner. In this vein, he likens the thinking behind the ‘big push’ to that of development economists in the 1960s, namely Rostow’s (1990) *the stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto*.¹¹³

On the other hand, this might be the exact point that makes the fascination and the popularity of the ‘big push’ with Western policy-makers and planners. Firstly, it constitutes ‘solving’ the problem of poverty as possible, so aid – or the ‘white man’s burden’, to quote Easterly (2006b) – has an end in the near future. On the other hand, it still proposes that it can be nicely planned without too much insecurity. This is the striking aspect of the ‘big push’: that it is inherently contradictory. On the one hand, a ‘big push’ demands an unparalleled effort on different levels; aiming to restructure a society – or in the case of the ‘big push’ to end poverty – a fundamental restructuring of the globe. The idea describes an endeavour that is touching practically all aspects of society: a revolution. On the other hand, this revolution is not thought to happen in a revolutionary manner: It is thought to be carried out in a planned, orderly, and closely managed fashion. Change is thought to be brought about by the aid *dispositif*, meaning a sophisticated machinery of hundreds of organisations, tied together by funding and subcontracting relationships that each require a significant amount of control, checks, and management. Every aspect of it is thought to be carried out, implemented, and supervised according to professional standards that regulate how things are

¹¹² On a side note, this program now proposed by Sachs starkly contrasts with the ‘shock therapy’ his name was associated with in the transition to capitalism in Eastern Europe (J. Wilson, 2015).

¹¹³ This is only one episode of a fierce debate between the two economist heavyweights Sachs and Easterly. For an overview of the exchange spanning several years and different medias, see Pryke (2014).

done, how change is going to happen, and how it will be monitored. There is supposed to be strategic planning on all levels of organisations, making sure that all needs are met in different sectors, regions, and countries, in an orderly, coordinated, coherent manner that avoids ‘non-efficient’ overlaps and duplication of activities. World-wide priorities and strategies of bi-lateral donors are broken down in to country roadmaps, interlinked with poverty reduction strategies, split up into sectoral programmes consisting of individual projects. And, there is an endless paper trail of reports that are constantly fed up the aid hierarchy, going from the small community-based organisation, to a larger national ‘partner’ NGO, to a managing international NGO, up to the multi-lateral organisations managing a sector, and from there to a bi-lateral donor organisation; documenting every item delivered, every community meeting held, every white car bought. Put bluntly, the ‘big push’ plans to ‘implement’ a revolution by bureaucratic means. Or, in the words of Sachs (2005, p. 274): ‘Getting from here to there is a matter of routine planning, not heroics’.

That these bureaucratic means for ‘routine planning’ are heavy is already evident from the armada of planners it took to work out the implementation of the MDGs:

Its 10 task forces, Secretariat, and broad array of participants from academia, government, UN agencies, international financial institutions, nongovernmental organizations, donor agencies, and the private sector created a worldwide network of development practitioners and experts across an enormous range of countries, disciplines, and organizations (UN Millennium Project, 2005, p. vi).

This has several implications. The ‘big push’ helps the discourse of aid to constitute his object – let’s call it global development – in a very specific manner: namely as something that can be modelled, planned, implemented, and also achieved effectively with the machinery of aid institutions and other structures that make up the aid *dispositif*. It thus makes the problem of poverty amenable to a structure of global governance (cf. Mosse & Lewis, 2005) that is in charge of solving the problem. The managerial tools that are used to coordinate, plan, and administrate such an all-encompassing framework are constantly reproducing the conceptualisation of social change as plannable and manageable. In sum, if the aid *dispositif* is constituted as in charge of solving the ‘problem’ of global development, or ending poverty – it can also be expected to do that effectively, and to produce results. Thus, it makes that the deployment of a machinery of practices that focus on results, plan and measure the progress in ending poverty possible; as a legitimate and appropriate ‘solution’.

Furthermore, it also enables the different entities that are involved in bringing about the MDGs to relate to each other in new ways. This mainly concerns the role of the ‘developing countries’. Because the problems of the world in the new millennium are interconnected, and thus, ‘everybody’s problem’, they must be solved in a common effort:

‘Responsibility for managing worldwide economic and social development, as well as threats to international peace and security, must be shared among the nations of the world and should be exercised multilaterally. As the most universal and most representative organization in the world, the United Nations must play the central role’ (UN General Assembly, 2000).

This takes into account a broader development in international cooperation, which has seen a shift in how the developing countries are constituted: It is a shift from constituting them

mainly as recipients of aid, towards partners in development.¹¹⁴ Eyben and León (2005) describe this change as the transition presenting aid from a ‘gift’ to a ‘contract’. Abrahamsen (2004, p. 1453) sees in this a form of ‘advanced liberal rule that increasingly govern[s] through the explicit commitment to the self-government and agency of recipient states.’ It is thus expected of the developing nations to ‘own’ their plans for development, or to draft their own ‘poverty reduction strategy papers’ (cf. Maxwell, 2004). The underlying argument is simple: If the world’s problems are everybody’s problems, it is also in everybody’s interest to solve them. Thus, the developing nations are embedded in the aid *dispositif* tasked with eliminating poverty.¹¹⁵ The strong commitment to results-based management (cf. Maxwell, 2004) is evident in this setup: While the overall goal is set in the form of the MDGs, the individual countries now have to set goals for their own contribution to it – also financially (UN Millennium Project, 2005, p. 55).

Overall, the formation of the discourse of aid, their overall conceptualisation of the ‘big push’ towards the MDGs, and their problematisation of poverty and conflict constitutes all the institutions involved as a large ‘coalition of the willing’ to eliminate poverty – in the following, I will call it a ‘goalition’. The aid discourse constitutes a role to play for everybody in taking on the new millennium’s biggest challenge, and it is in everybody’s interest to make the MDGs a reality. This glosses over possible differences, contestation or differing interests among the ‘development partners’ of the goalition.¹¹⁶ Development, or peace, are constituted as in everybody’s interest, and are not objectionable anymore. In other words: the MDGs are de-politicised, and present themselves as a technical problem (cf. also Ziai, 2011). That the MDGs are only a specific problematisation of development, or peace (which is not even mentioned in the goals themselves) is omitted. The debate that is allowed to take place is situated on the levels of the individual countries, and their strategies, or on differing strategies on getting to the final goal. But the final goal(s) themselves are set. So are also the big lines of how to get there: With the big push, reaching the MDGs is problematised as a matter of mobilising enough resources to get the market-based solutions of job creation to work, in a non-antagonistic manner. It thus also de-politicises global inequalities in the economic system, which might oppose the interest of the developed and developing countries (cf. also Ziai, 2011). In the goalition, these all become ‘development partners’.

But producing the goalition of non-antagonistic ‘development partners’ is not the only salient aspect of the ‘big push’ for my analysis.¹¹⁷ It is the view of the ‘big push’ of the MDGs that another ‘big push’ became possible, which deploys the technologies of neoliberal governmentality to achieve the MDGs: the aid effectiveness agenda. It in the process of the first review of the MDG progress that bi- and multilateral donors resolved ‘to take far-reaching and monitorable actions to reform the ways we deliver and manage aid’ (OECD, 2005b, p. 1); because they recognised

¹¹⁴ For an overview of the history of discourses on partnership in aid, see Clarke (2004).

¹¹⁵ On this point, see also section 3.9 below.

¹¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of these contestations and differences, see Clegg (2015).

¹¹⁷ I will analyse the implications of the goalition with the specific case of Myanmar in chapter 5.

‘that while the volumes of aid and other development resources must increase to achieve these goals, aid effectiveness must increase significantly as well to support partner country efforts to strengthen governance and improve development performance’.

Asserting a specific formation of discourse based on concepts of results, accountability, and measurements is not further astonishing in a document entitled the *Paris declaration on aid effectiveness* (OECD, 2005b). But this document is of another use for my analysis: because of the specific connection of the notions of development with ‘national ownership’; that sits somehow uneasily with the clear definition of goals that is pre-set in the MDGs. As shown above, the concept of ‘national ownership’ has already been present in the MDGs.¹¹⁸ What is actually new in the Paris declaration is that it posits a new approach to make aid more effective: namely with ‘mutual accountability’. In this sense, not only the procedures of the ‘giving’ countries must be improved, but also the states receiving aid have to improve their performance. Ownership thus becomes a very specific connotation of ‘being made ready for ownership’. The Paris declaration – among other points – resolves to:

‘Strengthening partner countries’ national development strategies and associated operational frameworks (e.g., planning, budget, and performance assessment frameworks).
Enhancing donors’ and partner countries’ respective accountability to their citizens and parliaments for their development policies, strategies and performance.
Defining measures and standards of performance and accountability of partner country systems in public financial management, procurement, fiduciary safeguards and environmental assessments, in line with broadly accepted good practices and their quick and widespread application’ (OECD, 2005b, p. 1).

Together with principles of ‘mutual accountability’ and with donors respecting the ‘country leadership’, there comes a battery of demands towards the governments and administrations of recipient countries to make their dealing with aid more transparent, accountable, and more efficient. The ‘partnership’ principle that the Paris declaration invokes thus enables new forms to legitimise policy prescriptions and intervention into domestic policies (cf. Clarke, 2004).¹¹⁹ With regard to my focus of analysis, the Paris declaration provides the means to integrate the recipient governments and their administrations into the aid *dispositif*, and subjugate their practices and institutions to the same technocratic, procedure-heavy, and managerial practices and standards that are ‘normal’ for aid. In her analysis of partnerships in development, Abrahamsen (2004, p. 1454) observes both ‘new forms of agency and new forms of discipline’ in partnerships. But when combined with the dominant discourses in the aid *dispositif*, structured and stabilised by the neoliberal order of knowledge, the space for agency in partnership seems rather limited for national governments.

What my analysis above primarily shows, is that the ‘big push’ has become an influential element in the discourse formation of aid. But the ideas of plannability of social change have not emerged in a vacuum; they had to be embedded in structures, institutions, artefacts, concepts, and practices to realise their power effects and to become part of our known world. In the next section, I thus turn to the scientific propositions and approaches that are in

¹¹⁸ And has been *en vogue* since the beginning of the 1990s (van Gastel & Nuijten, 2005).

¹¹⁹ This process has also present before the aid effectiveness agenda, and which is visible in the increased emphasis in the aid discourse on ‘good governance’ (Mosse & Lewis, 2005)

constant interaction with the discourse formation of aid; influencing and being influenced at the same time. As I will show in the following, it is in the scientific development of the Global West that can be found the propositions that provide the ‘technology’ to think a ‘big push’, to make it possible, and to put it into practice: in the concepts and ideas of social engineering and its revival in the form of evidence-based policy making.

3.6 The will to prove: science and social engineering

As noted above, the rise of neoliberal governmentality was not only an agenda of certain political actors.¹²⁰ The availability of certain new technologies that made neoliberal governmentality possible were equally important (cf. Rose, 1999, p. 27). This is particularly visible for the aid *dispositif*: It is in dire and constant need of information and knowledge to fulfil its declared mission of making the world a better place. As I sketched out above, the aid *dispositif* is not only here to change the world. It is here to change the world in an informed, planned, and orderly managed fashion. Hence, it needs to know the number of extremely vulnerable households in a community on the coast that was hit by a flood, it needs to know the level of alphabetisation among slum dwellers in the capital, and it needs to know the attitudes of the majority population towards an ethnic minority. Secondly, it needs to know the income generating activities in the community have reduced the vulnerability of these households, how the programme providing school uniforms in the slum has impacted alphabetisation, and how that TV-show promoting tolerance has changed the attitudes of the 20 to 25-year-old males of the majority population to make it more efficient, effective, and more sustainable. To ensure the availability of such knowledge is only possible with an extensive network of practices aiming at collection, storage, and analysis of data.

As Scott (1998) points out,¹²¹ these practices of mapping, assessing, and classifying are not without effect on society. States have to make societies legible and amenable to their administration. The same can be said for the aid *dispositif*: The numerous practices of collecting information about a society – to categorise it, to map it, and to name it – produce the society they are assessing in the very first place. Further, measuring, monitoring, and evaluating the practices of the aid *dispositif* is not without effect on these practices themselves. What aid ‘does’ is not automatically or naturally amenable to measuring, assessing, judging. Rather, the practices to which aid gives rise – e.g., improving access to healthcare, or doing capacity building for small scale farmers – have to be made amenable to measuring, assessing, judging. They have to be made legible to the aid administration and its technologies. In this section, I will look more closely at the different practices and institutions that feed into the continuous supply of assessments, statistics, analysis, updates, briefings, and reports; and at the role of science in stabilising the order of knowledge that enables it. Then, I will turn to the effects that this has on the practices of the aid *dispositif*.¹²²

In proliferating concepts, tools, and frameworks for the policy process, especially the applied sciences have played an important role; although also more traditional academia has

¹²⁰ See section 3.2 above, p. 69.

¹²¹ T. Mitchell (2002) makes a similar point in his analysis of expert rule in Egypt.

¹²² I will turn to the analysis of the effects on society in the chapter 5 on Myanmar.

brought forward a range of different conceptualisations of the link between science and policy, and about how certain policies come into being.¹²³ One of the most influential fields in this regard, I would argue, is evaluation research. Evaluation in this context can be thought in different ways – and has also been promoted in different senses: as a means to make decisions on program choices with the help of scientific methods, as the continuous self-reflection in professional practice in the form of ‘evaluative thinking’, or as the ritualised practice at the end of the project management cycle. For my analysis, I am conceptualising it from a different angle: as the ‘scientific’ part of the aid *dispositif*, which is making the increased managerialisation of aid possible in the first place.

Evaluation, and mainly, evaluation research and theory, are deeply intertwined with the institutions and practices they evaluate. They evolve with them, they follow different trends and turns, and they reproduce the power/knowledge networks that stabilise and make aid possible, legitimise its approaches, and make its object amenable to scientific methods to ‘develop’ it. Evaluation research, as a so-called ‘applied’ science, constructs itself as an important link between theory and practice, academic research and policy – which helps the latter with the knowledge and findings of the former. Evaluation research has thus over the years also mirrored and integrated the different debates in the broader social sciences, and the paradigmatic changes that academia has seen have equally left their traces in the methods, epistemologies and ontologies of evaluation approaches. On the other hand, evaluation is also a myriad of practices that is clearly influenced by political trends and by the ideology of the administrations in power. Because of this multi-faceted role, evaluation offers the ideal ground to observe the evolutions of the thinking of how science relates to policy and practice; and to explore the scientific parts of the aid *dispositif*.

There are several categorisations to order the different ways of thinking that were dominant in evaluation over the last fifty years.¹²⁴ According to their authors’ standing, they have prioritised the different aspects to distinguish one approach from another. For instance, Alkin (2004) has given priority to the distinction of the driving forces behind different evaluation approaches. He sees the two dimensions of accountability and control on the one hand, and social inquiry on the other, as the basic driving forces; each providing a different rationale for evaluation. These dimensions thus form the two roots of an ‘evaluation tree’, which has developed the three branches of approaches: one focusing on social research

¹²³ Especially the branch of political science termed ‘policy analysis’ has generated a range of different theories of the policy process. This comprises the first conceptualisations of the policy process as a ‘stages heuristic’ as formulated by Lasswell (1956) and reformulated by Brewer and deLeon (1983); the institutional rational choice framework (e.g., Ostrom, 1986, 1990; Scharpf, 1997); the garbage-can (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972) or multiple-streams model (Kingdon, 1984); the advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier, 1988); or the policy diffusion process (Berry & Berry, 1990). Later, these frameworks have been complemented by theories based on social constructionism (e.g., Schneider & Ingram, 1993), and the analyses of the strand of ‘critical policy studies’ that draw on similar epistemological grounds as I do with my analysis (Durnova & Zittoun, 2013). Although also these could be used to analyse different understandings of how science relates to policy, I chose evaluation as my focus of analysis in this section; as it is more closely related to the different practices I will analyse in the following.

¹²⁴ Schwandt (1997, p. 63) points out that there seems to be a strong desire in the evaluation field to impose order into the ‘messiness’ of the field; which also includes to define criteria to distinguish genuine, ‘real’ evaluation from pseudo-evaluation.

methods, one on the aspect of valuing a specific policy or project, and a third one primarily concerned with the use that is made of evaluation inside of an organisation.

As another example, Guba and Lincoln (1989) use the epistemological and ontological standing of different approaches to create their categories. They thus draw a pathway that distinguishes four generations, which at the same time stand for a paradigmatic shift from positivism towards constructivism. In this reading, evaluation transitioned the phases of measurement (of project progress or need), description (to improve a project), judging (of merit or worth of a project), and their own approach, negotiating (a shared construction of reality).

But while these categorisations are valuable, they are primarily interested in academic classification, which gives the impression that these developments took place untouched by the world outside the ivory tower, and its worldly power structures. I will thus rely on a more simplified classification to guide my analysis, which is taking into account that also science is ‘from this world’ and thus not untouched by power/knowledge. I draw on the work of Dahler-Larsen (2012), who looks at evaluation from the vantage point of organisational sociology. He thus distinguishes two different organisational types, into which evaluation is embedded: the ‘rational’ organisation, which can be likened to Weber’s (2002) understanding of bureaucracy, and which is close to what Scott (1998) calls ‘high-modernism’; and the ‘learning’ organisation, which takes into account the existence of different perspectives, and is sensitive to how organisations adapt to feedback and ‘learn’ (Levitt & March, 1988). These two organisation types form the basic tension which is ordering the discursive environment of evaluation; and that I call ‘proving’ versus ‘improving’. Their debates and different standings may look fierce, but still have to be understood as superficial battles that stabilise and entrench the broader structures and institutions that justify evaluation as a practice *per se*.

Vedung’s (2010) metaphor is helpful in depicting this: he speaks of four waves of evaluation, which succeeded each other, but always left sediments on top of each other that now make up the structure of the evaluation field. It is thus not only one side that ‘wins’ the debate, but evaluation as a whole who builds its sediments in societal power/knowledge networks that are not swept away anymore by the tides. I will now turn to the rational, scientific, or ‘proving’ understanding of evaluation, which has developed first and made a strong comeback in the form of evidence-based policy; before I turn to the ‘improving’, learning understanding in the next section on peacebuilding.¹²⁵

The rational, scientific understanding of the relationship between science and policy has a long history. Elements of it can be found already in the narratives of the enlightenment (Dean, 1994). But its distinctive form that is still influential today has emerged in the ideas of social engineering that were prominent in the United States of the 1960s.

The basic ideas for this program can be distilled out of the then vice-president Lyndon B. Johnson’s speech demanding a ‘great society’:

¹²⁵ That I analyse the learning organization in the next section on peacebuilding is not supposed to imply that ‘learning’ is not influential in the aid discourse. To the contrary: learning can be considered as enjoying equal prominence in both the aid and peacebuilding discourses. But the formation of discourse in peacebuilding constitutes the practice of learning as a means to distinguish peacebuilding from aid, which merits more detailed attention in my analysis than the emergence or prevalence of the learning concept in the aid discourse.

‘For half a century we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all of our people. The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization. [...] For in your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society. The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice’ (L. B. Johnson, 1965, p. 705).

The call to end poverty and racial injustice along the lines of the grand strategies demanding a ‘big push’ was the starting point for a wide range of social programs targeting education, health, and environment. Besides the strikingly similar rhetoric to the more recent ‘big pushes’ to ‘eliminate poverty’, the central role of science in this endeavour of engineering a new society is noteworthy:

We are going to assemble the best thought and the broadest knowledge from all over the world to find those answers for America. I intend to establish working groups to prepare a series of White House conferences and meetings--on the cities, on natural beauty, on the quality of education, and on other emerging challenges. And from these meetings and from this inspiration and from these studies we will begin to set our course toward the Great Society (L. B. Johnson, 1965, p. 706).

In these phrases, the basic configuration of ‘scientific’ knowledge and the will to improve the human condition that is characteristic for these approaches is deeply ingrained. The essence of this system of thought is well illustrated by a social scientist from the 1960s worth quoting in full:

‘One of the most appealing ideas of our century is the notion that science can be put to work to provide solutions to social problems. If eighteenth-century physics gave us the modern engineer to deal with technological problems, and nineteenth-century biology gave us the modern physician to deal with health problems, so twentieth-century social science dreams that it shall give mankind the social practitioner to deal scientifically with social problems. Encouragement of this dream comes primarily from the increasing volume of social research from the increasing ranks of practitioners of social science’ (Zetterberg, 2002, p. 16 f.).

A social science put in service of solving society’s problems was an idea that rings well with the high-modernist thinking of the time, and which also gave rise to the discipline of evaluation research. It is not a coincidence that the first phrase of this statement is quoted by two of the most influential evaluation research theorists: First by Suchman (1967), and subsequently by Patton (1997, p. 6 f.). Zetterberg’s phrase has become the *leitmotif* of evaluation research, which is forming the overall framework of the discipline as a whole. Finding this *leitmotif* in different paradigms in evaluation research is relatively easy in this case. Instead of tracing this idea’s origin with an elaborate analysis of language structure, a glance at the bibliography is enough: Suchman quotes Zetterberg, Patton quotes Suchman quoting Zetterberg. Although the evaluation field has seen paradigmatic change in the meantime, the overall rationale and the hope that science can help solving society’s problems has persisted in one form or another.

In this first phase of evaluation research, named science-driven, or methods-focused, in the centre of attention was proving the worth of public policy programs to improve society. Science was presented as being able to help policy-makers to take rational decisions for

rationally defined problems. Vedung (2010, p. 266 f.) describes what he calls the ‘social engineering’ approach to public policy as follows: First, a problem is brought to the political agenda – either by researchers themselves or by interest groups. Social science then analyses the origins and causes that gave rise to the problem. At the same time, there is also an estimation of the possible impacts or costs the problem may entail when not addressed. Then, finding a solution to that problem is contracted out to object, neutral, and external researchers. With the help of a small-scale pilot programme and rigorous evaluation – preferably with experimental or quasi-experimental methods – the most efficient method, project design or ‘intervention’ is identified. This information is then fed back to policy-makers, who can take a decision for a specific policy; grounded on scientific facts.

The exclusion of politics from this model may explain its main focus on scientific methods, causal inference and ‘rigor’. If the decision on the policy is exclusively based on scientific ‘facts’, and excluding ‘irrational’ beliefs or ideology, then the proof a policy’s worth, or the assessment of the most efficient policy, must be defensible according to scientific standards. Political decisions thus become decisions prepared by academic experts; which shifts the set of criteria for such a decision from ‘political viability’ towards ‘methodological robustness’. And, as Schwandt (1997, p. 64) notes, this also supposes a distinction between the researcher and the researched, between the subject and the object of research: ‘To obtain a clear and distinct understanding of an object, the inquirer must disengage both from her own immediate experience, tastes, prejudices, and desires and from the errors associated with custom, tradition, and authority’ (Schwandt, 1997, p. 64). ‘Science’ is thus constituted in opposition to politics; as a place where an objective and pure knowledge or reasoning can happen – untouched by the power struggles of politics.¹²⁶ As becomes evident throughout my whole analysis, these ascribed qualities of ‘purely scientific’ knowledge, or the ‘scientifically’ identified solution is very efficient in legitimising the solutions proposed by ‘science’. Thus, the science-driven approach seeks not only to remove the identification of the solution from the realm of the political – but also the solution itself, and its implementation are placed into the technical expert’s realm. As a consequence, it can only be criticised in the language that was used to legitimise it in the first place – ‘scientific, rigorous proof’.

Accordingly, the proponents of the science-driven approach have mainly focused on developing methods for scientific ‘proof’, and inferring causality beyond any doubt. A lot of inspiration for the research designs that ensued came from the natural sciences, namely in the form of the experimental setting to prove causalities. In their seminal work entitled *experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*, D. T. Campbell and Stanley (1963) laid out the elements of that would structure the debate around research designs, scientific proof, and causality for the years to come.

In the first place, they called for an experimental approach. In the experimental setting, one group receives an intervention and a control group does not, and the two groups are then compared to identify differences in the variables of interest. The decision whether a

¹²⁶ For an in-depth analysis of some of the processes that make science’s perceived as objective, see also Porter (1996).

participant is part of the intervention or control group is randomised. The randomisation is supposed to control for biases and external factors that have nothing to do with the experiment. D. T. Campbell and Stanley (1963) also introduce the concept of ‘internal validity’ to describe how strongly the experiment is controlling for biases. The more control to guard an experiment from threats to internal validity, the stronger its claim that the ‘treatment’ has in fact caused the effect. They distinguish this concept from ‘external validity’, which describes how well the findings of an experiment can be generalised to other populations, and situations.

But they also are admitting that experiments are not perfect, and often not applicable to specific settings. Thus, they introduced a range of ‘quasi-experimental’ research designs, which relax the criteria of randomly assigning participants to control or intervention group. These (still quantitative) designs are then discussed in terms of their possible problems in terms of their internal and external validity.

D. T. Campbell and Stanley (1963) are clearly advocating the experimental approach, which they describe

‘as the only means for settling disputes regarding educational practice, as the only way of verifying educational improvements, and as the only way of establishing a cumulative tradition in which improvements can be introduced without the danger of a faddish discard of old wisdom in favour of inferior novelties’ (D. T. Campbell & Stanley, 1963, p. 2).

What is already evident in their standing is the underlying understanding of knowledge: Their approach subscribes to what they call an ‘evolutionary perspective’ (D. T. Campbell & Stanley, 1963, p. 3), where new knowledge cumulatively builds on top of older knowledge, and the stock of knowledge steadily increases. The role of experimentation in this process is seen as a ‘means to sharpening the relevance of the testing, probing, selection process’ that already happens ‘naturally’ when traditional wisdom is built; it is a ‘refining process superimposed upon the probably valuable cumulations of wise practice’ (D. T. Campbell & Stanley, 1963, p. 4). Social science thus helps the knowledge of society progress faster, and with less error.

As Dahler-Larsen (2012, p. 38 f.) points out, the environment that such an understanding of evaluation – and more broadly speaking, of the role for science in policy – requires, is that of a bureaucratic, rational organisation. It is an environment where problems are managed according to procedures: Rules, guidelines, and handbooks become of primary importance, and are seen to make human or professional judgment unnecessary. The overall ideal of such an organisation is to find the procedure to handle a large number of cases with the least cost (financial, administrative effort, etc.) possible. It uses the best solutions identified by an objective science for clearly delimited and defined problems.

Such an understanding of an organisation, or a public administration, or the network of organisations that are embedded in the aid *dispositif*, may seem rather odd from today’s perspective. Also the conceptualisation of the interaction between science and policy seems overly simplistic, especially if one looks at the other propositions the academic field of policy analysis has to offer. A range of approaches have questioned the assumptions underpinning the understanding of public policy as a rational, bureaucratic organisation, by stressing the

importance of belief systems (Sabatier, 1988), the social construction of target groups for policies (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), or specific opportunities that enable new policies to be forged (Cohen et al., 1972). More radical approaches stemming from the field of social anthropology (e.g., Cris Shore & Wright, 1997) throw most assumptions of the ‘rational’ organisation directly overboard and study the policy process along the lines of symbols, rituals, and power. To put it with (Mosse, 2004, p. 641), they see ‘policy as a rationalising discourse concealing the hidden purposes of bureaucratic power or dominance’.¹²⁷

Notwithstanding, the idea of the rational organisation and the scientist approach to evaluation and policy is still an important element in the formation of discourses of public policy and the aid *dispositif*. In the 1990s, it even made a specific comeback. Not because its credibility would have increased in the meantime, but because appropriating its de-politicising effects proved an efficient strategy to create legitimacy for public policies in this historically specific moment.

When new labour took office after years of Thatcherism in 1997, the role that discourses reserved for the state to play in society was reduced to a minimum. State action, or public policy, *per se* was disqualified, and the time of the ‘big ideologies’ was declared to be over. Thatcher had made clear that ‘there is no such thing as society’, and indeed, her administration did not leave much of such a thing behind. The new labour government thus quickly embarked on a path of ‘modernising government’. In a White Paper with this title, then Prime Minister Tony Blair justified the need for these reforms as follows:

‘The Government has a mission to modernise – renewing our country for the new millennium. We are modernising our schools, our hospitals, our economy and our criminal justice system. [...] But modernisation must go further. It must engage with how government itself works. Modernising government is a vital part of our programme of renewal for Britain. The old arguments about government are now outdated – big government against small government, interventionism against laissez-faire. The new issues are the right issues: modernising government, better government, getting government right. [...] it is modernisation for a purpose: modernising government to get better government – for a better Britain’ (Cabinet Office, 1999, p. 5).

To justify a far-reaching reform agenda, this problem statement is surprisingly hollow – and even circular. Although it promises that modernisation is for a purpose, this purpose is never made clear. And neither is the problem this reform wants to address: it ends with the circular phrase demanding ‘modernising government to get better government’, which is then somehow linked to a better Britain. One could think that this formulation only makes sense in discursive environment where government *per se* is denounced as something ‘bad’, and ‘only less of it’ would be better. In the UK at that time, discourses on government have been doing exactly that for almost two decades by then.

New Labour’s strategy therefore positioned the party’s vision not in opposition with this image. Rather, it presented itself as transcending the ‘old arguments’ between left and right with its reforms (Solesbury, 2002, p. 93). The reforms thus become an end in itself: ‘modernising government, better government, getting government right’. At the same time,

¹²⁷ Also among the professionals in the policy analysis field, only a minority seems to clearly hold on to the positivist understanding (Morçöl, 2001).

political debates, or ideologies are presented as something that belongs in the realm of outdated, ‘non-modernised’ government: ‘We live in an age when most of the old dogmas that haunted governments in the past have been swept away (Cabinet Office, 1999, p. 9). New Labour thus replaces political ideology with ‘modernisation’. For positioning this political program as non-ideological the means to bring about modernisation are pivotal:

‘And we need to make sure that government services are brought forward using the best and most modern techniques, to match the best of the private sector’ (Cabinet Office, 1999, p. 5).

With the help of technological progress, and the management tools from the private sector, this reform agenda positions itself as a high-modernism updated with the neoliberal private sector inspired solutions (cf. Sanderson, 2002). Evidence-based policy making is a crucial component in this:

‘This Government expects more of policy makers. More new ideas, more willingness to question inherited ways of doing things, better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long-term goals. Our challenge, building on existing good practice, is to get different parts of government to work together, where that is necessary, to deliver the Government’s overall strategic objectives – without losing sight of the need to achieve value for money’ (Cabinet Office, 1999, p. 16).

Invoking evidence-based policy-making, and more ‘willingness to question inherited ways’ is underlining the a-political, non-ideological tone of the overall document. Instead of old ideological debates, this government uses science to find ‘better’ solutions. Accordingly, small pilot projects to try out new approaches and see whether they work becomes popular again (Sanderson, 2000, p. 433), underlining the close relationship between evidence-based policy making and the scientific approach outlined above. ‘Finding what works’ becomes the main objective, and ‘what matters is what works’ becomes the new ministerial *mantra* (Sanderson, 2000, p. 433).

In this problematisation of public policy, ‘doing what works’ gets elevated to ‘doing the right thing’. If one considers that the definition of ‘what works’ is here relatively narrowly framed as delivering value for money, the constructed nature of the non-ideological stance of evidence-based policy becomes evident. What is presented as a post-ideological government uncritically absorbs the standards for a good government set by neoliberal problematisations of public policy. Evidence-based policy, in this sense, cannot be uncritically seen as transcending ideology (cf. Parsons, 2002). Rather, it posits ideological positions on public policy as non-ideological and moves forward by uncritically endorsing them. Hence, it is further entrenching the neoliberal problematisation of public policy and the order of knowledge in which it is embedded; and contributes to the acceptance of its basic assumptions, notions, and theories, as part of the ‘normal’.

And, this specific way to problematise the public sector is not limited to the UK: For instance, the Organisation for economic co-operation and development (OECD) writes in the presentation of a report entitled *Modernising Government: The Way Forward* that

‘[p]ublic sector modernisation is no longer an option, but a necessity. It will help governments respond to changing societal needs and maintain competitiveness in an uncertain international environment’ (OECD, 2005a).

If ‘there is no alternative’, the space for debate that is allowed within the discourse of public policy or government is restricted to discussing the details of *how* to modernise government, but not *whether* government has to be modernised at all. With an organisation like the OECD, which assembles the largest bi-lateral donor countries, this specific problematisation is equally projected into the domestic policies of developing countries. Academia and research institutions focusing on development policy also quickly picked up on the evidence-based policy making trend, and started to explore ways to apply this model to a global level (e.g., H. Jones, 2012). Donaldson (2009) has saliently called this the ‘search for a blueprint for an evidence-based global society’.¹²⁸

An important share of this endeavour to project the underlying order of knowledge of evidence-based policy around the globe is contributed by international organisations. A noteworthy example is United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), who advocates for strengthening ‘capacities for evaluation’ in developing countries. In its report entitled *Country-led monitoring and evaluation systems. Better evidence, better policies, better development results* (UNICEF, 2009), the push to make policies more evidence-based could hardly be less explicit:

‘The issue of country- led monitoring and evaluation systems has been increasingly recognized as central to the promotion of development effectiveness. The Paris Declaration and the recent follow up in the Accra Agenda for Action, stress the importance of developing and working through country systems, and explicitly refer to national monitoring systems and country led evaluations. [...] In supporting countries to uphold and protect the rights of children and women and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we recognize the importance of using evidence to shape policy and practice, both internationally and in specific country contexts’ (UNICEF, 2009, p. 2).

Evidence-based policy has become a pivotal element of the formation of the aid discourse. It is presented as ‘central’ for the development effectiveness agenda embodied in the Paris declaration, and to achieve the MDGs. The hopes in what ‘evidence’ can achieve seem unlimited, and more evaluation seems necessarily better. Other interpretations, or challenges to this understanding of ‘putting science to work to provide solutions to social problems’ seem practically inexistent, at least in the official statements on the topic. As an example, the United Nations General Assembly recently approved the resolution A/RES/69/237, entitled *Capacity building for the evaluation of development activities at the country level* through general consensus and cross-regional support – apparently the first time that this happened in the history of the United Nations (UNEG, 2014). It is the same discursive environment that makes the following statement by the new chair of the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) possible:

¹²⁸ Even more saliently, Donaldson (2009, p. 5) describes the omnipresence and uncritical adoption of this model along the two following formulae: ‘Mom + The Flag + Warm Apple Pie = Evidence-Based Practice’, or simply ‘In God We Trust – All Others Must Have Credible Evidence’.

‘Evidence saves lives but to be able to save lives we need good quality evidence. We need evidence that looks at the structural problems of development. We need to have evidence that tells us, why for example women are excluded, why they are not included in political participation, in the economic society. We have to understand the context of why that happens, and that's why this evidence has to be generated by the country’ (Courtrix, 2015).

That evidence is now presented as ‘saving lives’, instead of supporting policies, programs, and specific practices in saving lives, is striking. It means that ‘evidence’ has become so entrenched in the aid *dispositif* that it becomes unthinkable to implement a project without specific activities that provide legitimacy for it – in the form of evidence. To put it bluntly, it is not – for instance – the vaccination campaign that saves lives anymore. It is the evidence that vaccination campaigns work that ‘saves lives’, by making the vaccination campaign fundable, or more efficient, or its effects more sustainable. Evidence-based policy – and how it relates the different practices of programming, evaluating, governing; how it configures the relationship between ‘science’ and ‘policy; and how it constantly reproduces this specific configuration – has become a backbone of the aid *dispositif*, and how discourses of the international community are structured in general.

But if I posit an astonishing survival of the image of the ‘rational organisation’ and the accompanying modernist beliefs in the discourse formation of public policy, even though most of its assumptions do not seem to hold when confronted with other research, this immediately begs a question: If the main purpose of this underlying order of knowledge and the discourses that held this image alive is not to provide an accurate, or helpful understanding of the policy process, what purpose does it serve instead? And, more importantly – and perhaps less speculatively – what are the effects of these discourses, and of the specific practices they enable and make possible?¹²⁹

A noteworthy effect of the increasing importance of evidence-based approaches is the continuing debate around evaluation methods. Although the new evidence-based policy movement rather considers systematic reviews as the new gold standard (K. Young, Ashby, Boaz, & Grayson, 2002), the debate on what counts as credible evidence (Donaldson, Christie, & Mark, 2009), and rigorous or robust evaluation designs (Chalmers, 2003) is revived with the emergence of evidence-based policy making. Also the randomised controlled trial has seen a phase of renewed interest, particularly in the United States (Bickman & Reich, 2009). Although the concept has been subjected to strong criticisms (e.g., Hammersley, 2005; Scriven, 2008) – also for its application in the context of aid (Bamberger & White, 2007) – the discourse of aid has been continuously shifting towards a problematisation of aid in terms of its impacts. The debate has thus more and more circled around the question to find ‘rigorous’ proof that certain strategies work.

In an influential paper, the CGD (2006, p. 1) provides the rationale for such a ‘rigorous’ proof:

¹²⁹ In this chapter, I can only give a tentative answer to this question along the broad lines of abstract tendencies and processes these effects entail. For the analysis of more concrete effects in the context of Myanmar, see following chapter 5.

‘Successful programs to improve health, literacy and learning, and household economic conditions are an essential part of global progress. Yet after decades in which development agencies have disbursed billions of dollars for social programs, and developing country governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have spent hundreds of billions more, it is deeply disappointing to recognize that we know relatively little about the net impact of most of these social programs. Addressing this gap, and systematically building evidence about what works in social development, would make it possible to improve the effectiveness of domestic spending and development assistance by bringing vital knowledge into the service of policymaking and program design’.

The rationale constructed here can be subsumed under the modernist belief of identifying the ‘right solutions’ with the help of ‘scientific’ methods, implying that these solutions – after the ‘noise’ has been filtered out with sophisticated enough research designs – are applicable regardless of their context. Further, it constitutes ‘development’ as amenable to be measured in ‘net impacts’, i.e. amenable to be quantified.¹³⁰ That this only captures a very small share of aid projects becomes evident if one looks at the applicability of the randomised controlled trials. Bamberger and White (2007, p. 62) estimate that only five percent of aid is amenable to this specific evaluation design.¹³¹ Nonetheless, their article is typical for this debate: Although they criticise the randomised controlled trial (RCT), their criticism reproduces the basic notions of rigorous methods and impacts:

‘The term ‘Gold Standard’ has recently been introduced into evaluation discourse to refer to RCTs as being the impact evaluation methodology to which development agencies should aspire, though this privileged position is disputed by others. The purpose of this article is to seek common ground on ways to strengthen the methodological rigor and quality of development impact evaluations, while at the same time adapting the methodology to the technical, administrative, political and sociocultural contexts within which these evaluations are developed, implemented and used’ (Bamberger & White, 2007, p. 58 f.)

In this case, this means that the authors would advocate for the next methods in the ranking of the ‘rigorous’ methods; namely the regression based quasi-experimental methods. So, even if the RCT may not have too many advocates, the debate reinforces that aid should measure and prove its impact, if possible with quantitative methods. If the benchmark for a good policy is set by the *mantra* that it works, proving that it works becomes mandatory for any policy to be seen as legitimate. And, the debate around how each method ranks in terms of rigour has clearly given the quantitative methods more weight in the practice of ‘proving’ in order to legitimise a certain policy’s worth.¹³²

The legitimate speaking position – from which one can speak about aid and be taken seriously by the other institutions and actors in the aid *dispositif* – is thus increasingly reserved for technical experts. In the extreme case, the judgement on the worth of a project can only be formulated in terms of its net impact, derived by a ‘rigorous’ evaluation design.

¹³⁰ For a collection of analyses of the effects of the growing influences of quantification in aid and peacebuilding, see Cooley and Snyder (2015).

¹³¹ For example, G. C. S. Smith and Pell (2003) convincingly argue that not all interventions can be tested in an experimental design with a control group. Caricaturing the advocates of experimental designs, they write that they have been unable to find a randomized controlled trial that would rigorously prove that the use of parachutes prevents death when jumping out of an airplane; and that our knowledge of the efficacy of the parachute relies on purely anecdotal, hence, less credible data.

¹³²

Criticising these methods, or their judgements, becomes increasingly difficult without the necessary background in quantitative evaluation methods.¹³³

The exclusion of other criticism – meaning in this case, criticism not based on ‘robust, rigorous evidence’ – is not only felt in the political realm, but also inside academia. As Schuurman (2009, p. 831) puts it:

‘With a few exceptions development research became characterised by an emphasis on empiricism, quantitative methodologies and policy-oriented project evaluations. Interpreting Third World problems in terms of the inner logic and shifting contradictions of a globalising capitalism was limited to those situated in the critical theory twilight zone.’

This shows how strong the power/knowledge networks are that link a positivist, empiricist understanding of causality and ‘scientific’ methods; with the legitimacy to identify and interpret problems of ‘development’ and finding their ‘solutions’. Even (critical, qualitative) parts of academia are excluded from criticising development policy on the ‘right’ terms, and are relegated to a ‘twilight zone’. This, in turn, reinforces a very specific understanding of research: as a ‘utilitarian’ enterprise (Solesbury, 2002), which has to be useful and useable, and which also constitutes academia – and the social sciences in particular – to provide ‘solutions’ to policy problems.

3.7 The will to improve: peacebuilder’s exceptionalism and the duty to be effective

In this section, I now turn to a closer examination of the discourses in the field of peacebuilding; and how they relate to the developments in the discourses of aid outlined above. First of all, a disclaimer: that I dedicate a different section to the bundle of discourses, institutions, and practices called peacebuilding does not mean that I would consider peacebuilding as inherently different from aid; neither in its approaches, practices, rationales, or concepts. As with aid, I consider it the result of historical processes of discourse formation, of a specific order of power/knowledge that enables it and produces it.¹³⁴ Why I set my analysis of peacebuilding – at least for the moment – apart from aid is due to something else: The formation of discourses, and its ensuing institutions and practices of peacebuilding have evolved in different historical processes than aid. What makes their separate analysis even more fruitful is that the discourse formation of peacebuilding often functions in direct distinction to aid; and thus, also relates differently to the practices of planning, measuring, and evaluating.

With peacebuilding arguably being still less institutionalised compared to aid, the evaluation of peacebuilding as a field may be marginal, and has only gained in importance over the last decade. This makes ideally suited to serve as a field for observation: it is in this area that the problems to apply standard approaches are striking where I can observe the power effects of larger discourses that make that they are applied anyway. And, it is in this

¹³³ It is in this context that Eyben (2013, p. 21) calls the effect of evidence-based policy to ‘build an anti-politics firewall’.

¹³⁴ See chapter 2.

field where I can best observe how the discourses *make* things measureable, manageable, and plannable.¹³⁵ But firstly, I need to contextualise the emergence of peacebuilding and its discourses.

Historically speaking, the emergence of peacebuilding is intrinsically tied to the end of the Cold War. It was the end of the confrontation between the two political systems that has dominated the second half of the 20th century in most historical accounts; and this provided the conditions for peacebuilding to emerge in his specific form. Whilst ‘peace’ or ‘peace research’¹³⁶ had an emancipatory ring to it during the Cold War, it quickly lost this meaning after its end (Goetschel & Hagmann, 2011, p. 45). It was in the mind-set that had just seen an unexpected historical shift, and which some have – a bit prematurely – described as ‘the end of history’ (Fukuyama, 1989). Still, it is more than telling when Fukuyama (1989, p. 3) writes that

‘the past year has seen a flood of articles commemorating the end of the Cold War, and the fact that ‘peace’ seems to be breaking out in many regions of the world.’

It was in a period when peace would still be seen as ‘breaking out’, likening its sudden and inexplicable presence to a phenomenon in nature. But it was shortly afterwards that the formation of the discourses of the international community and academia started to constitute ‘peace’ as something man-made, as something which can be ‘built’. Since the adoption of then UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali’s (1992) famous ‘*agenda for peace*’, a range of multilateral organisations and bilateral donor institutions got engaged in peacebuilding practices; and specialised peacebuilding INGOs emerged. Subsequently, that peace can be ‘built’ with specific practices became a problematization of peace and conflict that was shared across the political spectrum (Goetschel & Hagmann, 2011, p. 45; Paris, 1997, p. 55).¹³⁷

Accordingly, peacebuilding interventions have given rise to a growing body of debates in the academic realm, but more recently also in more policy-oriented fields of policy and evaluation research. Classically, theorists would distinguish between three different paradigms to peacebuilding (Miall, 2004): Conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. For conflict management, the main focus is a pragmatic stance towards conflict:

‘Conflict management is the positive and constructive handling of difference and divergence. Rather than advocating methods for removing conflict, [it] addresses the more realistic question of managing conflict’ (Bloomfield & Reilly, 1998, p. 18).

An important aspect of this finding the appropriate institutions that deal with conflict, and that allow to address conflict in specific settings without resorting to violent means. For conflict resolution theorists, on the other hand, this view equals to a quick fix solution that does not address the real problem. For instance, Azar and Burton (1986) argue that violent conflicts have to be resolved by helping the parties to reflect on their positions and interests,

¹³⁵ This reasoning is similar to the approach that Power (1996) took when he was analysing marginal practices of auditing, because their broader logic would be hidden in more established contexts.

¹³⁶ For an overview of the older currents of peace research, e.g. see Goetschel and Hagmann (2011).

¹³⁷ For example, Saferworld or the International Crisis Group.

to find appropriate solutions that are acceptable. Finally, conflict transformation theorists argue that conflict has to be addressed with a more holistic approach: In his pioneer work on the topic of violent conflict, Galtung (1969) already argues that violence has a cultural, a direct, and a structural dimension that have to be addressed. This opens the possibility for an agenda of building peaceful societies that understands itself explicitly emancipatory (cf. Goetschel & Hagmann, 2009), where different individuals have the opportunities to a life free of violence, and access to economic opportunities free from discrimination (Galtung, 1969, 2007; Lederach, 1997, 2005). In this understanding, absence of direct violence only can be described as a negative peace, while the successful transformation of conflict should lead to a positive peace that is marked by the absence of direct and indirect violence, a culture of peace, and a non-discriminatory institutional framework (Galtung, 1969). This problematisation of ‘building peace’ as ‘building peaceful societies’ thus gave rise to an understanding that the very foundations of a society, or ‘root causes’ of conflict have to be addressed to transform violent conflict. And, this problematisation of peace as ‘positive’ peace also makes entire societies, and their *rappports de forces* amenable to be improved, redesigned, and transformed by peacebuilding. In this sense, conflict transformation can be seen as a form of bio-power in the sense of Foucault (1997), wherein populations and their internal relations have to be managed to maximise their collective force.

Noteworthy is that conflict transformation has reached a quasi-hegemonic status among peacebuilding practitioners (cf. Miall, 2004; Paffenholz, 2014). It forms thus a specific order of knowledge that is realising its power effects via specific institutions, namely the networks of state and non-state actors intervening in countries with violent conflicts, using specific practices, frameworks, codes, standards, and so forth. In short: a neoliberal governmentality.

Another strand of literature that has received a lot of attention in the academic debate over the last years can be subsumed under the label of the ‘liberal peace debate’.¹³⁸ This debate revolves around the normative framework on which the growing number of interventions in conflict-affected contexts is drawing; and is basically a critique of the implicitly or explicitly liberal assumptions of many of the interventions aiming at reconstructing societies, strengthening institutions and building peace after internal conflict. Based on the assumption that democracies do not go to war with each other (Doyle, 1983, 1986), and that consolidated democracies are less likely to experience internal conflict,¹³⁹ the building of democratic states is seen as a prevention of armed conflict and a means to the pacification of ongoing conflicts. This normative framework and its influence on interventions in conflict-affect contexts have been criticized from various angles. For instance, Paris (2004) argues that the transition process to democracy and a free market is a tumultuous one; for which adequate institutional frameworks are necessary to be successful. Consequentially, he identifies the focus on quickly held elections after internal conflict in various peacebuilding interventions as problematic. Other authors criticized liberal peace’ over-reliance on policies of market liberalisation (Pugh,

¹³⁸ Given the extensive body of literature that relates to this debate, I will restrict myself here to an absolute minimum. For overviews of these debates, see Newman, Paris, and Richmond (2009); S. P. Campbell, Chandler, and Sabaratnam (2011), specifically the chapters written by Sabaratnam (2011) and Chandler (2011); or Heathershaw (2013).

¹³⁹ For an empirical discussion of this point, see Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates, and Gleditsch (2001).

2005), or its universalistic tendencies and difficulties to take local contexts or agency into account (Richmond, 2010), which can be subsumed under various debates on hybridisation and a ‘local turn’ in the debate (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Another angle of criticism throws the assumed peacefulness of democracies completely overboard: Dillon and Reid (2007) argue that with the emergence of biopolitics, liberal states committed to making life live; and conversely, are committed to kill to make life live. Waging war on behalf of protection lives, or more precisely, populations, thus becomes ‘normal’ for liberal states.

Of more direct relevance for my analysis is what happens at the margins of these debates that Heathershaw (2013, p. 275 f.) saliently calls the ‘spectre [that] has haunted European scholars of peace and conflict studies since the end of the cold war’. There, scholars have noted the increasingly technocratic approaches to peacebuilding that have begun to emerge with the ongoing professionalisation and specialisation of the field. Goetschel and Hagmann (2009) observe an increasing bureaucratisation, and Mac Ginty (2012, 2013) identifies a ‘technocratic turn’ in peacebuilding. Denskus (2007) draws attention to the increasing importance of managerial tools like monitoring and evaluation, and how they ‘de-politicise’ peacebuilding. And Duffield (2001b) sees in the new public-private networks of aid practice in conflictive environments an attempt of the ‘metropolitan’ states to govern the ‘borderlands’.

So, how is it possible that ‘building peace’, the relatively free floating, new favourite activity of the 1990s now suddenly has turned into a regulated, bureaucratic endeavour? I argue that the power/knowledge networks of the aid *dispositif* also realised their power effects in peacebuilding. In the following, I attempt to retrace this process that made peacebuilding amenable to the problematisations, tools and solutions of the aid *dispositif*.

First thing to mention about the formation of the discourse of peacebuilding is that it constitutes its object not necessarily as a clear entity, but rather in distinction from aid: It is rather difficult to find a single discourse fragment that is not striving to emphasise that peacebuilding is different, new, taking place in specific conditions, and thus, needs specific approaches or tools. Already in one of the first attempts to address the question of peacebuilding and its results that got wider attention, Bush (1998, p. 1) wrote that

‘[t]he unique and fluid nature of the research and development problematique in post-conflict societies requires a programming approach which is highly responsive and reflexive to changing contexts. With the end of the Cold War, local wars and intra-state armed conflicts have come to centre-stage in international affairs, and the international community can no longer approach the twin issues of peace and development in a fragmented fashion. New conceptual and methodological tools are urgently required to understand and respond to the precarious and fragile political, economic, and social environments found in conflict-torn countries. Policy and practice must be informed by lessons drawn from the field as well as new analytical approaches.’

Already then, the rules of discourse formation seemed astonishingly clear. Even without much adaptation, the discourse fragment here could serve as an introduction in one of today’s guidelines or policy papers on peacebuilding. By emphasising the ‘fluid’ nature of the environment of peacebuilding, which calls for a ‘highly responsive and reflexive’ response, it clearly separates its field of application from a ‘normal’ aid context; which in turn must be

interpreted as ‘stable’.¹⁴⁰ It calls for a new approach, new tools, which are hoped to grapple with this new environment that peacebuilding is facing.¹⁴¹ At the same time, while this problematisation of the environment of peacebuilding constitutes it as a new field with unique challenges, the direction for these new tools and solutions is considerably narrowed down; namely to approaches that draw on the lessons from the field. Thus, the basic structures of the discourses on aid that demand constant improvement – and in this case, learning – are recognisable; and the broader lines of solving this ‘new problem’ remain rooted in the older approaches. Even if Bush admits and even stresses differences with other environments, this also constitutes the problem of peacebuilding as something which is amenable to the right approaches and methodologies; something that can be ‘built’ or mastered. Although constructed as opposed to traditional ways of approaching things, this call for seemingly radically new ways remains within the confines of the established aid discourse; and is only asking for a set of new tools. Instead of beginning something new, this discourse fragment rather stabilises and crystallises the underpinning order of knowledge of the aid *dispositif*.

The basic direction that is given by the discourse, and visible in Bush’s (1998) statement above is then further entrenched with the proposition of new tools and approaches. On another level, the exercise of ‘taking stock’ of what has already been tried (Spencer, 1998) or ‘framing the state of play’ of ‘emergent practices’ (Church & Shouldice, 2002, 2003) is further ingrain the problematisation that it is a question of developing the right methods and tools. In the rationale of their stock-taking exercise, Church and Shouldice (2002, p. 1) make it clear that ‘[c]urrently evaluation is an ad hoc process conforming to the needs of the moment and limited by lack of skills, understanding and resources’. That this state is not acceptable, and needs to be overcome by the design of new tools, quickly follows:

‘As the discipline of conflict resolution matures, the need for the field to be able to understand, articulate, measure and compare will become increasingly important. New tools need to be designed, disseminated within the field, tested and refined. If those directly engaged in the work do not take up the challenge of finding methods and approaches that are suited to the unique challenges of conflict resolution, other, less useful methods will be imposed by those requiring evidence of the effectiveness of this work. Whether evaluation is tailored to meet the needs of conflict resolution or conflict resolution is tailored to meet the needs of evaluation remains to be seen – and is ultimately the choice of those engaged in the field’ (Church & Shouldice, 2002, p. 3).

Besides its undisputed value from today’s vantage point as a fulfilled prophecy, there is another reason why I chose this passage, namely the inter-discursive link it performs: It is drawing on the discourse of aid and its problematisation (‘those requiring evidence’) to create an urgency to develop peacebuilding’s evaluation methodology. The advent of technical methods is posited as inevitable. Put simply: There *will* be evaluation of peacebuilding, no matter what. But it is up to ‘those engaged in the field’ to find suitable methods for these evaluations. The other possible solutions for the ‘problem’ of peacebuilding – outside of

¹⁴⁰ A construction that would not hold like this, and which was later challenged by complexity theory (see next section 3.8 below).

¹⁴¹ See also, for instance, Church and Shouldice (2002).

evaluation – are thus precluded from the outset; the practitioner remains with the options of having either useful or less useful evaluations.

Hence, this fragment demonstrates how that the practices of the aid *dispositif* (in this case, evaluation) are forming a part of a knowledge order; which can hardly be questioned anymore. That every kind of government or NGO sponsored activity has to be evaluated, judged and improved, seems to be taken for granted. Further, and similar to the fragment by Bush (1998) quoted above, it shows how criticism of the old ways can be uttered within the space confined by a discourse; but that this at the same time reproduces and reinforces the structure of the discourse, and does not necessarily challenge it more fundamentally. In this example, Church and Shouldice (2002) are trying to prevent the peacebuilding field from an imposition of methods from the outside. At the same time, to bring up the question on the results of peacebuilding from the speaking position of an expert makes it legitimate to question peacebuilding's results. It connects peacebuilding with the practice of evaluation in a way that was not possible, or not seen as legitimate before. It enables the practices of evaluation in the peacebuilding field in the first place. Problematising it along evaluation methods thus makes peacebuilding amenable to these practices of the aid *dispositif*, and thus constructs legitimacy for 'those requiring evidence' to impose their methods in the first place. In a sense, this discursive fragment thus contributes to becoming a *self*-fulfilling prophecy.

A similar effect can also be observed by in the stock-taking study of Spencer. Also she reiterates that peacebuilding needs a different approach:

'The central argument of the paper is that peacebuilding is not simply a technical exercise and, as such, requires new ways of viewing and assessing it (Spencer, 1998, p. i).'

New here is that the 'new ways' are called for because peacebuilding is not a 'technical exercise'. This brings up an important – almost omnipresent – element for the formation of the object of the peacebuilding discourse: To constitute 'peacebuilding' as 'political'; as opposed to something technical. While for most of the time its definition remains blurry at best, the 'political' is constantly referred to as a founding or essential element that is separating peacebuilding from the technical approaches – almost in a way reminiscent of how one would distinguish an artisan from an artist.¹⁴² The invocation of the 'political nature' of peacebuilding has become ritualistic in the discourse of peacebuilding; which is rendered more and more professionalised, technical, and bureaucratic. The same applies too Spencer's (1998) assertion above. Paradoxically, her assessment from the legitimate speaking position of a peacebuilding expert doing a meta-analysis of peacebuilding evaluations, who is on the quest for a contribution to this 'debate around possible criteria and the need for conceptual frameworks for assessing such interventions' (Spencer, 1998, p. i), her document reproduces and reinforces the very problematisation of peacebuilding as a technical exercise that she criticises.

¹⁴² This distinction is common especially in the subfield of peace mediators: 'Although mediation can be analysed in a systematic manner, the practice of mediation is more complicated and messy than any theory so far presented. There is no universally valid blueprint for mediation. There are no easy or predetermined solutions in peace negotiations. [...] mediation is a carefully balanced and fragile 'piece of art' and the challenge is to build and maintain this balance with skill and determination' (Mediation Support Project, 2015)'

A few words on the formation of the legitimate speaking position as an ‘expert’ that are linked to these exercises of ‘framing the state of play’: Through these exercises, this new discourse of peacebuilding appropriates the power and legitimacy effects of a ‘science’ that is usually seen¹⁴³ as progressing by identifying the state-of-the-art first, and then answering new questions that add upon this stock of knowledge. In a newly emerging field like peacebuilding, the power effects of these practices are particularly strong: They have a normalising effect on already existing approaches, and subjugate them under one specific problematisation – in this case, how to improve peacebuilding methods. Further, the formation of a legitimate speaking position as a peacebuilding ‘expert’ is henceforth constructed for those that have taken note of and integrated the conclusions of the state-of-the-art-overview; while those who haven’t are disqualified as ‘trying out’, or ‘ad-hoc’, and thus excluded from the legitimate speaking position.

Smith’s (2004) widely read joint study of peacebuilding, known as the *Utstein study* is another one of these stock-taking exercises. In his report, he firmly embeds peacebuilding in the broader discourses and their problematisations of public action that have been prevalent in for aid. He writes that

‘[v]arious security and socio-economic projects seem ‘strategy resistant’ as if they need no strategic justification because their worth is self-evident’ (D. Smith, 2004, p. 11).

This embedding is performed in the way the sentence is constructed: Firstly, ‘strategy resistant’ implies that there is a broader trend of having a strategy, to which only a few outliers are resisting. Then the second part of the sentence conveys disbelief, almost astonishment towards the thought that these projects might – indeed – have a worth that is inherent, or does not need to be proven. In an order of knowledge that produces a need for every kind of project, public action, or institution to prove its worth and merit, in terms of being effective, having an impact, or a strategic justification, it becomes unthinkable that worth could be self-evident.

The focus on results has entered the discourse in small steps that made peacebuilding also amenable to similar pressures for technical approaches to prove its worth like the ones I analysed above for the aid *dispositif*.¹⁴⁴ But although there remains a lot of resistance towards this overall development on the level of individual peacebuilding practitioners,¹⁴⁵ it cannot only be seen as the consequence of an intrusion from another field of practices. Equally, practitioners themselves have taken up elements of this problematisation of peacebuilding in the terms of the results it achieves. Voluntarily and involuntarily, they have taken up some elements, left out others, pushed some aspects, rejected others; and thus, in sum, contributed to the crystallisation of the power/knowledge networks that structure the peace *dispositif* today. A certain ‘will to improve’ is present in the discourse of peacebuilding; and it nurtures the quest for new approaches and ways to make peacebuilding better. This will becomes evident in the following paragraphs that Ropers (2008) writes on the increased use of conflict transformation concepts:

¹⁴³ At least in traditional, positivist understandings of science.

¹⁴⁴ See section 3.6 above.

¹⁴⁵ See also section 5.4.5 below.

‘Yet while they have enriched the spectrum of measures for responding to conflict, there is still a huge gap between the grim reality of declared and undeclared wars, of frozen, latent and protracted conflicts and what conflict transformation approaches have been capable of delivering.

Much work has been done to redress this gap and improve the effectiveness of nonviolent response to internal conflicts. There has been commendable work in the areas of developing sounder conflict analysis (including reflection on its theoretical underpinnings), reflecting on the overall effectiveness of peacebuilding measures (including the link between micro measures and macro impact) and enhancing impact assessment’ (Ropers, 2008, p. 11).

It becomes evident that focusing on results is not only a pressure from donor side, with which peacebuilding practitioners have to comply. Triggered by the feeling that peacebuilding is not yet unfolding its full potential¹⁴⁶ to overcome the ‘grim reality’ of war, there is also a welcoming uptake of the technical tools like better conflict analysis, effectiveness, and impact assessments in the discourse of practitioners. As however imperfect these technical tools may be seen and described, they still are the only way that the formation of peacebuilding discourses allows moving ‘forward’. If one wants to stay within the realms of professionalised peacebuilding and not venture into – say – ‘political activism’,¹⁴⁷ these tools are the only way to ‘improve’ practice.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that the most widely used framework to assess and conceptualise peacebuilding results – which was also instrumental in further expanding the reach of these tools into peacebuilding practices – was developed as a collaborative process between experts and practitioners: the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) Project (Anderson & Olson, 2003, p. 5). Its rationale is best described in its own words, which reiterate the moral obligation to ‘do better’:

‘All of the good peace work being done should be adding up to more than it is. The potential of these multiple efforts is not fully realized. Practitioners know that, so long as people continue to suffer the consequences of unresolved conflicts, there is urgency for everyone to do better’ (Anderson & Olson, 2003, p. 10).

But this rationale for the focus on results, and why it should also apply to peacebuilding, also shows that the problematisation of peacebuilding in terms of effectiveness has not always been as ‘natural’ as it might be perceived today. In fact, the moral obligation to do better cited above is the books overriding response to half a page of practitioners’ statements expressing their scepticism towards the focus on results in peacebuilding. Already then, the points still present in today’s discourse of peacebuilding where there: The complexity of peace; the long-term nature of the changes, the soft, intangible goals; and the flexibility required (Anderson & Olson, 2003, p. 8 f.).

Notwithstanding these concerns, Anderson’s and Olson’s (2003) book revolves around a simple proposition, that still figures as the key message on the Project’s website more than twelve years later (CDA Collaborative Learning, 2015): Peacebuilding should be accountable to ‘Peace Writ Large’. Peace Write Large here means the macro-level peace in a country, a

¹⁴⁶ The same applies to the methods deployed to evaluate peacebuilding; as illustrated by the choice of title for an article assessing the state-of-the-art of peacebuilding evaluation. Scharbatke-Church (2011) entitled her article *Peacebuilding evaluation – not yet all it could be*.

¹⁴⁷ On this distinction, see chapter 5.

societal level change, as opposed to the micro- or community level. This is not to be understood as necessarily promoting big-push projects. Rather, RPP promotes a new mind-set for peacebuilders, which focuses on results their activities produce, and how:

‘Many peace activities are discrete efforts directed toward affecting one (often small) piece of the puzzle. Most peace practitioners talk of the importance of linkages among the work at all levels and across sectors of society. Often, people will say, ‘I have to assume that, over time, all of our different activities will add up.’ But, the evidence is that, without explicit efforts to add it up, this does not automatically or inevitably occur’ (Anderson & Olson, 2003, p. 54).

The effect of RPP for the formation of peacebuilding discourse can hardly be understated. A discursive fragment with a clearer agenda to make peacebuilding amenable to the focus on results, to (re-) constitute its goal, and to shift its practices is hard to imagine. At least since the publication of this book, the focus on results is a fixed part of the formation of peacebuilding discourse. Resistance or discussion is mainly relegated to the smaller details of which method is best – to be even more focused on results.

Shortly after the publication of Anderson’s and Olson’s (2003) book, the debate among peacebuilders mainly revolved around the question of measuring impact. There were significant objections against a focus on impact, and various publications enumerating the conceptual problems of showing impacts with evaluation of peacebuilding activities.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, ‘impact’ made it to a prominent place in the formation of peacebuilding discourse, even to its overarching goal:

‘If projects are not accountable for how their interventions contribute to the broader peace, one runs the risk of investing a lot of time, resources, and effort in programmes with excellent outcomes, but that make no measurable difference to the conflict’ (Woodrow & Chigas, 2008).

This discursive fragment is illustrative in how it subjugates other possible accounts of peacebuilding by constituting the larger goal of peacebuilding in a very specific way. Peacebuilding is what makes a ‘measurable difference to the conflict’.¹⁴⁹ While ‘excellent outcomes’ on lower levels, for instance, community-level reconciliation, may be welcome, the ultimate goal of peacebuilding has to be making a difference to the conflict on macro-level. Therefore, if one wants to improve peacebuilding, one has to assess the difference it makes. This shifts not only the target of a practical measuring approach; it shifts the target of peacebuilding *per se*: towards an abstract idea of peace on the macro level, and away from the improving relationships, working on community level, away from people. While all these things may still be acknowledged as important, they are only important in the sense of ‘excellent outcomes’; meaning intermediary steps on the way to the ‘real’ goal. In the words of Slim (1997), it is the permanent shift from a deontological ethic (‘an action is good because it is good in itself’) towards a teleological ethic (‘an action is good because goodness emerges from that action’).¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ For example, see Menkhaus (2004); or Stave (2011).

¹⁴⁹ The same basic structure can also be found in the calls for more randomised controlled trials in the peacebuilding field (e.g., Gaarder & Annan, 2013).

¹⁵⁰ See section 3.4 above.

What underlies this reasoning is that the discourses of peacebuilding constitute it as ‘the thing’ that is tasked with bringing about peace; similar to how the discourses of aid constitute ‘aid’ as the thing that ‘eliminates poverty’. If one thinks of all other influences on peace in a country, or a region, or even the globe – e.g., geostrategic interests, legacies of colonialism, the global economic system – it becomes clear that peacebuilding alone cannot realistically deliver on building ‘peace’. Most of the factors that would make peace possible are out of its influence. If peacebuilding is not able to bring about peace, then it makes no sense to hold it accountable for impacts on the macro-level. But peacebuilding *is* held accountable to make a larger contribution to peace – and thus, these discourses stabilise and reinforce a *dispositif* that makes an armed conflict a ‘target’ for peacebuilding, makes it amenable to its practices.

On the other hand, peacebuilding – and to some extent, aid – are the only assumed direct influences of Western countries on peace in a conflict context that are actually subjected to a measurement; or at least to an expectation to measure and to prove. If one ventures into a little thought experiment, one can easily think of other policy fields probably influence peace, but which are not subjected to measurement: trade agreements, foreign direct investments, arms exports; or even military interventions. Taking all these factors into account would probably allow for a more realistic image of peacebuilding’s possibilities and limits.¹⁵¹ But factoring in these other influences is excluded by the aid and peacebuilding discourses; which constitute development and peace as the results of aid and peacebuilding. To make the task even more bizarre: It is not peace, or aid, that has to report towards the benchmark of peace on the macro level of a country. It is every single project, which has to make a difference to peace on the macro-level.

The idea that sustainable peace cannot be ‘built’ (e.g., Denskus, 2007; Goetschel & Hagmann, 2009) with the set of project-based professional interventions that we call peacebuilding today – or that these might not be enough – is excluded by the discourse. Peacebuilding is thus is a *dispositif* that constantly fails to live up to its own ideals, or to reach its self-declared goals.¹⁵² What can be said in this discourse is that the right handle, method, or technology has yet to be identified. Peacebuilding is also subjecting itself to the – potentially never ending – quest for that ‘silver bullet’ strategy. On this quest, it produces constantly failing new policies, new measurements, or ‘improved approaches’. The quick diversification and turnover of concepts and strategies in this field testify to that. In this sense, current peacebuilding practice can also be seen as showing the traits of a neoliberal governmentality, where practitioners are produced as subjects willing to improve themselves for the greater good – as opposed to more classical understanding of accountability, that enables more forms of direct control and discipline.

What has ensued was a succession of guidance notes and manuals, to improve peacebuilding or to bring ‘practice up to international standards’ (e.g., Church & Rogers, 2006; OECD, 2012). Besides the focus on results, it has been suggested that peacebuilding

¹⁵¹ For some specific parts of peacebuilding, like UN Peacekeeping missions, there have been attempts to model their influence in relation to other explaining factors with the help of quantitative methods (e.g., Doyle & Sambanis, 2000; Fortna, 2004; Gilligan & Sergenti, 2008). Not least due to their highly abstract results that give minimal handle to improve practice, they are largely ignored by practitioners.

¹⁵² For the ‘liberal peace’, Heathershaw (2008) draws a similar conclusion.

should invest more in better conflict analysis (Woodrow, 2006), design, and baselines (Spurk, 2008). Over time, this discussion has started to involve not only the aspects of the projects of peacebuilding, but the broader organisations that are ‘implementing’ peacebuilding as well. Starting from the finding that international organisations are failing to ‘learn’ to do peacebuilding (Benner, Mergenthaler, & Rotmann, 2011; Benner & Rotmann, 2008), the concepts of (organisational) learning have entered the peacebuilding discourse and quickly gained in importance (S. P. Campbell, 2008, 2011).

The idea of the ‘learning organisation’ has been present in the academic debates of organisational sociology (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978; Levitt & March, 1988; Senge, 1990), and many fields of social policy for decades (cf. Dahler-Larsen, 2012), but its entrance into the discourses of aid and peacebuilding has been particularly forceful. The call for more ‘learning’ to improve aid and peacebuilding has become an omnipresent feature of both discourses. With the formation of discourse problematising the justification of aid and peacebuilding in moral terms – which is still the main driving force for practitioners’ motivations I would reckon – it also becomes a moral obligation to make aid and peacebuilding better. To make more out of available resources, to reach more people, to do more in less time, to make one’s intervention more relevant, or more sustainable, are just a few of the intents that are present in the aid discourse. But it is also elements that are not as closely linked to the narrow problematisation of aid and peacebuilding in terms of results and efficiency I have been describing so far: It is also about being more inclusive, listen more to people’s needs, being more participatory in planning, ‘empowering’ people, building better relationships, fostering exchange, and ensuring better processes.¹⁵³ All of these values equally are part of the formation of discourse and legitimize aid and peacebuilding, and the broader vision they have. Naturally, these elements are also described by practitioners as elements of good practice, and are also part of the ‘moral’ obligation to continuously and meticulously ‘learn’ and ‘improve’.

If one looks at one of the most influential documents to guide evaluation practice in the peacebuilding field, the guidance by published by the OECD (2012), this importance of ‘learning’ and ‘improving’ is already visible in the subtitle: *Improving learning for results*. In many ways, this guidance is symptomatic for the field of peacebuilding, and especially for peacebuilding evaluation. It is telling that out of a 101 pages strong guidance, which is entitled with *improving learning for results*, only half a page is specifically dedicated to learning. It contains a rather vague idea that evaluation should ‘feed back into programming and engage in learning’ (OECD, 2012, p. 75) and is followed by an even vaguer idea of how evaluations should be useful:

‘Having completed the evaluation and learning process, decision makers, managers and staff should be better able to understand and improve strategies, outcomes and impacts, so making more lasting contributions to peace’ (OECD, 2012, p. 76).

153 As examples of a virtually endless list of such reflections, see Bächtold, Dittli, and Servaes (2013); Bornstein (2006); Britton (2012); Ebrahim (2005); Pearson (2011); S. Young (2012).

That learning is practically absent in this guidance shows that the discourse of peacebuilding has taken up the concept of (organisational) learning in a rather specific way: It serves as the new rallying point for the results agenda. The problematisation in the rationale for publishing this guidance is illustrative of this:

‘In recent years, the international community has paid increasing attention to situations of conflict and fragility, acknowledging that they are one of the great development challenges of our time. As growing shares of resources, time and energy are devoted to projects, programmes, and policy strategies for countries affected by conflict and fragility, more evidence of the effectiveness of these endeavours is essential. Donors, practitioners and developing country governments show mounting interest in learning more about what does and does not work, and why, and in improving understanding of what contributes positively to sustainable peace and development’ (OECD, 2012, p. 17).

This statement is essentially structured along the elements of evidence-based policy and accountability I analysed for DFID at the beginning of this chapter. This formation of discourse is based on the sequence of a larger investment, which then automatically leads to a need for more evidence about ‘what does and does not work, and why’. Interesting then is the use of ‘learning’ here: ‘Learning more about what does and does not work, and why’ combines elements stemming from the evidence-based policy model and the learning model, which are usually opposed.¹⁵⁴ Combining them in this way actually glosses over the traditional opposition between ‘learning’ and ‘accountability’. It thus gives the impression that the actors that are commonly associated with learning (practitioners or implementers) are forming a union with those that are commonly associated with ‘accountability’ (donors). That they are mentioned together, and in conjunction with ‘developing country governments’, constitutes them as all belonging to the same, large coalition of those willing to learn more about making peacebuilding better. Possible contradictions, oppositions, or clashing interests between these actors are omitted; depicting better peacebuilding as an uncontested, unpolitical agenda that is in everybody’s interest. In this sense, the way that learning has been taken up in the peacebuilding discourse is reminiscent of the effects of the ‘goalition’ for the discourse of aid.

The invocation of ‘learning’ thus serves as a rallying cry that constitutes a coalition where there was none before; which excludes diverging accounts or critical questions towards the whole endeavour of peacebuilding. ‘Learning’ as a concept is ideally suited for this: Sufficiently vague – also in the way that practitioners picked it up – and anchored in the neoliberal networks of power/knowledge, ‘learning’ is practically uncontested. This is not to say that ‘learning’ cannot have emancipatory effects, or help to make peacebuilding more effective. What I note here is that the way it is invoked glosses over the power hierarchy that operates in aid and peacebuilding, and thus de-politicises the relationship among different actors in these fields.¹⁵⁵ But the contingency of this construction that learning is in everybody’s best interest becomes evident in the more practical advice to evaluators in the above-quoted guidance:

¹⁵⁴ See section 3.6 above.

¹⁵⁵ See also sections 5.3.2 and 5.4.5 on these relationships in Myanmar.

‘Evaluations of interventions in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding expose – in contrast to almost all forms of evaluation – both evaluators and evaluated to real risk. Potential implications are profound. First, the threat of violence may constrain the evaluators’ ability to raise issues, collect material and data, recruit and retain local staff, meet interlocutors, publish findings, and disclose sources. Defending the integrity of evaluation findings in highly politicised and even dangerous settings can pose problems for evaluation teams, particularly where evaluation findings may potentially be misused by different parties to a conflict or harm those involved’ (OECD, 2012, p. 33).

This does not fit well with the overall coalition of the ‘willing to learn’ that was constructed in the introduction of the guidance. Neither does the advice on the following page:

Fragile and conflict-affected settings are highly political environments. Due to the politicisation of international involvement and political sensitivities in national contexts, evaluators may find it difficult to maintain a safe, credible ‘evaluation space’ (OECD, 2012, p. 34).

While acknowledging the – obviously important – presence of contestation and clashing interests in the practical guidance, the introduction omits these aspects and subjugates all actors involved under a coalition of those willing to learn. The ‘learning endeavour’ thus becomes a discursive strategy to de-politicise, and gloss over existing tensions. Not least, this strategy shows up relatively bluntly when the guidance advises that

‘Stakeholders may resist questioning the effectiveness of their approach. Receptivity can be enhanced by emphasising the learning aspects of evaluation [...]’ (OECD, 2012, p. 75).

Apparently, learning can be legitimately believed to smother resistance to evaluation among stakeholders. This underlines the unifying and de-politicising force the concept seems to have acquired in the peacebuilding discourse. ‘Learning’ has become the catch-all notion of peacebuilding; up to the point where ‘learning’ becomes an ‘empty signifier’ whose function is to gloss over the *rapport de forces* in the field of peacebuilding.

The broader debate that is becoming a hallmark of the formation of peacebuilding discourse is crystallised into two camps: Into those that demand more accountability, and those who demand less accountability, and more learning – with the blemish that the first camp does not seem to exist in the community of practitioners. If accountability is brought up at all, then as a by-product of evaluations that should mainly contribute to learning – or to point out the negative effects of too much accountability (e.g., see Bornstein, 2006; Ebrahim, 2005; Whande, 2012). As an example, the Toolkit for ‘planning, monitoring and learning’ by Lederach, Neufeldt, and Culbertson (2007, p. 63), mentions accountability exactly once – as the reason why evaluations often miss learning opportunities. The formation of discourse among practitioners thus fundamentally differs from the formation of discourse on the level of government and donors (external) representation.¹⁵⁶

But by ‘*rapport de forces*’ in the field of peacebuilding I refer to above do not primarily mean the relations ordering donors and implementers. Rather, it is ordering by omission: it creates a hierarchy between the coalition of the ‘willing to learn’ – and those who are not, or

¹⁵⁶ See also chapter 5.

cannot. And this concerns the people who are actually living in the countries where peacebuilding takes place. The endless, ritualised debate between ‘upwards’ accountability and learning has led to an overemphasis of ‘learning’ and it has disqualified accountability as a whole. With this, another aspect of accountability is omitted, side-lined or excluded: the concept of democratic, or ‘downwards’ accountability. While accountability towards local organisations or people occasionally gets mentioned among other propositions to improve peacebuilding (S. P. Campbell, 2011; Pouligny, 2005), it gets marginalised by the bigger debate between learning and accountability. Accountability *per se*, as it is present in the peacebuilding discourse, merely exists as the empty sparring partner for ‘learning’, behind whose back everybody rallies (cf. Tsadick, 2008).

In this context, the concept of democratic accountability even becomes subjugated to the focus on results. An example:

‘The call for accountability to the people ‘on whose behalf or with whom’ we work is one that resonated with both frameworkers and circlers¹⁵⁷ – who want to be as effective as possible. The calls to show effectiveness were heard.’ (Neufeldt, 2011, p. 487).

Here, the concept of democratic accountability is equated to ‘showing effectiveness’ to the people on ‘whose behalf’ peacebuilding is undertaken. It might seem like a detail, as one could assume a certain interest of the local population in the effectiveness of peacebuilding operations that came to transform their society. But the implications are more far-reaching. It is only if the peace ‘built’ by peacebuilding is in everybody’s interest that the construction above makes sense. Only if everybody wants this peace, then everybody has an interest in more effective peacebuilding. And only then it makes sense to equate the accountability towards local people to showing peacebuilding’s effectiveness. The implications are major: Peacebuilding is constituted as non-objectionable; as being somehow inherently, or automatically in the interest of all the actors and parties involved. The only criticism possible is to criticise its lacking effectiveness – an arena of debate on a highly specialised topic, where access is mostly reserved to technical experts.

This means that most aspects of current peacebuilding practices are not questionable anymore: its organisational setup in projects and program funded by Western donors, its understanding of local ownership, the partners it chooses, its machinery of practices and institutions that are deployed into each armed conflict. The reference category for being accountable in the peacebuilding discourse is either a ‘taxpayer’ somewhere, or the professional standard of doing peacebuilding effectively, to learn and then to do it even more effectively. ‘Being accountable to Peace Writ Large’ thus shelters peacebuilding from being accountable to the people on ‘whose behalf’ it takes place.

Being accountable to professional standards created mostly in Western donors’ headquarters (Tsadick, 2008, p. 7), or to abstract notion like peace, or even effectiveness, may be one thing. But to assume that this form of accountability also automatically satisfies the aspirations, ideas, and needs of the people ‘on whose behalf’ peacebuilding takes place is

¹⁵⁷ On the distinction between frameworkers and circlers, see next section.

striking – especially for a field with self-declared values like participation, and local ownership.

Especially the comparison to another field makes the contingency of this understanding of accountability evident. In humanitarian aid, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP)¹⁵⁸ has established widely used principles and practices for accountability towards the people at the receiving end of aid. In the peacebuilding discourse, this form of accountability is omitted, or more precisely, it is subsumed as a part of the duty to make peacebuilding more effective. That this assumption does not necessarily hold, and that what peacebuilders ‘build’ is far from uncontested, will be of my foremost concern in the next chapter, when I delve into the messy reality of a specific conflict context: Myanmar.

3.8 The will to circle: complexity and system dynamics

As becomes evident from my analyses above, a discourse is not ordering all elements into a neat network without contradictions at all times. Rather, it is the in the frictions, contradictions, and struggles where the discourse shows its productive force: in subjugating other concepts, problematisations, or ways of speaking to its own rules of formation. This process where a discourse is struggling to uphold its inner coherence is always precarious, and relies on the ever-shifting balance of the *rappports de forces* in a given society. It is in this sense that this section of my analysis has to be understood: With the example of complexity science and its approaches I aim to show how the aid and peacebuilding discourses ‘deal’ with contradicting concepts and problematisations by selectively taking up elements, leaving out others, re-interpreting them, constructing fit and hence, subjugate them to their way of ordering things. It is in these processes that discourses partially evolve and change, but at the same time struggle to keep up, reproduce, and further crystallise the broad lines of their formation.

Over the last twenty years, a line of thinking has emerged that challenges many of the underlying assumptions of the planning model of the aid *dispositif*; mainly by pointing out the special conditions of environments marked by armed conflict. Peacebuilding has claimed since the end of the 1990s that it needs a different approach because it takes place in complex and fast-changing environments (e.g., Bush, 1998). Especially for the evaluation of peacebuilding projects, these conditions have challenged the established linear models of planning, attributing, and measuring change. Similar problems emerged in the aid *dispositif*, where the increasing tendency to measure and count created unease among practitioners. Natsios (2010) even diagnosed the whole sector with what he called the ‘obsessive measurement disorder’; which counts everything, but misses the more important changes that are not easily quantifiable.

A lot of the criticism revolved around the tools for planning, monitoring, and evaluation, which are necessarily reducing the thinking behind an aid or peacebuilding project to a few boxes and indicators. An almost ritualised debate takes place among practitioners around the standard planning framework for aid, the omnipresent logical framework, or logframe

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.hapinternational.org/>

(Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005). Reflecting the ‘management by objectives’ environment with clear goals and responsibilities that was characteristic for the thinking in the 1960s,¹⁵⁹ the essentially linear logic of the logframe is accused of being unable to adequately grapple with the environment of aid (Hummelbrummer, 2010).

On the search for means to measure these often-invoked changes that are soft, subtle, and hard to quantify – like relationships, capacities, knowledge, or attitudes – aid and peacebuilding have turned to a similar set of methods and theories that was already successfully used by other public policy fields like public health: complexity theory.

Complexity theory cannot be described as a science, or as a specific discipline. It is more a collection of concepts stemming from different disciplines; a specific notion of causality; and a different understanding of ‘how the world works’ (Midgley, 2000, 2003). It is a collection of different models revolving around systems thinking, complexity, and non-linearity, and which are not necessarily reconcilable in their details (Cabrera, Colosi, & Lobdell, 2008).¹⁶⁰ In 2008, complexity made its first widely acknowledged entry into the discourse of aid with an article by Ramalingam, Jones, Reba, and Young (2008). The article explored different concepts of complexity theory and possible applications for aid. This in the attempt to better make sense of the ‘messy’ realities in which these practices take place; by drawing on ‘chaos theory, cybernetics, complex adaptive systems [...] in the natural sciences, postmodernism in the social sciences, and systems thinking, which is found across all sciences’ (Ramalingam et al., 2008, p. 4f.). The basic concepts they outline can be roughly summarised as the idea of thinking in complex, interdependent systems, which are dynamically changing and evolving in non-linear ways. This means that the system as a whole is more than the sum of its parts; and planning and prediction of how such systems evolve are only possible to a certain extent. Agents in these systems react to changes in the system and adapt their behaviour accordingly, thus contributing either to the self-organisation and the emergence of structures – or to dissolving these.

In the very first place, this paper can be read as a manifest against the order of knowledge of an aid *dispositif* that becomes increasingly rigid in its planning procedures and requirements. Robert Chambers sets the tone for this already in the foreword:

‘Much development and humanitarian thinking and practice is still trapped in a paradigm of predictable, linear causality and maintained by mindsets that seek accountability through top-down command and control. Recent years have seen more emphasis on the mechanistic approaches of this paradigm’ (Ramalingam et al., 2008, p. vii).

There seems to be a growing unease of practitioners and professionals that see themselves confronted with a steadily growing number of rules and regulations, standards, controls, and bureaucracy that is characteristic for the neoliberal approaches to public policy (cf. Hibou, 2012). Complexity theory seems to respond to that by providing a ‘scientifically’ grounded, multi-disciplinary, and rational explanation why the dominant approach is not suited for the environments it is deployed to. Put bluntly, complexity theory and systems thinking promise a

¹⁵⁹ See section 3.6.

¹⁶⁰ For an overview of the evolution of concepts of complexity and systems thinking, as well as their applications, see Checkland (2000), M. Mitchell (2009) or Williams and Imam (2007).

scientific, ‘a-political’ explanation for a finding that most professionals in public policy more or less openly hold: that the neoliberalist model just doesn’t work.

Accordingly, complexity theory was not only used to criticise the planning approaches of aid. It was also levelled at the management of government ministries at the heart of new public management: Arguing that government ministries also have to be understood as complex, adaptive systems, Chapman (2004) argues that setting targets for their performance from the centre has to be expected to fail. Geyer (2012) sees in complexity theory a welcome opportunity to overcome the current dominant model of evidence-based policy making; which is more in line with more recent understandings of causality, organizational theory, and social change processes. And Chandler (2014) writes in an article of the newly founded journal ‘resilience’ that ‘complexity operates not only as a critique of liberal modes of ‘top-down’ governing but also to inform and instantiate resilience as a postmodern form of governance’ (Chandler, 2014, p. 47).

Complexity theory is thus presented as the new hope to overcome the problems of the dominant neoliberal model of public policy – in a variety of professional discourses. Interestingly, the hope to scientifically prove the failure of the neoliberal public policy model falls back on exactly the scientific justifications and reasoning that are characteristic for this neoliberal model. I would doubt that complexity concepts have the potential for the ‘radical critique’ of parts of neoliberalism, as Chandler (2014, p. 48) claims. Complexity, itself, is also a ‘concept from this earth’, and thus, politically situated and imbued with power. This becomes evident when Joseph (2013) argues that complexity theory, and particularly the notion of resilience it carries, are close to ‘a form of governance that emphasises individual responsibility’. He thus argues – convincingly – that ‘the recent enthusiasm for the concept of resilience across a range of policy literature is the consequence of its fit with neoliberal discourse’ (Joseph, 2013, p. 38).

But more central for my analysis are the implications of this recent enthusiasm for complexity theory: the shifts in problematisations it entails, and the practices it makes possible in aid and peacebuilding. The reception among practitioners there was clearly positive: Systems thinking and complexity hold the hope to better grapple with many problems in evaluation (Eoyang & Berkas, 1998; Williams & Imam, 2007), to overcome the linear logframe (Davies, 2004, 2005), and to move towards more complex models of change for aid (Leach, Scoones, & Stirling, 2010). In peacebuilding, a field that has stressed its ‘exceptional’ conditions since the very beginning, these ideas were quickly received and welcomed (de Coning, 2012). Less experimental ‘rigor’, a more malleable understanding of social change, more flexibility, and not least, an inherent need for learning and adaptation went perfectly with the understanding and self-representation of peacebuilders.

Neufeldt (2011) expressed this growing unease of many practitioners with the planning models that they felt are not adequately representing the change processes they are working for in her distinction of ‘frameworkers’ and ‘circlers’. The way she constructs her categories is illustrative of the discourse of peacebuilding, especially if analysed in relation to the ‘increasing demands for effectiveness and results’ (Neufeldt, 2011, p. 487) she identifies. She locates the origins of these pressures in the fact that many other sectors use their (linear)

frameworks and indicators – and expect the newly emerged peacebuilding sector to do the same (Neufeldt, 2011, p. 487). She thus constructs a category of a frameworker, who embodies these conceptions: For frameworkers, change happens in linear, cause effect chains, and is can be usefully planned with the logframe. She grounds this worldview in a positivist ontology and epistemology, which posits the existence of an objective reality independent of observation; the possibility of a value-free enquiry and generalisations; and a predisposition to use quantitative measurements.

For the category of the circler, on the other hand, change is non-linear, cause and effect are intertwined and not usefully distinguishable, and they seek community-based, flexible, and organic processes. She grounds this worldview in an interpretivist ontology and epistemology, which posits socially constructed realities that are not independent from observation; necessarily value-bound inquiries, and a predisposition for qualitative methods.

From a discourse analytical perspective, the distinction between frameworkers and circlers has different implications. Firstly, it is relatively clear on which side peacebuilder's sympathies usually lie.¹⁶¹ Creating the two categories thus allows distinguishing the frameworkers, who follow the approaches of 'other' sectors, and circlers, whose mind-set is clearly peacebuilding. Establishing two clear ways of thinking thus helps to work out the 'exceptional' conditions of peacebuilding, and to problematise the question of peace not in terms of 'proving' its effectiveness, but in terms of 'improving' its effectiveness. By constituting peacebuilding as a field that can only be meaningfully understood with notions of complexity, a frameworker approach emphasising collecting evidence of what works, and to possible apply these lessons to other contexts, is disqualified from the outset. The 'appropriate' answer in terms of practices and tools to make peacebuilding more effective must then lie in adapted approaches drawing on systems theory and complexity concepts: In short: more flexible 'learning', less rigid (upward) accountability.¹⁶²

Here emerges a paradox, which is illustrative of the force of discourses in structuring meaning, knowledge, and power. Complexity theory stresses – in the very first place – uncertainty; meaning that complex environments cannot be fully understood, let alone predicted. If taken in its extreme form, this would qualify all sorts of planning, long-term predictions, or large change agendas as elusive. But this understanding of social change, this idea of a complex, practically un-manageable world, is not mobilised to declare planning and management impossible, useless, or not reconcilable with complexity. To the contrary: it is mobilised to improve planning and management. The idea of a chaotic world that defies human control is tamed by the discourses of aid and peacebuilding, it is dissected, separated, parts of it integrated, others disabled; in short, it is subjugated to the dominant order of knowledge; and the focus on results persists. So, how is this – admittedly impressive – re-interpretation of a set of ideas that challenge the dominant approaches in their very core happening?

¹⁶¹ Personally, I don't think that I have ever met a pure frameworker in this field, but countless pure and vocal circlers.

¹⁶² On this point, see also previous section, p. 115.

In many ways, the cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007) is illustrative of this process (see Figure 1 below). It performs a categorization, which allows controlling the element of hazard, uncertainty, and to a certain extent, helplessness of the manager when faced with complexity and chaos. It re-orders the world into different zones that require different approaches. Firstly, there is a zone of simple contexts, where more classical laws of cause and effect, and thus, also standard approaches of management and planning can be applied. Secondly, there is a zone of complicated contexts, where the same laws still apply, and management response has to be minimally adapted. These two zones thus are to be understood as ‘ordered’, where ‘right answers can be determined based on the facts’ (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 4). Then, there are two more zones that are unordered: the zones of complex and chaotic contexts. Here, the classical understandings of cause and effect are only applicable in limited ways, and the recognition of patterns is the best to base management decisions on. In these contexts, there are no more ‘right’ answers. Finally, there is a small, enclosed zone of disorder: Here, making sense of the situation is nearly impossible, there are ‘multiple perspectives that jostle for prominence [...] and cacophony rules’ (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 4). Clearly, this is the ‘zone’ where classical understandings of management and decision-making are challenged to the maximum. Thus, the authors propose that there is ‘way out’, which

‘is to break down the situation into constituent parts and assign each to one of the other four realms. Leaders can then make decisions and intervene in contextually appropriate ways’ (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 4).

While complexity theory posits a an unorderedly, complex world as its main premise, the cynefin framework proposes a way to colonise the space of the uncertain, unordered, and disordered, and makes it amenable to management practices that can ‘deal’ with the problem. All of a sudden, complexity is not the systemic ‘threat’ to current approaches anymore. It can now be managed with the ‘appropriate ways’; it can be dissected into areas where ‘business as usual’ can prevail, and into areas where slight adaptations of current practice are necessary. Thus, even for the space of disorder, there is a way out.

This act of categorisation of the problem of complexity can be found in a variety of concepts that have been applied in the management of public policy and aid (e.g., Glouberman & Zimmerman, 2002; Rogers, 2008). Particularly telling about the cynefin framework is its graphical representation (see Figure 1 below).

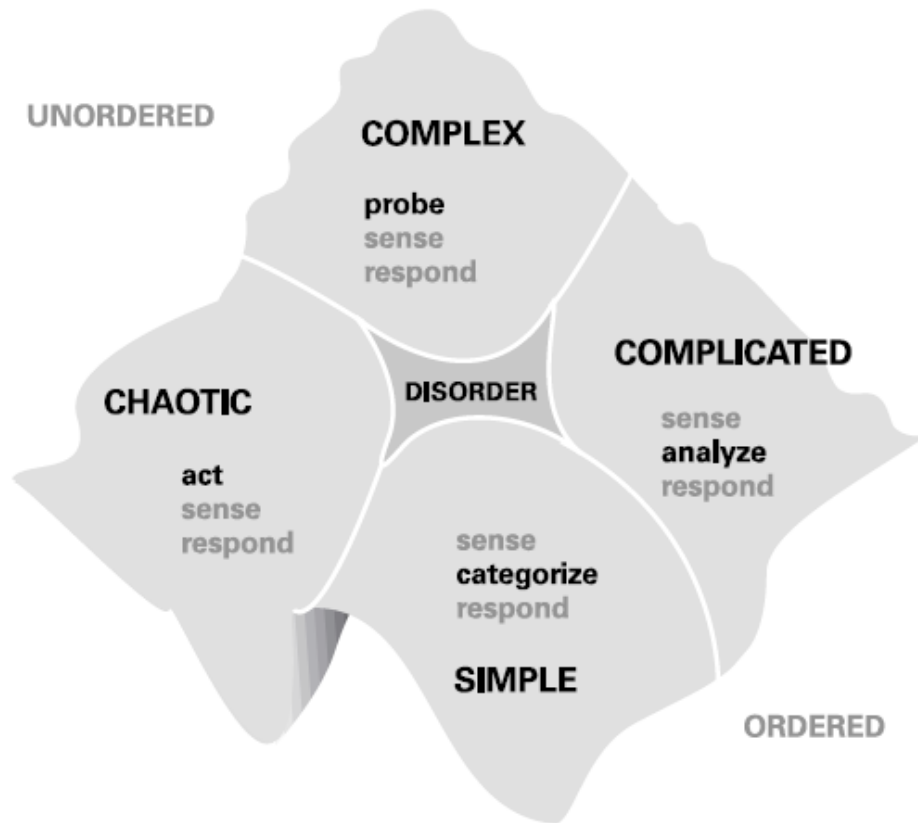


Figure 1: the cynefin framework (from Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 4).

The ‘map’ the cynefin framework provides places a small zone of disorder in the middle, where it is enclosed and fenced by the other zones that were made amenable to ‘fact-based’, or ‘pattern-based’ management. The representation of disorder as enclosed by the areas that make it amenable to management is not a coincidence.¹⁶³ It further reproduces the discourses that constitute the world as something which can be made sense of, dissected, and colonised by appropriate, scientific methods. The threat of an unordered, uncertain world is thus tamed by scientific progress that allows dealing with such problems. In a way, it is not the underlying understandings of cause and effect, or basic ontological assumptions of the world that are challenged by complexity theory. To the contrary: Scientific progress – in this case, system dynamics and complexity theory – are mobilised to further advance in improving the human condition. Complexity theory is thus not a challenge anymore; it is the means or technology to re-instate the dominance of the high-modernist ideology, that relies on the belief that advances in science and technology will solve every problem. In this sense, the problem of complexity is tamed by scientific discourses and their concepts. But this is not where this process stops: As I will show in the following, these discourses not only constitute

¹⁶³ To make the contrary point: one could easily argue that according to complexity theory, chaos is the basic state of the world, and draw little enclaves where the attempt of understanding a situation as ‘simple’ or ‘complicated’ is sufficiently tenable. But in any case, these enclaves would have to be understood as imperfect constructions drawn for the specific purpose of making sense of these situations; rather than a natural or objective state untouched by human interpretation.

the world as amenable to the concepts of complexity theory. At the same time, they re-define complexity theory from a problem to a part of the solution. While initially, complexity theory showed the limits of the planned approach to social change and the results that can be expected from it, its concepts, ideas about the nature of social change, and tools deriving from the latter are now deployed to ensure results.

As an example, in his influential report on a joint study of peacebuilding practices, known as the *Utstein study of peacebuilding*, D. Smith (2004) still rejected the idea of an impact assessment for individual projects following the classic approach.¹⁶⁴ Among other reasons, he cited that

‘there are important conceptual confusions and uncertainties. There are problems about the timing of financial flows. The influx of resources has unwanted effects in wartorn countries. There is no known way of reliably assessing the impact of peacebuilding projects. Important lessons learned [...] include the multi-dimensional nature of peacebuilding, the inter-dependence of its different parts, and the wide range of different activities that are possible. It has been learned that peacebuilding must be responsive to context and need and must be sustained for the long term’ (D. Smith, 2004, p. 11).

But already then, the author of the study did not exclude the possibility that there will be a solution for these problems in the future:

‘Taking as the starting point that we currently do not know how to assess the impact of individual projects, we can admit failure and put an end to shortterm demands to know. The task can now be taken out of the realm of studies that are supposed to report in a few months or at most a year or two, and put into the slower channels of genuine theoretical academic research. Two theoretical fields that ought to be explored here are those of game theory and chaos theory. Both may offer a different perspective from the normal cause-and-effect chain of logic that underpins most attempts so far to solve the problem of impact assessment’ (D. Smith, 2004, p. 15).

Striking about this paragraph is how neatly it fits with the high-modernist ideology described by Scott (1998). Rather than admitting failure, the author admits failure for now. But this does not preclude him from delegating the task to ‘genuine’ academic research, which at some point may be able to solve the narrowly defined problem. This shows how crystallised the order of knowledge around the aid *dispositif*, and its embedded formation of discourses has become: to put into question the overall endeavour of showing an impact for individual projects is not possible within these discourses. Discussion can only take place within the narrow framework of finding new approaches that are apt to the task of identifying and proving impacts. That complexity theory¹⁶⁵ relies on an ontology and epistemology that might be diametrically opposed to the endeavour of proving impacts (e.g., cf. Midgley, 2003), or the evidence-based policy making approach (Sanderson, 2000) is casually glossed over.

A few years later, this hope has been confirmed: ‘scientific progress’ has enabled concepts borrowed from complexity theory to become a part of the ‘toolbox’ of many practitioners in

¹⁶⁴ The discussion around the ‘attribution gap’ (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 1999) between the project and the peace on the macro level was clearly marking the discourse around peacebuilding evaluation at the time. Other examples are to be found in Anderson and Olson (2003) or Goetschel and Schnabel (2005).

¹⁶⁵ Mentioned in the discourse fragment above as one specific proponents of complexity theory, ‘chaos theory’.

aid and peacebuilding. While they still cannot be described as mainstream methods, these tools and concepts are steadily applied in different fields of public policy (Eoyang & Berkas, 1998; Forss, Marra, & Schwartz, 2011; Hargreaves, 2010; Williams & Imam, 2007). There are specific ‘systemic toolkits for practitioners’ (Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2011), guides to ‘planning in the face of complexity’ (Hummelbrunner & Jones, 2013), or practical guides to manage change with systems approaches (Reynolds & Holwell, 2010). Some approaches like outcome mapping (Earl, Carden, & Smutylo, 2001) are at the centre of communities of practitioners,¹⁶⁶ while others like the ‘most significant change’ approach (Davies & Dart, 2005) are rather marginal in their application. And, even a heavyweight of the evaluation research field has elaborated his own approach drawing on complexity theory: Patton’s (1994, 2011) approach of ‘developmental evaluation’.

But also approaches that have existed for longer, like for instance the theory-based approach to evaluation, have integrated elements of complexity theory. Here also, the categorisation of complexity enables its integration into a framework: For instance, Rogers (2008) proposes to distinguish simple, complicated and complex aspects of a program, and to develop a model of a program’s logic accordingly. Also here, complexity is constricted to certain parts of a program, while the other remaining parts are treated with a more classical understanding of cause and effect. This approach integrates relatively easily with more classical, linear approaches to program planning; and the use of theories of change in program planning and evaluation has become a standard both in aid and peacebuilding nowadays.

Noteworthy is also the different conception of ‘methodological rigour’ underpinning most systems-inspired approaches, which has started to challenge the positivist conception outlined above.¹⁶⁷ On the grounds that the problem of the attribution gap cannot be overcome when there are too many intervening factors, authors like Mayne (2001, 2012) have developed approaches to evaluation that make ‘credible causal claims’ based on the testing of a theory of change. As already in the name, ‘contribution analysis’ gives up on the claim of attribution that experimental methods are seeking. Rather, it seeks to establish credible evidence for a positive contribution of the program to its goals. This less ‘rigorous’ understanding of causation allows conceptualising the different changes a program is intending to achieve up to the macro-level, and assessing its contribution towards these changes.

Integrating concepts of complexity theory has thus allowed the theory-based approach to react to the criticism levelled against it from the more classical approaches. Before this development, complex programming was accused of being ‘too difficult to explain its key objectives in tangible terms, too amorphous to deliver, and too difficult to meaningfully evaluate’ (Pinnegar, 2006). With the emergence of the discursive ‘fencing’ of complexity in the distinction of simple, complex and complicated, and the means of contribution analysis, the systemic approaches have created concepts that started to enter the discourses on public policy, aid, and peacebuilding.

Ironically, although complexity theory’s foundations are challenging the high-modernist understanding – like its emphasis on uncertainty, self-organising actors and emergence, or its

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/>

¹⁶⁷ See chapter 3.6.

different understanding of cause and effect – it is also put in the service of the modernist ‘big push’, as I will show in the following.

The increasing popularity of systems thinking and complexity theory also led to increasingly complex analyses of the ‘problems’ in peacebuilding. As Ropers (2008, p. 12) puts it, peacebuilding efforts are faced with

‘the complementarity of different levels of intervention (multi-track), the timing of interventions (multi-step), the interdependence of issues (multi-issue) – and particularly the interaction of peace-related interventions with other issue areas like relief and development, human rights and constitutional reform.’

With so many moving parts, the thought was not too far-fetched to find the appropriate mapping tools for such situations in complexity theory (Woodrow & Chigas, 2011). With the typical systemic feedback-loop diagrams, a tool was found that allowed taming complexity of such a conflict context and making it more legible – at least to a certain extent. The following graph of a systemic conflict analysis for Sri Lanka gives an idea of this:

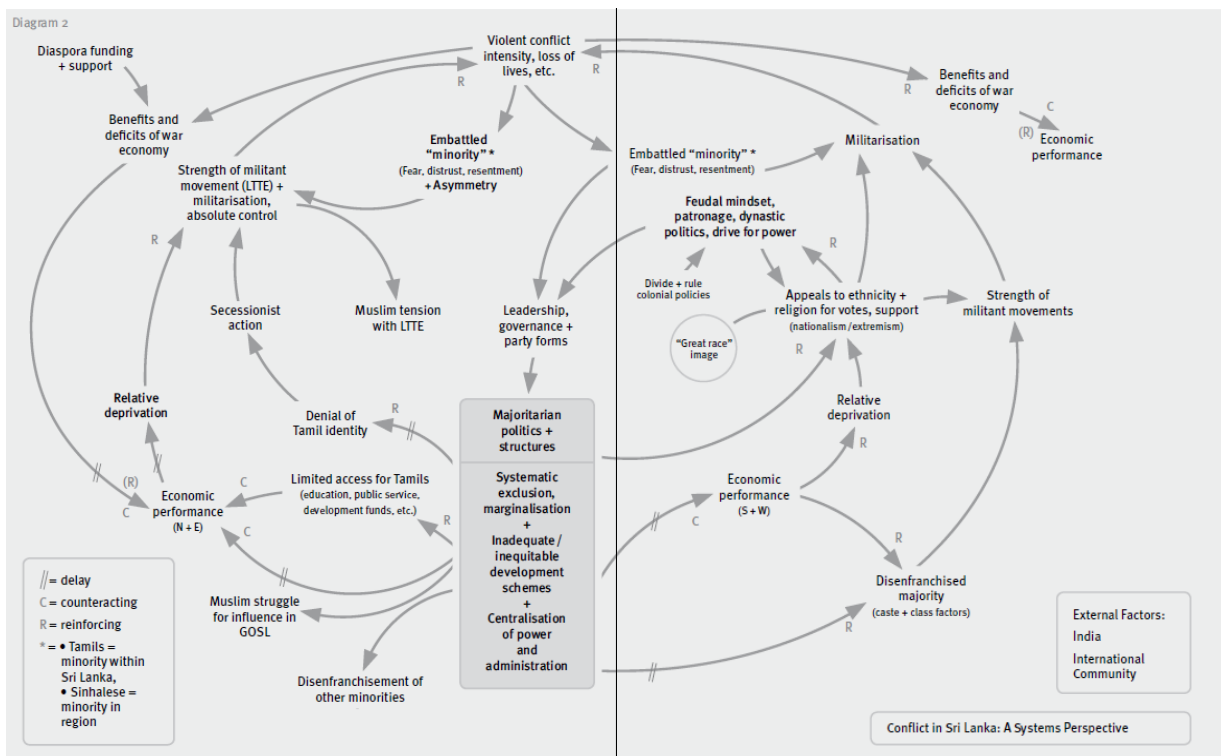


Figure 2: Conflict analysis Sri Lanka (from Ropers, 2008, p. 26 f.)

With the ongoing progress and possibilities to map out and conceptualise complex societal changes, these practices also had an effect on the discourses of peacebuilding. With the evolution of the peacebuilding field, the activities or problems that peacebuilding was constituted as tasked with continuously expanded. A telling example of this is Smith’s (2004, p. 28) ‘peacebuilding palette’, which gives an overview of the different activities that came to be considered as part of peacebuilding: The activities range from organising dialogues between conflicting parties, over democratisation and good governance, to security sector reform, and up to reconstruction of economic infrastructure and food security. All of these subfields have become to be viewed as having a role in conflict, and thus, constituted by the

peacebuilding discourse as to be legitimately addressed by peacebuilding. If this is not directly, then at least in coordination with actors from other fields (like aid, humanitarian assistance, or military).

The thinking that different problems are interlinked, and cannot be tackled with individual interventions, has thus also reached peacebuilding. The problematisation of all these different fields like security, development, etc. as potential ‘root causes’ for conflict or ‘contributing factors’ for peace almost automatically has implications for the solution to these problems: They are brought together in ever-more complex designs of comprehensive, holistic, or integrated peacebuilding operations. The ‘discursive fencing’ of complexity by the practice of systemic mapping allowed peacebuilding to model program logics on broader systems level, and thus, made these kind complex of interventions amenable and legible in terms of the results they achieve.

It is in this sense that peacebuilding literature now proposes to plan for systemic impact. Ricigliano (2011; also cf. Woodrow & Chigas, 2011) picks up the idea of a knowledge gap between the individual project and its impact on the macro level (‘peace writ large’, PWL) by Anderson and Olson (2003). He sees this gap as a

‘fundamental challenge to the governmental and non-governmental organizations who try to make effective use of billions of dollars of reconstruction and development aid every year. A critical reason for the peacebuilding gap is that the connections between individual projects and PWL are unarticulated, which means that programme designs make no connection to PWL and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of a programme’s impact on PWL is impossible. [...] Simply put, these concepts can help peacebuilders see the interconnections between diverse programmes (micro-level impacts), how these programmes impact – and are impacted by each other and the societal context. Furthermore, systems thinking can assist peacebuilders assess how programmes and contextual factors interact to affect the macro-level whole (PWL)’ (Ricigliano, 2011, p. 183).

To paraphrase this: To use ‘the billions of dollars’ effectively, the peacebuilder thus has to get to a full understanding of the different impacts of his program, to its articulated connection to peace on the macro-level, as well as the other programmes and further contextual factors. This should then help to assess whether the programme’s reach and efforts are enough to build peace, or to team up with other actors to tackle all different problem systems in a coordinated manner. Systemic feedback loop diagrams and theories of change then provide the means to keep the overview of these processes.

The identification of self-reinforcing ‘virtuous’ and ‘vicious’ circles, tipping points (Gladwell, 2006), and feedback loops promised to unlock the potential of complexity theory to explain the current failure of aid and peacebuilding, to focus resources on areas where an over-proportional (non-linear) impact can be expected, in short: to make aid and peacebuilding finally more effective. Non-linearity holds the promise to be able to efficiently tip over a whole conflict system with a minimal investment, because one can finally identify the right handle or entry point. In short: deliver value-for-money. Metaphorically speaking: Armed with the concepts of complexity theory, these approaches ventured out to make social change – and the social *per se* – legible, to map it, predict it, and master it. While presenting themselves as an alternative to the modernist ideology underpinning evidence-based policy

making, this endeavour is still conspicuously reminiscent of what Scott (1998) observed as the modernist ideology in states. In the broad lines, also these approaches constitute the social, the environment that they target, development, or peace, as something that can be modelled, brought about or ‘built’ with the support of science – with the distinction that the arrows in their models are usually not straight, but curved. These approaches thus reproduce, stabilise and further crystallise the order of knowledge that is underpinning the modernist ideology. Especially ‘planning for systemic impact’ is reminiscent of the ideas of the ‘big push’ that are present in the discourse of aid: Both Sachs’ (2005) proposition to achieve the MDGs, and in Kofi Annan’s *in larger freedom* (UN Secretary-General, 2005) rely on the idea that problems are interdependent, and thus require a ‘big push’ to address them in coordinated manner.

In this line of thought, the formerly separately problematised fields of armed conflict, (economic) development, security, governance, democratisation, and so on, now become increasingly problematised as parts of a larger, interlinked problem *system*. While this problematisation has been present before in the discourses of peacebuilding or humanitarian relief in the notion of the ‘complex emergency’ (see Dillon & Reid, 2000), now the technologies are available to map these problems, and to constitute them as self-perpetuating and interlinked ‘problem’ systems requiring a wide range of interventions.¹⁶⁸ Hence, these situations lost their ‘emergency character’, to which the international community had to respond with short term interventions. Rather, they are now problematised as long-term transitions, which brings their symptoms like disaster proneness and armed conflicts in relation to their ‘root causes’ to be found in weak institutions, structural inequalities, and insufficient participation processes.¹⁶⁹ Accordingly, these situations are made amenable to a long-term, coordinated effort to re-engineering by the international community, involving all ‘necessary’ agencies. The overview provided by systems maps, and macro-level theories of change and integrated strategies can be seen as technologies that enabled this problematisation, that emerged from the formation of discourse, and are stabilised and reinforced by a global order of knowledge enabling a neoliberal governmentality.

Clearly, this evolution also came with changes in the formation of discourses. In the first place, the language has changed to more technical terms. Why peacebuilding has to address a certain issue – or not – can now be justified on the basis of an arrow that connects it with an impact on the macro level that could reach a tipping point – or not. Most likely, this would then be a decision to be taken by an ‘expert’. The complexity inspired approaches raise the bar to access the expert debates. Access to legitimate speaking positions from which one could make such decisions or criticise these approaches arguably requires an even more specific vocabulary and specialised education than it was the case with linear approaches before.¹⁷⁰ Overall, questions on specific strategies or issues of peace are thus removed from

¹⁶⁸ That this conceptualisation has found its way into the formation of the aid discourse is visible in the OECD (2007, p. 2) principles for engagement in fragile states. Principle number 5 prescribes to ‘recognise the links between political, security and development objectives’.

¹⁶⁹ See next section 3.9.

¹⁷⁰ Although Khuzwayo, Meintjes, and Merk (2011) make the contrary point: they see the non-linear, systemic approaches as unusual for the West only, and more common in Non-Western cultures and knowledge structures. Also Blum (2011) has argued that ‘embedded’ organisations usually develop more holistic, systemic theories of change compared to outsiders.

the political realm, and placed under the influence of experts that are tasked to deal with these kinds of questions. This also comes with an even stronger emphasis of how the relevant discourses constitute ‘peace’, or ‘development’ in very specific ways; namely as the results processes of aid and peacebuilding that are enabled, managed, administrated, and controlled with specific practices within a specific set of institutions.

But, the problematisations of ‘development’, or ‘peace’ that came with the complexity-inspired perspective also had more tangible effects for the formation of discourses, as well as the institutions and practices of its different subfields. For instance, the closer collaboration and coordination required between all ‘necessary’ agencies and actors under this new framework also had the consequence that the aid formation of the aid discourse and its specific emphasis on (tangible) results further ventured into the subfield of peacebuilding, where it now starts to realise its power effects with full force.¹⁷¹ Thus, I argue that what has long been described as a nexus between peacebuilding and development (e.g., Uvin, 2002) has reached a new level in its application of technologies of power; up to the point where I can analytically consider that the aid and peacebuilding *dispositifs* have merged under an new *dispositif* with a new strategic imperative: the *dispositif* of managed pacification, tasked with managing, guiding, and re-engineering the societies of their new object: ‘fragile states’.

3.9 The will to order: From the failure of states to the failure of building effective states

After having outlined the characteristics of the discourses of aid and peacebuilding above, I will now direct my analysis towards the areas where they merge, intersect, and overlap: in the notion of the so-called ‘fragile state’. Although there has been a lot of interaction, exchange, or distinction between the two fields on conceptual level for some time,¹⁷² one can observe an increasing similarity between aid and peacebuilding in their practices and concepts over the last years.

The distinction of working ‘on conflict’ or ‘in conflict’ (e.g., cf. Goodhand, 2002) – which has served as the main distinction between aid and peacebuilding – has increasingly become blurred with the extension of the spheres of influence, range of goals, and practices of both aid and peacebuilding. More and more, aid and peacebuilding are present in the same geographical context, at the same time, and trying to achieve similar goals with similar practices. This means that also the formation of discourses in the two fields have started to more explicitly draw on the same justifications, international standards, and goals they aim to achieve. In a way, this can be understood as the process of the ‘deployment of development’ that Escobar (1984, p. 387f.) has described; and which leads from a continuous incorporation of new problems, to professionalisation and institutionalisation of the ways that these problems are understood and ‘dealt’ with.

¹⁷¹ See next chapter on Myanmar.

¹⁷² For instance, in the form of the concept of the development/peacebuilding ‘nexus’ (Uvin, 2002), the ‘aid for peace’ approach (Paffenholz & Reyhler, 2007), or the considerations of the ‘Do no harm’ approach (Anderson, 1999).

But when I describe the merger of the aid *dispositif* and the peacebuilding *dispositif* into an overarching *dispositif* of managed pacification, this should by no means be understood as a smooth, planned, process without friction. Both are networks imbued with specific power/knowledge, with different formations of their objects, their legitimate speaking positions, their concepts, their strategies. And, given the many different levels of discourse production involved – ranging from the high-level forum donor document down to the practitioner on the ground – many diverging positions and differing standings towards this process have to be expected.¹⁷³

Still, their integration into one single *dispositif* happens when the discourses of aid and of peacebuilding are confronted with an order of knowledge, networks imbued with power that have gone beyond the specialised discourses where discursive activity could still be observed; where there is practically no more friction, where the specific order of power/knowledge has become part of the things we take for granted: neoliberalism. It is the neoliberal problematisations of public policy, the practices of accountability it enables, the notions of efficiency and value for money that are instrumental in subjugating more emancipatory aspects of the discourses of aid and peacebuilding into one overarching framework that tries to order the manifold practices, statements, and institutions, of aid and peace under one, coordinated, efficient, and effective framework *that works*. It is the technical approaches, the managerialism, the private sector logic of ‘getting things done’ that seems to be stronger in the end. But there have been several conceptual developments in the discourses of aid and peacebuilding that made possible what Mosse and Lewis (2005, p. 1) name a ‘convergence of ideas of neoliberal reform, democratisation and poverty reduction’. I will thus now turn to have a closer look at the ‘problem’ of conflict in international discourses of aid and peacebuilding, and how it was related to other ‘problems’.

Poverty, aid, peace, and security have been conceptually linked at least since the mid-twentieth century. In the mind-set of the Cold War, poverty and the risk of insurrection have been closely associated in the interpretations of policy-makers (cf. Escobar, 1995). Also on the more emancipatory side of the political spectrum, Galtung (1969) linked the ideas of economic development, structural violence, and peace. But it was only after the end of the Cold War, that the conceptual link between poverty and security came to be thought in terms of instability – rather than in terms of revolutions and the threat of interstate war. These ‘new conflicts’ associated with identity, social injustice, population growth, environmental degradation, and growing refugee flows quickly became the new scheme to interpret the link between poverty and security. It is in this line of argument when Robert Zoellick, then president of the World Bank, speaks of

‘the recurrent cycles of weak governance, poverty, and violence that have plagued these lands. Not one low-income country coping with these problems has yet achieved a single Millennium Development Goal. And the problems of fragile states spread easily: They drag down neighbors with violence that overflows borders, because conflicts feed on narcotics, piracy, and gender violence, and leave refugees and broken infrastructure in their wake. Their territories can become breeding grounds for far-reaching networks of violent radicals and organized crime’ (World Bank, 2011, p. v).

¹⁷³ That this process is still ongoing will be shown in chapter 5.

And it is in this context that Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General of the UN, made his now famous statement that ‘we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development’ (UN Secretary-General, 2005, p. 6).

As Duffield (2001a) points out, this new problematisation led to a merging of the terrain of security and development policy; closely associating aid with considerations of security. Duffield (2001a, 2002) calls this the ‘radicalisation’ of development: For Western states, the rationale behind aid has shifted from delivering aid because it is the ‘morally right thing to do’, towards a more self-interested rationale of ‘also protecting security in the global North’.¹⁷⁴ This shift in the discursive problematization of poverty in ‘underdeveloped’ states is also taking its material form in the growing strategic networks linking development and security actors - INGOs, academics, military. Especially after the events of 9/11, zones of instability located in so-called ‘failed states’ became pathologised in terms of ‘breeding grounds for terrorism’; which both put them on top of foreign policy agendas and further intensified the merging of development and security. As a consequence, so-called ‘failed states’ moved firmly into the focus of the international aid system, and a growing architecture to intervene and act upon them to bring about stability was put into place (Duffield, 2007; Hughes & Pupavac, 2005). Accompanying this trend was a new focus of aid on the institutions of the state. Instead of conventional projects aiming at delivering services, this ‘new architecture of aid’ (Mosse & Lewis, 2005, p. 3) is rather concerned with reforming the policies of recipient governments (also cf. Clarke, 2004).

In the academic debate, strong criticism has been levelled at the concept of the ‘failed state’.¹⁷⁵ A main point of criticism was that the state failure literature compares a ‘failed’ state to a state implicitly thought as the European state. In this sense, the ‘failed states’ are constituted as a deviant – or degenerated – ‘Other’ from a (Western) norm, that has to be acted upon (Hill, 2005). An ahistorical and static version of the Weberian state – which relies on a monopoly of the use of (legitimate) violence, an autonomous bureaucratic administration, and a specific territory (Weber, 2002) – serves as the ‘benchmark’ (Bhuta, 2015) to which the ‘failing’ states are compared to. Accordingly, these ‘failed’ states have to be ‘rebuilt’ with ‘statebuilding’ – typically with an emphasis on order and stability (Call, 2008; Heathershaw, 2008).

Gradually, the term of the ‘failed’ state has been replaced by the term of the ‘fragile’ state, especially in the literature directed at practitioners.¹⁷⁶ This is not to say that replacement of the term ‘failed’ with ‘fragile’ state has addressed the criticisms towards the older concept. Many of the implicit images of the (Western) state that have been criticised in the term ‘failed state’ also apply to the term of the ‘fragile state’.¹⁷⁷ The point of mentioning this shift here is a different one, namely its effects in terms of the practices it enables.

¹⁷⁴ On the differentiation between ‘altruism’ and ‘self-interest’ as a rationale for aid, see section 3.4.

¹⁷⁵ For an overview, see for instance Hagmann and Péclard (2010).

¹⁷⁶ As an example, the prominent ‘*Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations*’ (OECD, 2007).

¹⁷⁷ Call (2008, p. 1492), for example, treats the term ‘fragile state’ as a pure corollary of the concept of the ‘failed state’ when criticising the latter.

As I showed in the last section above, the increasing use of concepts and tools of complexity theory and systems thinking are enabling and reinforcing a new formation of discourse, which conceptualises the different problems outlined above as interlinked and mutually reinforcing problem systems; upon which the international system has to act in a comprehensive, and coordinated manner. While for the ‘failed’ state, the ‘solution’ was ‘statebuilding’, for the ‘fragile’ state, the ‘solution’ is a whole range of international intervention, ranging from aid to peacebuilding.

The ‘fragile state’ has been identified as a problem in different discourses, and for different reasons: either as a security risk, as a human tragedy, as a manifest form of structural violence, or as an obstacle to development and eliminating poverty. As I will argue in the following, it is the last item that has made it to the dominant problematisation. But notwithstanding the rationale, the result is that the fragile state is constituted as the ‘final frontier’, which has to be acted upon.¹⁷⁸

This is visible in the way that the international community has begun to problematize the so-called ‘fragile’ state, embodied in the ‘New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’. The ‘New Deal’ was endorsed by 40 countries and a few large multilateral organisations on the occasion of the fourth high level forum on aid effectiveness in Busan in 2011 (OECD, 2011a). While reviewing progress on the principles of the Paris Agenda, these states and organisations also decided that ‘fragile’ states need a ‘different approach’:

‘The current ways of working in fragile states need serious improvement. Despite the significant investment and the commitments of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), results and value for money have been modest. Transitioning out of fragility is long, political work that requires country leadership and ownership. Processes of political dialogue have often failed due to lack of trust, inclusiveness, and leadership. International partners can often bypass national interests and actors, providing aid in overly technocratic ways that underestimate the importance of harmonising with the national and local context, and support short-term results at the expense of medium- to long-term sustainable results brought about by building capacity and systems. A New Deal for engagement in fragile states is necessary’ (OECD, 2011c, p. 1).

This marks a new approach indeed. The self-critical assessment of international ‘partners’ identifies many of the problematic aspects of international cooperation that have inhibited more ‘results’ so far. But what happens in the New Deal from a discourse analytical perspective goes way beyond a critical self-assessment of international actors: It enables a new rationale for intervening in states that are identified as fragile.

Particularly striking is the way the New Deal problematizes ‘fragile states’ and constructs the basic rationale for the ‘new ways of engaging’ it proposes. In a document like the New Deal, which is proposing a ‘new development architecture and new ways of working’, a certain urge for action has to be created. To convince the audience of this document, it has to be shown why ‘fragile’ states constitute a problem, and why the solutions proposed are in fact needed and legitimate. The problems are listed in bullet points:

¹⁷⁸ The notion of the ‘final frontier’, reminiscent of the private sector terminology of frontier market, is not my creation. In October 2010, the OECD organised a conference under the title: ‘Fragile states - the final frontier’ (OECD, 2010).

- '1.5 billion people live in conflict-affected and fragile states.
- About 70% of fragile states have seen conflict since 1989.
- Basic governance transformations may take 20-40 years.
- 30% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is spent in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
- These countries are furthest away from achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)' (OECD, 2011c).

The urge to act is created by referring to the immense number of people that live in states that are labelled conflict-affected and fragile, wherefrom 70% seem to have seen conflict since the end of the Cold War. But the problematisation of these states – that enables the 'New Deal' to be presented as a solution – is striking: 'These countries are furthest away from achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).' And, despite the 'significant investment and the commitments of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), results and value for money have been modest' (OECD, 2011c, p. 1).

If one contrasts this problematisation of 'fragile states' with another path-breaking document, namely Boutros-Ghali's (1992), famous 'Agenda for Peace' which aimed at re-defining the role of the international community after the end of the Cold War in violent conflict, the difference couldn't be any greater. In the latter document, Boutros-Ghali presents the need for the UN to take up a role as a peacebuilding organization as follows: 'Poverty, disease, famine, oppression and despair abound, joining to produce 17 million refugees, 20 million displaced persons and massive migrations of peoples within and beyond national borders. These are both sources and consequences of conflict that require the ceaseless attention and the highest priority in the efforts of the United Nations' (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, para 13).

Both problematisations are speaking about similar situations of conflict and fragility, *nota bene*. But while the Agenda for Peace depicts the massive scale of human suffering caused by conflict in order to call for action, the New Deal presents fragile states as problematic because they fail to reach the MDGs. The nature of armed conflicts has not changed in the time that passed between the two documents: they still cause despair, refugee flows, and they still inflict human suffering on a massive scale. What has changed is the formation of the discourses in the international aid system, and the structure they propose to speak of armed conflict in order to be perceived as a legitimate speaker.

Nowadays, the assertion that no 'fragile' state has ever reached a single MDG has become an introductory statement repeated *ad nauseam* in discussions among international experts.¹⁷⁹ It has become a ritual to introduce the need for 'new ways to engage' with 'fragile' states. While creating a sense of urgency to finally act upon this 'problem', this discursive formation also has a different effect. It constitutes its subject – the 'fragile' state – as an entity that is not effective enough in fulfilling its function to deliver on the MDG benchmark. The 'fragile' state thus becomes a problem for the international community, because it seems to be a situation where the 'commitments' of the countries 'giving' aid cannot be met with the

¹⁷⁹ The origin of this statement seems to be the World Development Report (World Bank, 2011) quoted above.

current approaches. Fragile states are an obstacle for the ‘big push’ to be successful; the categorisation as ‘underachievers’ on the MDGs singles them out to be acted upon.

That the New Deal constitutes the achievement of the MDGs as the highest goal becomes evident when one looks at the introduction to the five Peace- and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs):

We agree to use the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs), as an important foundation to enable progress towards the MDGs to guide our work in fragile and conflict-affected states (OECD, 2011c, p. 1).

The goals aiming to build peace and even states become stepping stones on the way to the larger, overall goal, that is the achievement of the MDGs. This becomes even clearer in how the g7+, a group of states in the global South and East that self-identifies as ‘fragile’:

‘A state of fragility can be understood as a period of time during nationhood when sustainable socio-economic development requires greater emphasis on complementary peacebuilding and statebuilding activities’ (g7+, 2013, p. 1).

The New Deal (OECD, 2011c) then brings very different dimensions or problem systems into a single framework of goals to be achieved in the ‘transition out of fragility’ – or put differently, as stepping stones on the way to sustainable development:

‘Legitimate Politics - Foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution
Security - Establish and strengthen people’s security
Justice - Address injustices and increase people’s access to justice
Economic Foundations - Generate employment and improve livelihoods
Revenues & Services - Manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery’
(OECD, 2011c)

With a list comprising elements of peacebuilding, security, democratisation, economic recovery, and statebuilding, the New Deal underscores the range and the scope of different thematic areas that the *dispositif* of managed pacification is addressing. It testifies to the ongoing differentiation of ‘problems’ that this *dispositif* provides ‘solutions’ to, and also the growing scope of responsibilities it assumes. More and more, the formation of the discourses of aid and peace constitute ‘fragile states’ as entities on which this *dispositif* intervenes and acts upon in their entirety (cf. Duffield, 2001a, 2005). And, it also becomes clear that the merger of aid and peacebuilding under what I call the *dispositif of managed pacification* does not happen on equal terms. Clearly, development, or the MDGs are now constituted as the overall goal, with peace constituted as a means to this end.

But the *dispositif* of managed pacification is not only setting these goals to be achieved. It also constitutes itself in charge for bringing about their achievement by defining the process that is meant to lead to their achievement. Although projected as long-term transformations that ‘may take 20-40 years’ (OECD, 2011c, p. 1), these processes appear as a smooth, gradual, planned transition that can be properly managed. It is then a question of the right ‘process management’ to make these transitions successful. Accordingly, the procedures foreseen for these transitions in the New Deal are more elaborated than the vague goals it formulates.

The process of integrating the governments of developing countries into the frameworks, procedures, and practices of international aid that was already pursued in the Paris Declaration reaches a new level. Instead of ‘alignment’, the New Deal now proposes a full-fledged integration of the governments and administrations of ‘fragile’ states into the *dispositif* of managed pacification: The New Deal states that its success depends on the ‘leadership and commitment’ of the ‘fragile states’ that endorsed the New Deal as the group of the g7+, ‘supported by international actors’. The fragile states themselves are thus put in the role of leading the New Deal process, in order to foster ‘leadership and ownership’ necessary for the ‘the country-led and country-owned transitions out of fragility’ that were mentioned initially (OECD, 2011c, p. 1).

Here, the New Deal is strongly drawing on the formation of the concept of local ownership, which has received a lot of attention over the last decade – both in the fields of aid and peacebuilding.¹⁸⁰ The ‘local ownership’ of for the transition out of fragility is assumed to make the process more legitimate, and also more effective than a solution that is imposed from the outside. But as Abrahamsen (2004) has noted when she analysed the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, this by no means can be understood as a leadership that conveys the participating country governments an extensive freedom.¹⁸¹ Rather, these processes take place in the environment structured by existing power/knowledge networks. This means that the range of problematisations that are possible and allowed by the discourses of aid and peacebuilding are narrowed and limited to a specific set, and so are the possible solutions that can be proposed. ‘Ownership’, in such a context of partnership, has to be understood as structured by power/knowledge networks that are relying on elements that are ‘voluntary and coercive at the same time, producing both new forms of agency and new forms of discipline’ (Abrahamsen, 2004, p. 1454).

Accordingly, the solutions that are proposed by ‘fragile’ states for their transitions out of fragility cannot be expected to be revolutionary or overthrowing the older ways of ‘doing development’. Rather, they are more or less following the same lines that have been provided by the frameworks of international cooperation before. This becomes clear when in a second section – after outlining the PSGs – the following steps for the implementation of the New Deal are outlined:

‘As part of the ‘New Deal’ we commit to FOCUS on new ways of engaging, to support inclusive country-led and country-owned transitions out of fragility based on a country-led fragility assessment developed by the g7+¹⁸² with the support of development partners, a country-led one vision and one plan, a country compact to implement the plan, using the PSGs to monitor progress, and support inclusive and participatory political dialogue. We recognise that an engaged public and civil society, which constructively monitors decision-making, is important to ensure accountability’ (OECD, 2011c, p. 2).

¹⁸⁰ See section 2.4 and 3.5.

¹⁸¹ Eyben and León (2005) speak in this context from a transition in the relationship between donor and recipient: from a ‘gift’ to a ‘contract’.

¹⁸² The g7+ are a group of so-called ‘fragile and conflict-affected’ countries that committed to implement the New Deal.

Although the g7+ are – in an almost rhetorically excessive way – put into the driving seat of their own transitions, the steps proposed are clearly along the lines that the international community has engaged – or pledged to engage with these countries before. After an initial assessment, the ‘fragile states’ have to develop ‘one vision, one plan’:

‘We will develop and support one national vision and one plan to transition out of fragility. This vision and plan will be country-owned and -led, developed in consultation with civil society and based on inputs from the fragility assessment. Plans will be flexible so as to address short-, medium- and long-term peacebuilding and statebuilding priorities. [...] They will be monitored, reviewed and adjusted in consultation with key stakeholders on an annual basis’ (OECD, 2011b, p. 2).

Several points are emerging from this proposition: firstly, it assumes that a country-owned ‘one vision, one plan’ actually can be developed. In a context where there has been armed-conflict, this assumption is striking: isn’t the incompatibility of perspectives on a country’s situation usually the reason why there is armed conflict in the first place? To assume that a shared understanding of the problem can be fostered; and to get from there to a shared national vision of the ‘solution’ by the means of consultation is staggering.

Secondly, the concept of ownership presupposes an entity that ‘owns’. So, when the New Deal writes that ‘one vision, one plan’ has to be country-owned, who exactly ‘owns’ this plan? No political system can assume to find a way to represent all interests of the population of a country in its government, which then could ‘own’ the plan. This is even less likely in a ‘fragile and conflict-affected’ state: Per definition, there are different political entities that struggle for influence and control – otherwise, the country would not be ‘conflict-affected’. Thus, who decides which entity is the legitimate one to own ‘one vision, one plan’? Whose vision, whose plan should be supported if there are conflicting ones? Is country-owned equivalent with (central) government owned? What about the zones controlled by armed non-state actors, that often assume quasi-state functions (cf. Mampilly, 2011)?

The ‘one vision, one plan’ as proposed in the New Deal does not seem to rely on democratic legitimacy: The New Deal implicitly starts from the assumption that a plan is drafted by expert knowledge with inputs from the ‘fragility assessment’, owned by the administration, and legitimised by consultation with civil society groups. The steps that follow then are formulated in the bureaucratic way of doing things in the *dispositif* of managed pacification: address peacebuilding and statebuilding priorities, monitor, review, and adjust plans on annual basis – in consultation with key stakeholders.

This ‘one vision, one plan’ then is implemented with the help of a compact. Although the New Deal states that this compact ‘will be drawn upon a broad range of views from multiple stakeholders and the public’ (OECD, 2011c, p. 2) these compacts seem to be tailored to respond mostly to the *dispositif* of managed pacification’s needs: ‘a compact will ensure harmonisation and donor co-ordination, reduce duplication, fragmentation and programme proliferation. A compact can guide the choice of aid modalities, and can provide a basis to determine the allocation of donor resources aligned to the country-led national priorities, in line with good aid effectiveness principles’ (OECD, 2011c, p. 2). A compact makes sure that the overall process stays in line with the principles of efficiency and effectiveness embedded

in the discourses of aid and peace; which posit duplication, fragmentation, and program proliferation as ‘inefficient’. With the means of a compact, the ‘fragile’ states’ governments are thus tied and embedded into the *dispositif* of managed pacification, constituting them as the leaders of their own transitions – which take place on the terms of the international community (cf. Abrahamsen, 2004).

Overall, ‘transitioning out of fragility’ as outlined in the New Deal seems a gradual, technical process that is following clearly defined steps. The possibility of fundamental contestation or conflicts that would go beyond a few details in priorities is omitted: The broad lines are given, and are constituted as in everybody’s interest. A possible solution is derived by ‘expert’ knowledge, consulted, and then owned by the administration of the fragile country in question. This gradual, technical process in the New Deal constitutes donors, INGOs, multilateral organisations, civil society organisations, and the state institutions of the ‘fragile’ state as one big coalition, all working for the greater goal of development – as enshrined in the MDGs. Again, the ‘goalition’ makes its appearance, glossing over differing interests, conflict, or contestation.¹⁸³

Thus, the New Deal reproduces two basic notions of the discourse of peacebuilding that Heathershaw (2008, p. 604) identified as peacebuilding as civil society, and as peacebuilding as statebuilding. Both their main target entities are constituted as legitimate institutions on which a transition out of fragility could rely – the state administration to own the plan, and the civil society providing checks and balances when consulted. But this construction relies on a very specific formation of the concept of legitimacy and of the function of the state, which is typical for the discourse of statebuilding: it conveys an understanding of the state as an effective service deliverer. The state of the developing country has to ensure that the country develops, if not, his legitimacy is in danger. The construction relies mostly on one of the dimensions that Scharpf (1970, 1999) identified as ‘output legitimacy’. This concept of legitimacy presumes that if a state’s policies represent effective solutions to the common people’s problem, it is legitimate.¹⁸⁴ But the New Deal problematises the ‘fragile’ state mainly as a state failing to deliver services to its population, or to achieve the MDGs. The fragile state is thus failing on one of the most fundamental principles in the international community, on development (Escobar, 1984; Ferguson, 1990), or on the will to self-improve (Li, 2007); which is constituted as being the origin of his problem. Accordingly, the fragile state has to be strengthened or improved to be able to meet the benchmark set in the MDGs, and to become legitimate.

State legitimacy becomes exclusively based on its effectiveness in delivering services, and discussion is confined to the limits of how to improve the state’s service delivery (cf. also Duffield, 2005). Accordingly, the New Deal proposes to ‘strengthen country-systems’, to develop a ‘compact’, and ‘one vision, one plan’ for the different groups to work together towards their shared goal of an effective state. Formal state institutions are quickly identified

¹⁸³ See section 3.5 above.

¹⁸⁴ The other dimension, ‘input legitimacy’, relies on the capacity of the state to be responsive to the manifest preferences of the governed (Scharpf, 2003); which would rather be in the domain of what (Heathershaw, 2008) identifies as the ‘peace as democratic reform’.

as the ‘natural habitat’ of, or at least the key condition for the goal of ‘legitimate politics’, and their capacities have to be ‘built’.

It is only in the narrow understanding of the state as a service deliverer that the ‘solution’ for fragile states proposed in the New Deal makes sense: In this logic, showing that institutions work effectively is key to improve their legitimacy. Accordingly, concepts emphasising proper management have priority:

‘We commit to build mutual TRUST by providing aid and managing resources more effectively and aligning these resources for results. We will enhance transparency, risk management to use country systems, strengthen national capacities and timeliness of aid, improving the speed and predictability of funding to achieve better results’ (OECD, 2011c, p. 1).

Also, delivering ‘visible results quickly’ (OECD, 2011c, p. 3) is important, in order to show the people that their institutions are actually working, and to ‘build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery’ (OECD, 2011c, p. 1).

This ‘institutionalist’ understanding of legitimacy dominates the debate, and marginalises other forms of legitimacy (cf. Lemay-Hébert & Mathieu, 2014).¹⁸⁵ Questions on other, more context-specific sources of legitimacy are excluded from the debate, and thus neglected in international interventions in fragile states. Embedded in the broader context of the neoliberal problematisations of state action and social policy that Western countries have seen, this understanding of the state may seem ‘normal’ - especially for the international actors in aid and peacebuilding that are stemming from the West, and who are submitted to the power effects of these discourses in their own work on a daily basis. But through their standards, practices and discourses, these organisations also project the same narrow logic to developing countries – and reproduce the ‘Western’ understanding of the ‘problem’ and its ‘solutions’ in the global South and East.

The focus on results is an important part of the formation of discourse that structures the New Deal, and – I would argue – even the element that makes it possible in the first place: It is the framing of ‘fragile’ states as the main obstacle in achieving the MDGs that makes it possible to constitute them as the target for the ‘new’ approach of the New Deal in the first place. What is new about the New Deal are not its recipes – what is new is that it makes the governments of ‘fragile’ states a part of the *dispositif* of managed pacification that is tasked with making the ‘transition out of fragility’ happen. Accordingly, the function of these states is subjugated to the same concepts of effectiveness and efficiency that are embedded in this *dispositif*, and so is its legitimacy. A legitimate state is now an effective state. The assessment of the legitimacy of a state is thus assumed to take place in a technical manner, along the lines of judging the effectiveness and efficiency of its institutions.

Considerations on other forms of legitimacy are marginalized by the overwhelming focus on the technical ‘how to’ of making fragile states more effective. Essentially, this excludes the fundamental question of whether a more effective state is necessarily a more legitimate one, and whether the ‘fragile’ state should be made more effective in the first place. And the

¹⁸⁵ For instance, Lemay-Hébert and Mathieu (2014, p. 233) distinguish a neo-Weberian, institutionalist understanding of legitimacy from an understanding drawing on Durkheimian, and political anthropologist approaches in the OECD’s discourse.

question of how such interventions are perceived by different actors in a specific context, in terms of their political positionality and legitimacy.

Here lies an aspect of the discourse formation for aid and peacebuilding that has major implications: In these discourses, (democratic) institutions are constituted as neutral and not linked to specific political actors or groups. Accordingly, these discourses also exclude the possibility that different actors perceive institutions not as neutral, but as linked to a specific order put in place by one side of the conflict. In the discourses of aid and peacebuilding, strengthening institutions, administrative capacities, and rule of law are constituted to be in everybody's interest, and hence, not political, but technical. And, because all political actors would 'benefit' from more effective institutions, these are constituted as providing the means for 'legitimate politics'.

However, what if not only the legitimacy of the current government, but also the legitimacy of this very current order, its institutions and procedures are the principal objects of contention in a country? What if an effective state is not the first priority, and not even a shared goal of the different actors in a 'fragile' state? What if more effectiveness does not make a state more legitimate in the eyes of his population? These are the questions that my next chapter will look at more in-depth; where I move on to examine the power effects that the *dispositif* of managed pacification realises in a specific context: Myanmar.



Legend

^	Capital	—	Sea	■	Nay Pyi Taw
*	State Capital	—	State and Region Boundary	▨	State
		—	International Boundary	□	Region

Figure 3: Myanmar States and Regions (adapted from Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2015).

Note: Myanmar is officially divided into seven states, seven regions, and the union territory (Nay Pyi Taw); with regions predominantly inhabited by bamar majority population, and states by ethnic minorities.

4

contested histories of Myanmar

So far, my analysis has mainly focused on the discourse on the international level, and on the societal developments in a few Western countries to provide their historical and spatial context. In the second part of my analysis, I will now turn to the specific country of Myanmar. This chapter aims to give an overview of Burma's (and later Myanmar's) histories. Although it is impossible to do justice to the varieties of interpretations and structuring attempts that people have made of history in Myanmar, I still shall try to give an account of the country's past. Obviously, this will not result in a single, coherent, and uncontested description of history. The Eastern part of British India, then Burma, then Myanmar, well illustrates Foucault's (1966, 1969) claim that knowledge – and first of all, knowledge on history – is contingent, as well as historically and spatially specific. If Prasse-Freeman (2014b, p. 97) notes that 'truth' about Burma 'always seems to escape one's grasp', he touches upon a central element of the country's history. If one compares the accounts of recent history of, say, people from Kachin and from central Myanmar, these are likely to differ substantially, or to be contradicting. And who would be to judge which version is 'truth'? Myanmar illustrates Foucault's (1977b) claim that truth and power are inseparable. 'Truth' is produced under a range of constraints, and often dominantly (although not exclusively) controlled by large political entities. 'Truth' is the stake in each social confrontation (Foucault, 1977b, p. 158 f.). Nothing could be truer¹⁸⁶ about Burma. Thinking of the diverse attempts of different regimes to rewrite history according to their needs, or to control what information people have access to, Burma also shows that power can link to knowledge in direct, almost tangible ways.

Accordingly, I shall put forth a few qualifications of the following account of Myanmar's histories. First of all, the choices made of what to include, what to exclude, and how to structure the chapter are subjective. And, although this is unintentional, the chapter may reflect a certain bias privileging the centre of Myanmar; both due to the better availability of information from the centre, but also due to a broader tendency of international actors to focus their attention towards the centre of a country, or to what they see as the centre of a unit they are used to recognize: the nation state. Secondly, this chapter does not aim at a comprehensive

¹⁸⁶ Pun intended.

and in-depth retracing of Myanmar's histories.¹⁸⁷ Given the overall rationale of my analysis, I take the liberty to structure this chapter around the elements that are providing the context to the analytical steps in the following chapter. While heavily contested, the interpretations of Burma's past still form the backdrop against which different actors' realities can be plotted; in which certain concepts' meaning is enabled; and which are offering different repertoires on which discursive strategies are drawing. In view of my main focus of analysis, the different ways of how succeeding governments in Burma acted upon populations and how they constructed legitimacy for their policies and practices will serve as the thread. This allows showing how the imprints of previous ways of governing are still relevant today; as one might find unexpected continuities from colonial rule up to date¹⁸⁸. But even more importantly, this thread gives a historical background of the repertoires and collective memories on which today's actors are drawing when they are relating to the current transformations in Myanmar.

Following this logic, I will start this overview with aspects of British colonial rule¹⁸⁹, before moving to the situation after independence and its effects continuing up to date, the 'Burmese way to socialism', and the re-installment of another military regime after the democracy uprising in 1988. The end of this synopsis will turn to the events that have shaped the grounds for my analysis most decisively: the preparations for the ongoing transitions that Myanmar has seen since 2011.

4.1 British colonial rule

Although one of reasons to choose Myanmar for this analysis is the comparatively little exposure that actors in this country had to the international institutions of aid and peacebuilding, more general international influences on the country should not be overlooked. While Burma is often presented as isolated, inaccessible, or cut off from the rest of the world in recent decades; to think of it as a place untouched by the rest of the world would be grossly misleading. Especially the period under British rule left imprints on society that are still of relevance today.

With three so-called Anglo-Burman wars (1824-26, 1852, and 1885), the British Empire incrementally brought the territory of today's Myanmar under its control. Starting with the taking of coastal strips in Arakan and Tenasserim in its first engagement, the British Empire absorbed the rest of the seaboard including the Irrawaddy Delta and Rangoon in the second war. The other parts of the territory (then called Upper-Burma by the British) were seized in the third engagement (Holliday, 2011, p. 26 ff.)

British rule in Burma had clear and lasting consequences for today's Myanmar. Taylor (1982, p. 7 f.) argues that the colonial form of governing did little to narrow the linguistic and cultural differences among the many groups. But it was during the colonial period when it

¹⁸⁷ In this regard, e.g., the works of Taylor (1987) and M. Smith (1999) are offering comprehensive and detailed accounts.

¹⁸⁸ See section 3.5 above.

¹⁸⁹ The decision to limit this synopsis is by no means implying that Burma's histories started only with British rule. For instance, Taylor (1987, p. 5) argues that major factors that shaped the (then) contemporary state formation were linked to pre-colonial history. But the transformations of society in Burma under British rule are the first transformations that have clear implications for my analysis.

became accepted to group different peoples under broader ethnic labels; and that it became normal to speak of ‘Burmans’ (‘Bamar’) to refer to the majority population in central Burma, and to speak of Shan, Kachin, Chin, Kayah, Karen, Mon, or Arakanese when referring to the groups in the peripheral regions. Taylor (1982, p. 8) points out that this representation of Burma’s structure has been widely accepted by Burma’s political elite. And, this elite – like the Europeans who created it – tended to accept the broader ethnic categories as ‘embodying living social formations with political prerogatives’ (Taylor, 1982, p. 8). In other words, this has prepared the ground for the construction of ethnic lines along which political mobilisation and armed conflict later would inflame. But even if the discourses of larger ethnic identities and their ascribed salience only emerged with colonial rule, this ‘Western’ way of ordering things quickly subjugated other forms to construct one’s identity. Taylor (1982, p. 10) therefore argues that pre-colonial forms¹⁹⁰ of identity construction cannot help to understand modern Burma anymore.

This process was reinforced by other, more tangible processes related to colonial rule, which helped to render ethnic categories meaningful. For instance, the rapid introduction of capitalist modes of production, especially visible in the changes towards large-scale agricultural rice production led to a large-scale movement of the population towards the Delta. Thant Myint-U (2006, p. 166) points out that over a short time, the land used for rice cultivation more than tripled; turning Burma into the ‘rice-bowl of Asia’. According to South (2008, p. 9 f.), the changing economic environment resulted in an erosion of traditional bonds, livelihoods, and even languages of the peoples in the lowlands. The Empire exposed Burma to globalized structures in short time, and integrated it into international markets. In stark contrast, economic changes due to British rule were rather marginal for the peoples in the hills (Holliday, 2011, p. 30).

A similar contrast is visible in the way that the British administration governed Burma. In the early years of colonial rule, the interest in actually governing the newly acquired lands seemed relatively low on the side of the British. Considered the backwaters or appendage of British India, Burma was mostly governed from a distance (Holliday, 2011, p. 26). This gradually changed up to the full incorporation of Burma into the British Empire as a province of India after 1885. With the expulsion of King Thibaw, traditional authority structure disappeared practically overnight (Thant Myint-U, 2001, p. 3). Social structure and categories were quickly dissolved into what Thant Myint-U (2006, p. 181) calls an ‘undifferentiated pool of Burmese peasants’. Little was to replace them, besides the colonial administration relying mainly on policing force to uphold public order and aiming at ‘pacification’ (Holliday, 2011, p. 28 f.). This particular form of governing required little or no social cooperation from the local population, and confined itself mainly to repression (Callahan, 2003, p. 9).

However, this replacement of traditional forms of authority with the British administration again applied to the centre only (Scott, 2009). With the division of the colony into the central

¹⁹⁰ For instance, Lieberman (1978) notes the absence of permanent ethnic categories in pre-colonial Burma. Relations linking people to their leaders mainly took the form of separate personal bonds, and not the form of ethnic or national allegiance.

‘Burma proper’ and a horse-shoe of peripheral areas, the British also created an administrative separation between the majority Burmese in the central lowlands, and the ethnic minority peoples in the surrounding hills. For the minority areas in the hills, the colonial administration largely relied on indirect rule via traditional local authority structures. In terms of governing, British rule therefore had little direct effect for the peoples in the hills (South, 2008, p. 10).

Both the transformations in the economic and administrative realm added to shaping different parts of Burma in different ways. In sum, colonial rule led to the construction of two separate sets of identities: One of a Burmese majority populating the lowlands, and one of highland minority population (South, 2008, p. 10). This can also be seen as a classic divide-and-rule policy on the side of the colonial administration (Scott, 2009, p. 20).

One of the driving forces behind this process was the missionary activities, which were particularly successful in the hills. While in the hills, large parts of the population converted to Christianity, people in the lowlands did significantly less so. For some ethnic minorities, the adoption of Christian faith even began to constitute a creative force for their national identity. Soon, this translated into larger numbers of people from the hills attending British-style secondary schools, while the Bamar majority tended to avoid the Western education system associated with Christianity (Taylor, 1987, p. 113 f.). As a consequence, people stemming from the ethnic minorities were soon disproportionately sought for recruitment into the colonial government services (Taylor, 1987, p. 12), and especially for recruitment into the army (M. Smith, 1999, p. 44).

Accordingly, the emergence of modern Burmese nationalism opposing the British colonial rule was strongest in central Burma (Taylor, 1982, p. 8), and significantly less so for rural areas in the periphery (Scott, 2009, p. 20). For the Bamar majority people, colonial rule had the most tangible impacts on their daily lives, and they were excluded from economic opportunities associated with British rule. This tendency was reinforced by the large number of immigrants of mainly Indian (and to a lesser extent, Chinese) origin. Through the integration of Burma into British India, a single labour market was created, and the colonial administration heavily relied on the Indian labour force. At the beginning of the 20th century, many towns in Burma had a larger population of Indian immigrants than indigenous Burmese (Thant Myint-U, 2006, p. 185). After the First World War, Burma witnessed a substantial economic downturn. In these times, the immigrant population was increasingly the target of violent outbursts, and by the 1930s riots often ended fatally (Holliday, 2011, p. 34 f.).

In sum, the way that colonial rule acted upon Burma in terms of categorization, identity, administrative separations, and economic transformations created the seeds for what was to follow. Especially the construction of two sets of identities separating the centre from the periphery sketched the lines along which Burmese nationalism emerged, and was influential in shaping the political landscape of post-colonial Burma. Similarly, in a co-constitution with the growing influence of the international system of nation states in this part of the world, it also established the basic spatial configuration of today’s Myanmar by situating the centre and the periphery. Over the following decades, this basic configuration stood out from Burma’s manifold and complex categorizations; and gave rise to what could be called the contested histories of Myanmar. This constitutes a first continuity that remained influential throughout

the different (more or less arbitrarily defined) historical periods; and that was only marginally malleable and susceptible to being shaped, re-engineered or formed according to the will of specific actors. But there's more, as the following sections will show.

4.2 Towards independence and fragmentation

Although slightly simplifying, this basic configuration helps in ordering the events around the Japanese invasion in the Second World War and its aftermath. In the centre, a Burmese nationalism has grown over the years before the Second World War. From these predominantly urban and Bamar *milieu* stemmed a group of political activists that slipped out of the country and received military and political training in Japan. For the following decades, these 'thirty comrades' were to be leading the institutions of the state of Burma, as well as the institutions fighting it (South, 2008, p. 22).

When the Japanese Imperial Army invaded Burma in 1941, Aung San and his 'thirty comrades' followed them with their newly founded Burma Independence Army (BIA) in the hope of ending British colonial rule. Rangoon and large parts of the centre quickly fell under their control, although they never had a strong presence on the ground in many areas. Throughout the war, numerous militias and military units of the ethnic minorities in the hills kept loyal to the British forces. When moving towards Rangoon, the BIA perpetrated a number of atrocities towards the Karen and other minorities in reprisal for their loyalty to the colonial rulers (Gier, 2014, p. 82).

After the British forces' retreat to India, the Japanese established a nominally independent government under the leadership of the BIA commanders. This wartime regime followed a quasi-National Socialist ideology of 'one voice, one blood, one nation' (Taylor, 1987, p. 284), relying on a unitary image of a Burmese nation and its people. South (2008, p. 23) argues that what has already begun under the British was now accelerated with the Japanese occupation: namely the stabilisation and reproduction of an 'essentialist and conservative idea' of ethnicity. This essentialist understanding then was constituted as the main origins of individual and group loyalty; and hence enabled the mobilisation of ethnic identity groups to achieve political purposes.

Becoming more and more aware that there would be no far-reaching autonomy under the Japanese, Aung San led a revolt against the Japanese in 1945. Together with the Allied forces, they drove out the Japanese army (South, 2008, p. 23 f.). The following transition towards independence was marked by the discussions around the form that the latter would take. Aung San and his nationalist forces wanted an independence of Burma as a single entity ruled by the centre. The British were more inclined towards a two-Burma solution: granting the minorities more autonomous rights following the division established during colonial rule (Holliday, 2011, p. 38 ff.). In this situation came the conference of *Panglong* in 1947. The conference with the participation of Shan, Kachin, and Chin ethnic leaders occupies a central place in the collective memories and is still a mythically charged reference point for today's

political debates – especially for the ethnic minorities.¹⁹¹ At this conference, Aung San agreed to the principle of autonomy for the ethnic areas, which laid the ground for the quasi-federal constitution of 1947. However, the leaders of the Karen and Mon were not taking part in the Panglong conference, and their constituencies boycotted the following Constituent Assembly elections. This left the question of Karen independence largely unresolved (South, 2008, p. 25 f.).

In July 1947, Aung San and five of his cabinet members were assassinated (M. Smith, 1999, p. 70). Despite the disappearance of the architect of independent Burma, the process continued and Burma formally gained independence in 1948. But independence was far from bringing a solution to the different perspectives on how Burma should function as a nation state: by the end of the year, the newly independent state was facing ethnic insurgencies of the Arakan, Karen, Karenni and Mon, as well as a strong communist insurgency in the form of the Communist Party Burma (CPB). And in the following years, a range of more groups were to take up arms against the central government.¹⁹²

At this point, Burma was on the brink of falling into pieces. In the words of M. Smith (1999, p. 119), it was a ‘miracle’ that the government survived when the map of Burma resembled an ‘extraordinary mosaic of insurgent colours’. Nevertheless, there were improvements in the functioning of the central state: several elections took place, a state administration was rebuilt, and even a Burmese welfare state begun to emerge (Holliday, 2011, p. 43). But in parallel to these developments, also the institution that would take a dominant place in the different histories of Burma for the following decades began to take shape: the Burmese military, the *tatmadaw*.

When General Ne Win became commander of the *tatmadaw* in 1949, there were only around a thousand soldiers under his command, and they were mainly confined to the Rangoon region (Callahan, 2003, p. 114). At this point, a historical particularity played out in the North-eastern part of Burma: A large part of Chiang Kai-shek’s forces driven out of China by Mao Zedong’s Red Army started to operate in North-Eastern Burma. Callahan (2003) sees this as the pivotal moment for the rise of the *tatmadaw*. Her argument merits to be explained in some length here, as it offers insight into how the *tatmadaw* constructs its legitimacy, and what role it claims in society up – to today. For instance, also India or Malaysia were subjected to British colonial rule, but they have not experienced the emergence of a similarly all-encompassing military apparatus which would be comparable to Burma. Callahan’s argument is not resorting to sweeping generalisations on particular cultural traits, nor to the charisma of a particular leader. Instead, her argument is essentially based on (historical) contingency, which is well in line with the overall analytical perspective I provide in this book.

At independence, Burma did not start with a *tabula rasa*. Rather, it started with the remains of a repressive colonial security apparatus, which already was imbued with specific – violent

¹⁹¹ While this conference is generally referred to as a (if not the) unifying moment for Burma in current political debates, Walton (2008) dismisses the conference as a half-hearted attempt to satisfy British demands for minority protection, which was only given rise to its prominent position in collective memories due to an impressive mythical (re-)production and re-interpretation in the following decades.

¹⁹² For a comprehensive overview of the different insurgencies, see M. Smith (1999).

– ways of how the state relates to the population.¹⁹³ The historically specific situation of post-war Burma was marked by a limited influence of the government in Rangoon and by a proliferation of pocket armies (*tats*) that emerged easily in the heavily armed and mobilized post-war context. Quickly, ‘social relations in post-war Burma were governed [...] by whomever had the most guns’ (Callahan, 2003, p. 117). Thant Myint-U (2006, p. 269) notes that the country was ‘in shambles, and war had been replaced, in many parts, by anarchy’. A wide array of people started to arm themselves in order to protect their homes or families, plantations, or factories; or to further their political and economic interests. Social relations were structured by the access to arms, and violence became a means to achieve most things; not least to secure economic interests. Furthermore, it already laid out a blueprint for the complex network of overlapping and contested authorities of ‘states’ or ‘state-like entities’ to which people were subjected especially in the country’s periphery during the following decades (Callahan, 2007).

Faced with a range of autonomy demands by ethnic minorities, and with foreign troops operating on its territory, the government made use of the remainders of the colonial system already in place: namely to quickly build up a force that was capable of securing Burma’s national sovereignty and territory – by the means of violence. Callahan (2003, p. 5) therefore argues that this led to the reification of the colonial security apparatus to hold together a disintegrating country, threatened to be dragged into the Cold War. As this apparatus mainly relied on violence to uphold public order in the past, similar traits can be seen in the way that military leadership began to problematize Burma’s situation – and how possible solutions were constructed. Gradually, the ‘military solution to internal crises crowded out other potential state reformers, turning officers into state builders, and citizens into threats and – more characteristically – enemies’ (Callahan, 2003, p. 5). With the reification of the colonial security apparatus, Burma also inherited the notions and primary functions inscribed in this apparatus: In the first place, this apparatus was not built to be responsive towards a population, but to pacify by coercive means and to uphold production. In the means it employed, this apparatus showed a clear continuity with the former colonial security apparatus. On the other hand, the role in the state that this apparatus started to claim was fundamentally different; going way beyond the upholding of order.

During the 1950s, the *tatmadaw* built up to a more coherent and professionalized force that became largely detached from political leadership. In the words of Thant Myint-U (2006, p. 275): a ‘more coherent military machinery, loyal only to itself’. Also in terms of business, it started to branch out into a range of new domains and became the most important economic actor in the country (Maung Aung Myoe, 2009, p. 174; M. Smith, 2007, p. 30). With this structural transformation, the military also started to change the scope of its role in society: in the words of Callahan (2003), it became a ‘state-builder’.

At the end of the 1950s, the *tatmadaw* had acquired the status of an institution that was seen as a force able to bring order and to unify the country – as opposed to politics, that was in turmoil at this period following a split in the ruling party (Thant Myint-U, 2006, p. 283 f.). This perception was not limited to the army itself; it was also widespread in (majority)

¹⁹³ See also Duffield (2008, p. 8).

society.¹⁹⁴ Accordingly, a military caretaker government with Ne Win serving as prime minister installed in 1958 was mostly accepted as a measure to restore law and order after the ‘failure’ of elected politicians to do so. In the same line, even the clearly unconstitutional coup ultimately bringing Ne Win to power in 1962 was at least credited the benefit of the doubt (Holliday, 2011, p. 48 f.).

However, this second military government proved to be the exact opposite of the first. While the first had turned to (civilian) technocrats to ensure the fulfilling of its government functions, this second military government showed itself deeply suspicious of the educated political class (Thant Myint-U, 2006, p. 291). By this time, the self-perception of the *tatmadaw* had already moved beyond an institution tasked with guaranteeing the country’s security: the conflation of the state and the *tatmadaw* had begun. Callahan (2003, p. 189) cites an internal army paper illustrating the way that the *tatmadaw* constructed its role. It criticises the constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedoms of speech as ‘flaws’; as these would open the door to manipulate the wider population through insurgent’s propaganda. These constitutional flaws would allow ‘unscrupulous politicians and deceitful Communist rebels [...] to bring about in the country gangster political movements, syndicalism, anarchism and a totalitarian regime’ (Directorate of Education and Psychological Warfare, 1958; cited in Callahan, 2003, p. 189).

This paper contains a range of elements that allow dissecting the way that the *tatmadaw* constructed its own role at the time. But, even more importantly, it allows identifying characteristics of the discourses regulating what could be said – and what not – in the following decades. Firstly, it constitutes the population as a mass, which is ‘being left in the grip of their instincts alone, which generally are not of too high standards’ (Callahan, 2003, p. 189). These deficiencies make the ‘simple masses’ susceptible to manipulation by politicians and rebels, equally stemming from the population. This identifies both opposing leaders and the broader population as enemies; or at least potential enemies in the case of the manipulated population. Secondly, it constitutes the need for a protective, patronizing and well-meaning force able to prevent the disastrous consequences that come with a manipulated population. That the origin of the whole ‘problem’ is sought in the ‘harmful’ liberties guaranteed in the constitution also excludes any way of preventing these disastrous consequences by democratic means. On the contrary: democratic procedures and institutions become part of the problem, not the solution. As a consequence, it is incumbent on the *tatmadaw* to give the right direction and save the country from sliding into disaster. Accordingly, the solution proposed in the army paper quoted above consists in the introduction of an ‘anti-subversion ordinance’ that would allow the government to crack down on its opposition to fulfil this role (Callahan, 2003, p. 189) – suspending the ‘problematic’ liberties.

Overall, this provides the blueprint for the role the *tatmadaw* constructed for itself over the following decades: as the sole guarantor for the unity of the nation, protecting it from disintegration. This problematisation of Burma as on the brink of falling apart, and of the military as the backbone of the nation enabled a whole array of specific practices and ways of how the state and its institutions related to the population, as I will show in the next section.

¹⁹⁴ On the discourses stabilizing this public opinion, see following section 4.3.

But even up to today, similar discursive structures can be found in statements of the government, INGOs, and UN agencies; enabling them to act upon the population in specific ways.

4.3 The 'Burmese way to socialism'

As already stated above, the formation of discourse problematising the nation in terms of its – threatened – unity allowed the *tatmadaw*'s coup in 1962 to be seen as legitimate (Taylor, 1987, p. 291). In a way, the increased demands for autonomy by ethnic minority regions can be interpreted as involuntarily paving the way for the military taking over. The *tatmadaw* had been fighting over a decade under their slogan of 'One Blood, One Voice, One Command' (M. Smith, 1999, p. 195 f.). Demands for federalism were diametrically opposed to this idea of the nation. Quickly, these demands were problematized as a threat to Burma's unity, and they contributed to the constitution of the military as the guarantor of unity. Subsequently, they also provided the legitimisation for the *tatmadaw*'s strategies to 'burmanise' the country (Walton, 2013).¹⁹⁵

But these demands also enabled the structural changes in the state in the centre of Burma. The question of federalism became a part of a wider critique of parliamentary democracy *per se*. Along the lines of the argument outlined in the last section, namely that democratic liberties are seen as open to abuse by politicians representing individual rather than public interests, the weakness of Burma's state institutions was soon blamed on democracy. Consequentially, their abolition was presented as necessary for the state – or more precisely, the *tatmadaw* – to assume its role of preventing the disintegration of the nation. In the relationship between official state and non-official institutions, 'it is the state which is expected to be – and which is – the determining partner in such relationships' (Taylor, 1987, p. 4).

That the state – or the institution often conflated with the state, the *tatmadaw* – has played a dominant role in Myanmar's histories cannot be denied. But to accordingly place the state in the focus of analysis is not without alternative. Although the military machinery that ruled important parts of Burma has seemed impenetrable and immune to the tides of time for decades, it is still an analytically fruitful exercise to gaze at this machinery with a more dynamical and malleable understanding of institutions. Or, to be more precise: of the position of institutions in specific networks of power/knowledge. The understanding I am following here is drawing on Foucault's (1976, p. 122) proposition that institutions (or the 'state') cannot be seen as a stable, central point from where power is radiating. Rather, an institution is only a temporary crystallisation in continuously changing networks of power/knowledge that permeate the whole social body, and which are always local and unstable. Power, in this understanding, cannot be found in an actor or institution; rather it is the name that one would give to a complex strategic situation in a given society (Foucault, 1976, p. 123). The attempt to conceptually grasp the *tatmadaw* in terms of a stable, unified bloc¹⁹⁶ in the way it is often

¹⁹⁵ See below.

¹⁹⁶ For extensive analyses of the *tatmadaw* portraying an often divided and much less unified institution, see Callahan (2003), or Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2008b). For a nuanced account of how (rural) communities used

presented is of modest analytical value. The other perspective just outlined opens a more interesting angle to understand the peculiar positions that the *tatmadaw* has assumed after 1962. Namely as the positions adopted by an institution that constructed its role in opposition to other influential forces in Burma's social body at the time; and which evolved according to the *rappports de force* in society.

The military regime of Ne Win and the vehicle he chose to lead – the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) – presented itself as following a middle way between the social democracy of its preceding government and the programme of the armed communist insurrection (Taylor, 1987, p. 297). In the publication of the *Burmese way to socialism*, the Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma (1962) announced: 'Having learnt from contemporary history the evils of deviation towards right or left the Council will with vigilance avoid any such deviation'. The revolutionary council claimed a position for the state that was neither based on the interests of capitalists and landlords, nor on those of the Communist Party, but upon 'all people':

'Socialist economy does not serve the narrow self-interest of a group, an organization, a class, or a party, but plans its economy with the sole aim of giving maximum satisfaction to material, spiritual and cultural needs of the whole nation' (Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma, 1962).

'All people' is a discursive formation at the centre of the *Burmese way to socialism*. This formation constructed a legitimate position for the revolutionary council to speak on behalf of the greater good of Burma's people, and to lead on the 'right' path to prevent unrest, disintegration, and anarchy stemming from competing visions proposed by others. From this position, literally any demand opposing the revolutionary council's programme – be it federalism, civil liberties, or a communist programme – could easily be discredited as serving particular interests of a particular class. The legitimate speaking position regulating speech on the future for the country thus became intrinsically linked to the institution that followed the 'middle way' in the name of 'all people'. Propositions uttered from other positions – e.g., from the ethnic minority groups – were excluded on the grounds that they only speak for one specific group, and not for 'all people' – and hence, are not legitimate. At the same time, this reproduced and stabilised the crumbling entity that was the country of Burma by constituting its diverse populations as being part of the same entity – 'all people' of Burma. And, tacitly excluded by this construction is that not 'all people' subjugated under the state of Burma wanted to be part of this entity, let alone to have 'their' interests 'represented' by the *tatmadaw* speaking on behalf of 'all people'. Glossing over differences of interests among different groups by referring to a greater goal – non-disintegration, in this case – is a recurrent formation of discourse in Burma, and also in today's Myanmar.

Nota bene, 'all people' never literally encompassed all people living inside Burma's borders. As noted by a different authors (Holliday, 2011, p. 48 f.; South, 2008, p. 28; Taylor, 1987, p. 296), the traces of the nationalist ideologies (of different political shades) that dominated the scene in both pre- and post-independence Burma were easily found under Ne

cleavages between different levels of the military regime to further their interests, see Ardeth Maung Thawngmung (2004).

Win's regime, too. Developed in opposition to the colonial forces and the ethnicities they had favoured, Burmese nationalism mainly relied on a narrow definition of people of the nation as majority Bamar. It also borrowed some traits of national socialism, which have been already present before the Japanese invasion (Thant Myint-U, 2006, p. 216), and outlived independence especially in the military's political thought (M. Smith, 1999, p. 199). This involved selectively reconstructing a relevance of a majority Burmese or (Myanmar) identity and shared history. A Bamar centre of the nation was projected into the precolonial past; leaving out other important cultural and political centres of that period (Chein, 2004, pp. 19-20).

These discourses constituting the population of Burma – as majority Burmese – enabled a specific set of practices: Ne Win's regime soon began implementing what has been described as a an aggressive Burmanisation of Burma (South, 2008, p. 28). Bamar dominance¹⁹⁷ in newspapers and films, school education requiring use of Burmese language, and internal migration of the majority ethnic group, were the primary means of these policies (Holliday, 2011, p. 44 f.). Over time, this narrow definition of being Burmese as being Bamar also paved the way to enable military solutions for the 'greater good of all Burmese' to address ethnic autonomy aspirations, and crowded out other visions of the nation (Callahan, 2003). In parallel, the *tatmadaw* became a self-supporting organisation that for large parts of the rural peasantry offered the only available means to social elevation or making a living (M. Smith, 1999, p. 202).

But there are more elements in the *Burmese way to socialism* that merit closer examination, especially in view of analysing current discourses in Myanmar. As a programme that was to follow a parliamentary democracy in Burma, the *Burmese way to socialism* had to create the legitimate speaking position for the Revolutionary council in opposition to the former – democratically elected – leadership. It devotes a whole paragraph to this that is worth quoting in full:

'Parliamentary democracy called 'The People's Rule' came into existence in history with the British, American and French Revolutions against feudalism. It happens to be the best in comparison with all its preceding systems. But in some countries the parliament has been so abused as to have become only the means by which the opportunists and propertied people deceive the simple masses. In the Union of Burma also, parliamentary democracy has been tried and tested in furtherance of the aims of socialist development. But Burma's 'parliamentary democracy' has not only failed to serve our socialist development but also, due to its very inconsistencies, defects, weaknesses and loopholes, its abuses and the absence of a mature public opinion, lost sight of and deviated from the socialist aims, until at last indications of its heading imperceptibly towards just the reverse have become apparent. The nation's socialist aims cannot be achieved with any assurance by means of the form of parliamentary democracy that we have so far experienced' (Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma, 1962).

The discursive strategy it follows is relying on what Hirschman (1991) calls the 'perversity thesis'. It consists of claiming that a certain societal change would be positive in theory, but is

¹⁹⁷ Walton (2013) likens the position of being Burman (or *Bamar*) in Burma to the concept of 'whiteness' in the United States to emphasize the deeply excluding nature of these societal structures. According to his argument, these structures have entered knowledge so deeply that they are hardly perceived by majority people any more, and still have important implications for today's political struggles (see below, chapter 5).

achieving the exact opposite of its aims in reality.¹⁹⁸ Here, ‘parliamentary democracy’ is first presented as a desirable form of government, namely as ‘the best’ system in comparison to others. But following that, the above-described discursive formations of the ‘simple masses’ susceptible to manipulation, and the particularist interests that are trying to further their own aims by manipulating the population are invoked. Following this, parliamentary democracy is leading ‘just to the reverse’ of what it intended.

This way of de-legitimizing democracy has two consequences: Firstly, it constitutes Burma as an exceptional case, where parliamentary democracy has been ‘tried and tested’, but which has not proven to be ‘ready’ for a parliamentary democracy. Given that the necessary preconditions like a ‘mature public opinion’ are absent, Burma is constituted as a peculiar situation where this form of government is not working. This image of a population ‘not ready’ for greater liberties is showing a clear historical continuity: originally used internally by the *tatmadaw* and later officially by the BSPP, it commonly shows up in today’s accounts of Myanmar’s situation – authored by the UN agencies, donor organisations, and INGOs alike; calling for more capacity building.¹⁹⁹

Secondly, it allows constructing the government’s legitimacy differently; namely as legitimacy based on the achievement of certain results. Typically, the legitimacy of a democratically elected government relies on two dimensions: on the procedures that brought it into office (elections), and on the results it achieves.²⁰⁰ But in the *Burmese way to socialism*, this procedural form of legitimacy is subordinated. What matters here for the legitimacy of a government is the degree of achieving socialist aims: Parliamentary democracy has ‘failed to serve our socialist development’, ‘lost sight of and deviated from the socialist aims’ and is even heading towards ‘just the reverse’. Therefore, the ‘nation’s socialist aims cannot be achieved [...] by means of the form of parliamentary democracy that we have so far experienced’. This creates an implicit hierarchy: procedural legitimacy of parliamentary democracy (being elected) is subjugated to something deemed more important, namely the results-based form of legitimacy (achieving socialist aims). At the same time, the discourse excludes the ‘socialist aims’ from being put into question. What remains is only to ask about how to achieve these aims, not whether they should be achieved in the first place.

The parallels with more recent developments in the global West that I discussed above in chapter 3 are striking. Especially with the neoliberal problematisations of public policy and the role of the state, the output-based form of legitimacy has gained in influence at the expense of input-based legitimacy. Although the two discourses contrasted here are the result of very different historical processes, and took place in very different geographic settings, their effects are astonishingly similar. In both cases, the emphasis on results achieved narrows public participation: directly by delegitimizing or suspending parliamentary democracy in the case of the *Burmese way to socialism*; and indirectly in the case of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, where decisions are put into the realm of ‘experts’. Also in both cases, the effect

¹⁹⁸ This potent form of bringing forward criticism in order to delegitimize societal change processes has a longstanding tradition. Hirschman (1991) identifies this ‘perversity thesis’ already in criticisms levelled against the French Revolution.

¹⁹⁹ See chapter 5.

²⁰⁰ For the distinction of input and output legitimacy (Scharpf, 1970, 1999), see section 3.9 above.

of focusing on a larger goal is that differences in the interests of different actors are glossed over. Accordingly, the larger goal is de-politicised, and not part of what can be questioned anymore.

A few elements of the context might help to better understand how this discourse in Burma came into being, and how it became possible for this discourse to become dominant together with its main proponent, the *tatmadaw*. In the eyes of important parts of the population, the military provided the antithesis to the instability associated with the previous phase of democratic government. While parliamentary democracy in the first place was associated with the sometimes chaotic struggles between different political parties and factions, the *tatmadaw* enjoyed the reputation of being able to govern effectively, and to uphold public order. In this specific historical situation, the government was constituted as the ability to effectively uphold public order. Effectiveness and more broadly, a results-based legitimacy associated with order subjugated the procedural legitimacy of democracy; which became associated with chaos and disintegration.

The discursive strategy of delegitimizing parliamentary democracy as ineffective in achieving socialist aims proved successful in different ways: It reinforced the legitimate speaking position of the Revolutionary Council on behalf of ‘all people’, and restricted the legitimate speaking position to a small circle of people. Further, it enabled a range of practices aiming to uphold public order and protect the socialist aims, which now were constituted as the source of legitimacy for a government. This meant nothing less than a re-engineering of Burma’s society along the lines of a socialist economy, but also to ensure the control of the Revolutionary council’s legitimate speaking position by all means.

Accordingly were organized the practices applied to deal with opposition forces questioning the position of the Revolutionary Council: Soon after the coup, the army violently cracked down on student demonstrations in Rangoon, leaving a significant number dead and the student’s union building dynamited (M. Smith, 1999, p. 202). Opposition parties were banned in the following years, and were replaced with the BSPP as a mass party and several government controlled subsidiary organizations like the Peasants’ and Workers’ Councils. These organizations have been described as the means to ‘educate’ the people to make sure that the ‘simple masses’ are not falling for the manipulation from the left or the right (Taylor, 1987, p. 315). In the same vein, extensive measures of official censorship were introduced for all publications; and a press scrutiny board was vested with broad competencies ranging from deletion of passages or whole articles up to banning entire publications that were deemed to be contradicting the *Burmese way to socialism* (Leehey, 2012). One could say that the BSPP appropriated and controlled the production of discourse in Burma in almost tangible ways.

Although it has to be considered a contingent product of Burma’s specific historic situation after the coup, the tension between procedural legitimacy and results-based legitimacy²⁰¹ is by far not limited to Burma. To the contrary: A historical continuity of the discourses around

²⁰¹ In similar forms, similar conceptualizations opposing process and result can be found in the literature: Eyben (2010) speaks of substantialist vs. relationalist ideas of aid (see section 3.4 above); Scharpf (1999, 2003) speaks of input vs. output legitimacy for governments (see section 3.9 above; and Slim (1997) distinguishes deontological vs. teleological ethics underpinning humanitarian aid (see section 3.5 above).

achieving societal progress, or rather around ‘developing a country’ have been identified for other countries in the transition from colonial rule, to military regimes, and to today’s development programs(cf. e.g., Barral, 2015; Li, 2007; Sabaratnam, 2013) Similarly, it has been one of the central elements in discourses associated with the rise of neoliberalism in the rest of the world, and can be considered a central element (re-)structuring the field of aid and peacebuilding.

In different historical and geographic contexts, similar discourses have enabled different power/knowledge networks, and different forms of institutions and practices. Conceptually linking and comparing these very different occurrences of these discourses must not be understood as an attempt to lump these situations together and to claim that they are all the same. Rather, it shows that the discourses constituting objects, ordering concepts, creating legitimate speaking positions, and enabling discursive strategies are infused with power/knowledge, and inseparably linked to the *rappports de forces* of the specific society they take place in. Identifying historical continuities from colonial rule and military regimes to today’s *dispositif* of managed pacification shows that these manifold practices, (scientific) concepts, and institutions commonly associated with aid or peacebuilding cannot be understood as being external to power – even if they present themselves as non-political, neutral, evidence-based, or even technical instruments.

Along these lines, another discursive strategy present in the *Burmese way to socialism* also lends itself to structural comparison with other contexts. This strategy is closely associated with the Revolutionary Council’s self-positioning as representing a middle way between extremist agendas from the left and right (see p. 148). In the practical implementation of the *Burmese way to socialism*, it is stated that the Revolutionary Council

‘[...] will diligently seek all ways and means whereby it can formulate and carry out such programmes as are of real and practical value for the well-being of the nation. In doing so it will critically observe, study and avail itself of the opportunities provided by progressive ideas, theories and experiences at home, or abroad without discrimination between one country of origin and another’ (Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma, 1962).

Two elements are important here: Firstly, the emphasis on ‘real and practical value’, which is signalling a distinction from the ideological programmes of the left and the right; which hereby are constructed as being abstract, intangible, and far from reality. In other words, the BSPP will implement ‘what works’, and not follow dogmatic ideological considerations. This is also signalled by the last sentence of the quotation indicating that all knowledge will be taken into consideration, ‘without discrimination’ of its origins. The parallels to the discursive strategy followed by New Labour in the UK in the 1990s are striking.²⁰² Also New Labour aimed to position itself as a middle or ‘third way’ between the political right and the left; and proposed to orient its policies not along ideological lines, but towards ‘what works’ (Solesbury, 2002). A consequence of this strategy is that finding solutions to societal questions is removed from the political realm and firmly placed in the realm of technical experts, whose judgment can barely be questioned. What clearly distinguishes the discursive strategies then is that New Labour delegated the judgment of ‘what works’ to experts in the

²⁰² See sections 3.2 and 3.6.

form of researchers, while the *tatmadaw* oriented itself primarily along the lines of its internal expertise. Almost inevitably, the solutions and practices originating from these experts were military in nature; and structured along the problematisation of Burma in terms of upholding public order – above all else.

For the economy, the transformation of the country towards a socialist system mainly meant the nationalization of enterprises, which took a relatively slow pace and was following a sectorial logic. Overall, the economic policies seemed mainly to target the peasantry (M. Smith, 1999, p. 204), which was considered the main class to base the socialist economy on (Taylor, 1987, p. 300). Noteworthy for my analysis in this regard are the tone and the way that Revolutionary Council described the transformation of the economy; testifying to the military origins of the knowledge used. Marked by military metaphors now applied to the re-ordering of society and economy, the discourse now dominant structured not only the problematization or the solutions of ethnic insurgency, but the vision of society overall. Accordingly, also the institutions, procedures and ideas created by the Revolutionary Council were structured along a clearly militarised order of knowledge. As Taylor (1982, p. 299) puts it, the institutions and practices created reminded more of ‘a system of military post exchanges than of a complex national organization of production and commerce’. In a report of the Revolutionary Council (1974, p. 298; cited in Taylor, 1987, p. 299), it is stated that local administrative committees supervised the process to implement a nation-wide monopoly of paddy purchasing by the state ‘effectively in the form of a military operation’. This statement is specifically enabled in the historical context of Burma after the coup: Military solutions enjoyed a certain credit for being effective, especially when compared to democratic political processes that were commonly associated with chaos and struggles among particular interests. Accordingly, the problematisation of military solutions to societal problems along the lines of their effectiveness became possible; and subsequently, societal problems were made amenable to military solutions.

The same applies to the inward-looking strategy of economic development; following policies of radical autarky. This stands in stark contrast to the reforms introduced by British colonial forces, which quickly exposed the economy of Burma to the global market. This exposure was reversed after the coup: Importance of trade relationships with foreign countries fell continuously in the following decades, programmes of American organizations like the Ford or Asia foundations were closed, and in 1979, Burma even left the Non-Aligned Movement (Taylor, 1987, p. 295 ff.). But although the image of Burma as a place sealed off from the outside world may have been true for important parts of the population in the centre of Burma, it requires qualifications: Firstly, the regions situated on Burma’s borders always kept important links to their respective neighbouring countries (M. Smith, 1999). And secondly, the elite associated with the military regime has maintained diverse contacts with other countries, especially after the steps towards a re-opening of the economy in the 1980s (see below).

Discourses connecting the formations of a population susceptible to manipulation – narrowly defined as the Burmese majority – that needs to be protected from its enemies outside and inside the country provided a powerful structuration of what could be said, how

things were problematised, and what solutions could be thought of.²⁰³ These discourses can be considered as a part of a larger *dispositif*, that ordered how the government acted upon the population. But although the *tatmadaw* formed an important anchor point for the elements of this *dispositif*, it was by no means reducible to the military as an institution: It equally comprised specific historical knowledge on the emergence of the nation; specific practices of censorship and self-censorship; administrative measures like Bamar-centred school curricula; traditions of military organization from the colonial period and the independence struggle; just to name a few. Brought together, the different elements of this *dispositif* enabled to problematize Burma's political conflicts in terms of illegitimate claims and threats running contrary to the 'people's interest'. In turn, this made Burma's political conflicts amenable to solutions relying on the use of (military) violence and control.²⁰⁴

First of all, this was observable in the language the *tatmadaw* began to use the armed groups after the breakdown of peace negotiations in 1963. Instead of according them a political status, insurgents were henceforward described as bandits, extremist, and the like – united by their will to bring about the disintegration of the Union (M. Smith, 1999, p. 259). In the environment shaped by these notions, the problematizations of the demands by ethnic armed organisations gave rise to the *tatmadaw's* infamous counter-insurgency strategies. These strategies and refugees' graphic descriptions of related human rights violations in turn shaped an important part of the image of how Burma was characterised in the international arena in the following decades; especially on the side of human rights organisations based on the Thai-Burma Border.²⁰⁵ These counter-insurgency strategies known as the 'four cuts' (aiming to cut off insurgents from their local support in the form of food, funds, intelligence and recruits) heavily relied on forced relocation of villages from insurgent areas to government-controlled areas. Basically, a designated area was declared a rebel zone. Whoever remained in these zones and was not re-locating in government controlled villages was automatically treated an insurgent and ran the risk to be shot on sight. Special forces of the *tatmadaw* would then enter the area and sweep for insurgents. This was typically linked to atrocities committed towards the remaining villagers and a strategy of scorched earth (M. Smith, 1999, p. 259 ff.).

These strategies only became thinkable on the grounds of the *dispositif* just described above, and the discursive formation of the Revolutionary Council of the only 'legitimate' body to act in the interest of 'all people' (see p. 148). Firstly, this enabled the *tatmadaw* to employ drastic, violent means towards all people fighting for interests that were at odds with

²⁰³ A thought also present in Foucault's (1997) *il faut défendre la société*, where he identifies similar tendencies in Europe's history.²⁰⁴ A similar interpretation of how the *tatmadaw's* practices became possible draws on Agamben's (1998) work on sovereignty, and the production of 'bare life'. In this view, the *tatmadaw* produces 'bare life' in the borderland, meaning people for which it is up to the sovereign to decide if they are worthy to live (Malseed, 2009). For the population in this area, this results in living a permanent state of exception, which is marked by exclusion and indiscriminate violence (O'Kane, 2007).

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²⁰⁵ See section 5.2.1 below.

the interests the Revolutionary Council defined as being the interests of ‘all people’. Secondly, it enabled the declaration of the civilian population in the zones targeted by the four cuts as insurgents, or at least as related to insurgency, and hence, as enemies of the Union. In combination with the *tatmadaw* as the guarantor of the Union, this legitimized all means the *tatmadaw* would take to combat these insurgents. In sum, this configuration made it possible to redefine a large part of Burma’s population as enemies to be liquidated or integrated into the *tatmadaw*’s services; operating a clear-cut distinction of ‘with us’ and ‘against us’. In the framework of the four cuts, parts of the *dispositif* making these redefinition and distinction possible even took a physical, tangible appearance in the form of military bases and watchtowers that were set up in the surroundings of the insurgency zones.

While proving effective from a military point of view²⁰⁶, these counterinsurgency strategies and the related reports of human rights violations influenced the discourses in the international sphere on Burma; which would be structuring the way international actors spoke of Burma from the end of the 1980s on.²⁰⁷ The reports of refugees arriving mainly on the Thai-Burmese border drew a picture of Burmese state as a brutal military machine²⁰⁸ (Holliday, 2011, p. 183); whose underlying logic seemed hard to discern. These discourses fell on fertile ground with the large number of international and local human rights organisations, humanitarians and activists based on this border; who were drawing attention to the situation of the refugees and the population in the border region.

On the other hand, the perception of the *tatmadaw* in the perspective of people from central Burma must have been quite diverging from this. Over the decades, the military was successful in driving insurgent armed groups to the periphery of the country. Accordingly, the *tatmadaw* was not visible as a fighting force anymore; police handled most of the situations in the centre (Callahan, 2003, p. 209).

But it was the first set of discourses that then would structure the way that states, business, international organizations or INGOs could legitimately engage with Burma, and which forms of interactions would be excluded from what is possible or appropriate engagement.²⁰⁹ But

²⁰⁶ M. Smith (1999, p. 261) describes the four cuts as ‘devastatingly effective’ for the central regions of Burma, although its strategic limits became visible when it was applied in the border regions where insurgents could rely on supply from the outside of the *tatmadaw*’s direct reach.

²⁰⁷ See section 5.2.1 below.

²⁰⁸ The discourses on the killing machinery *tatmadaw* in the Thai-Burmese border region have even made it to prominent appearance in Hollywood. Although it cannot be considered a piece with great depth, the film *Rambo* (Stallone & Monterastelli, 2008) still offers an interesting glimpse of the construction of Myanmar for an (uninformed) international audience. Noteworthy is how the situation in Myanmar is depicted: The borderlands are presented as an absolute stasis of brutality and atrocities, and the people who want to change this non-violently serve as the naïve counterpart to the hero who has to save them by taking on the brutal killing machine of the Burmese military single handedly – shooting everyone and everything. The following dialogue between the hero and one of the do-gooders illustrates an understanding that was dominant in the West – both of the situation in Myanmar and the means to change it:

‘John Rambo: Go live your life ‘cause you’ve got a good one.

Sarah: It’s what I’m trying to do.

John Rambo: No, what you’re trying to do is change what is.

Sarah: And what is?

John Rambo: That we’re like animals! It’s in the blood! It’s natural! Peace? That’s an accident! It’s what is! [...]

[pause]

John Rambo: Don’t waste your life, I did. Go home’ (Stallone & Monterastelli, 2008).

²⁰⁹ See Holliday (2011) for a detailed description of different actor’s ways to engage with Myanmar.

they only were to provide a foundation for the discourses that would ensue in the international sphere after the events of 1988.

4.4 The '88 uprising

In 1988, Burma had witnessed 26 years under Ne Win's military regime, and the ruling party of the BSPP protecting its 'Burmese way to socialism'. As on several occasions in Burma's history, the price of rice and the shortage of essential goods led to demonstrations. Not least because demonetisation exercises in the years before had destroyed the savings of large parts of the population (South, 2008, p. 43). But it was only after a student got shot dead by a policeman in March that there ensued larger demonstrations of students in the capital (Lintner, 1994, p. 274 ff.). The government was quick to clamp down on protest, and astonished both observers and Rangoon's residents with the brutality of the means employed.²¹⁰ Already this first crack down on demonstrations left an estimated hundred demonstrators dead (M. Smith, 1999, p. 1 ff.).

Over the following months, demonstrations sparked in different parts of the country, often followed by police or military using lethal force; leaving hundreds of demonstrators dead. The continuously tensed situation further increased the spiralling prices on rice and other essential goods, in turn provoking even larger protests. In an unexpected move in July, Ne Win announced his resignation, and called for the organisation of multi-party elections. Although his proposition was quickly voted down by the BSPP, it offered a new rallying point for the protesters: democracy. Even more because Ne Win (cit. in Lintner, 1994, p. 276) left the podium with a stern warning: 'In continuing to maintain control, I want the entire nation, the people to know that if in the future there are mob disturbances, if the army shoots, it hits – there is no firing in the air to scare.'

A new mass demonstration was called for 8 August 1988 (8-8-88), a date that in today's Myanmar is still synonymous with the democracy movement. The day ended in a bloodbath when security forces opened fire on demonstrators, with an unconfirmed death toll of up to 3,000 among protesters in Rangoon alone (M. Smith, 1999, p. 3 ff.).

The following month saw divergent dynamics in the situation: On the one hand, an opening up of political space could be observed. New political movements and opposition forces emerged – among others, Aung San Suu Kyi took the stage in this period (Lintner, 1994, p. 279 ff.). Although she had never appeared in politics before and spent years abroad, people quickly identified a symbol to rally behind in iconic Aung San's daughter (Holliday, 2011, p. 56). Ne Win and its foreseen successor both resigned under the pressure of massive protests and the ensuing events, and the BSPP showed signs of disintegration. Many of the newly formed opposition forces were optimistic that democracy and the abolition of the BSPP's one party rule would be within reach (M. Smith, 1999, p. 6 ff.).

On the other hand, events were accompanied by considerable turmoil. Reports of mob violence, robbery, and lootings dominated the news, with allegations of the military

²¹⁰ Reports range from beating, torture, rape, to intentionally letting demonstrators suffocate in an overcrowded police transport. For a detailed account of the events, see M. Smith (1999), or Lintner (1990).

intelligence instigating such events. Prisons were emptied, disbanding thousands of both political prisoners and common criminals into Rangoon. Communal violence incidents started to spark up along religious lines; again with rumours of the government instigating mob violence against the Muslim population (Holliday, 2011, p. 55). Although the level of lawlessness at the time was contested, it provided the *tatmadaw* with the justification to take over power (M. Smith, 1999, p. 14 ff.). Again, this came along the lines of the discourse sketched out above: the *tatmadaw* as the guarantor for security and stability, saving the country from disintegration and chaos. In September, the military proceeded with a coup and began to crush the protest movement. In a few days, more than a thousand protesters and bystanders are estimated killed. For the whole year, M. Smith (1999, p. 16) estimates around 10,000 deaths among the demonstrators.

In the aftermaths of the crackdown on demonstrators, the new regime started a widely broadcasted propaganda campaign to frame the opposition movement as a problem of 'lawlessness', which would leave the *tatmadaw* with no other option than to seize power to uphold public order. Quickly, political opposition was denounced as bandits or extremists (M. Smith, 1999, p. 18), or as instigated by the US Central Intelligence Agency (Guyot & Badgley, 1990, p. 189). Again, the discursive formation of the *tatmadaw* following the right path – as opposed to 'leftists' or 'rightists' – emerged. Again, the *tatmadaw* was portrayed as the only actor able to guarantee stability and public order. And again, this was opposed to the chaos and anarchy that would follow from a multi-party democracy.

This framing was accompanied by a peak in reporting on the country's ethnic insurgencies. The narrative of the *tatmadaw* that held the country together, fighting the 'disintegration' attempts by ethnic armed organisations had another revival after the coup from 1962; and the 'well-meaning force' protecting the country from enemies on its inside and outside was brought into play once again. These blatant attempts to rewrite history marked the surreal climate in the country in the aftermath of the coup – a 'fascist Disneyland', in the words of a foreign diplomat (cit. in M. Smith, 1999, p. 18).

Over the 26 years of its rule, the then regime of the BSPP has established a discursive environment stabilizing its central role for the country's faith. With the discourse constituting the BSPP speaking on behalf of 'all people', there was only space for one legitimate speaking position for a political actor – the BSPP. This position has constituted the BSPP in opposition to other actors whose political nature was implicitly denied: Brandished as extremists or as defending particularist interests, they were denied access to a political arena where the greater good of the Union would be negotiated. This exclusive position to legitimately speak on behalf of the country's greater good allowed the BSPP to maintain its inherently precarious position facing both communist and ethnic minority armed groups. Accordingly, the BSPP has almost exclusively relied on the *tatmadaw* and military violence to deal with these actors branded as 'enemies'.

With the emergence of student demonstrations and new political actors in 1988, this unitary legitimate speaking position was challenged from the central parts of the country. With the growing numbers of demonstrators, the discursive formation of the BSPP speaking for 'all people' began to crumble, and so was the established discourse. In order to be able to

respond to respond to the protests with the same means it has used before (i.e., military force), it was necessary to depict the demonstrations as violent mobs, enemies, and extremists – even if this concerned larger parts of the population.

An account of events around the *tatmadaw* shooting into a demonstration by the military leadership is illustrative in this regard: It claimed that only fifteen demonstrators died during that day, but also 500 people described as ‘looters’ (Ring & Faulder, 1989). It shows two things: Firstly, the problem the demonstrations created for the legitimate speaking position of the BSPP as the only political actor. Given that the interview took place in an international newspaper, a complete denial of the demonstration’s political nature would be hardly credible. Accordingly, their existence is acknowledged, but by the sheer numbers given, they are presented as a marginal problem compared to lawlessness. Secondly, the statement is following a strategy to reconcile the former events with the response of the *tatmadaw* to render the latter ‘appropriate’. When security forces are fighting violent mobs, the use of non-excessive force is generally seen as acceptable – which is not the case with peaceful protesters. Therefore, also putting the use of force in the realm of the non-excessive is crucial:

‘[...] the mob came to assault us. In defence, we fired. But we did it in a controlled manner, not in an irresponsible manner. Instead of using our army weapons, we used shotguns – twelve-gauge’ (Ring & Faulder, 1989).

To further legitimate the use of military force, the military leadership invokes the discursive formation of the *tatmadaw* guaranteeing the survival of the Union in the threat of disintegration. General Saung Maw is quoted on this topic: ‘The country has come back from an abyss, and I saved the country, for the good of the people, according to law’ (Ring & Faulder, 1989). Finally, the discourses depicting the democracy movement as ‘lawless’ and a problem of ‘public order’ also bore the possibility to legitimise the strategy the regime had followed after the bloody crackdown on the demonstrations: Thousands of supporters of the democracy movement were sentenced to harsh prison terms, where hundreds died from torture and neglect (South, 2008, p. 44).

Overall, what has been described as an attempt to re-write history, or even a fascist Disneyland, can also be analysed as the attempts of a regime under strain to uphold the coherence of basic discursive structures ordering its role for the country, identity, and legitimacy.

4.5 A ‘new’ country: Myanmar

The events around the democratic uprising in 1988 consolidated the discourses on the military regime of Burma in the international sphere. They both brought a brisk end to the romanticised narratives of Burma as a non-aligned country ‘developing at its own steam’ as well as to the support of its most important aid donors. The new regime of Saw Maung quickly became a pariah of the international community; and there were no signs that the Soviet Union or China would step in to support Burma (M. Smith, 1999, p. 1 f.). But the events also gave rise to alterations in the discourses that could be found inside Burma.

One of the consequences of the coup in 1988 was discursive shift in the way the new government constructed its legitimacy. The discourses problematizing Burma's then situation as a problem to uphold law and order that have been revitalized during the '88 uprising became dominant. At the same time, the BSPP's problematisation of Burma in terms of achieving the socialist aims for 'all people' of Burma's society disappeared together with the BSPP as an institutional body. This shift is also visible in the name of the new leading body the military formed after the coup: the 'State Law and Order Restoration Council' (SLORC). This now dominant discourse was supported by a quickly installed structure of subordinate 'Law and Order Restoration Councils' on all administrative levels (Guyot & Badgley, 1990, p. 188) that ensured to consistently problematise situations in terms of public order and security. Accordingly, the *tatmadaw* built up its forces: In a few years, its strength rose from an estimated 180,000-190,000 troops to nearly 400,000 (Callahan, 2003, p. 211; Thant Myint-U, 2006, p. 331).

Interestingly, this shift also brought to the fore new ways to conceptualize the relationship between the regime and its population. While the discursive formation of educating a population susceptible to manipulation occupied an important place in the framework of the *Burmese way to socialism*,²¹¹ this element only played a marginal role in Burma's discourses under the SLORC.

The discursive shift was both symptom and response to a deeper transformation in the *rapports de force* of Burma's society; understood as the complex strategic situation found in Burma's society after the coup. New actors in the form of democratic opposition groups appeared on stage – first of all, the National League for Democracy, founded by Aung San Suu Kyi and her colleagues shortly after the SLORC (South, 2008, p. 44). But also on the side of the armed insurgencies, significant shifts took place: In 1989, the long running communist insurgency of the CPB collapsed and splintered into different armed groups along ethnic lines (M. Smith, 1999, p. 374 ff.).²¹² Quasi overnight, the military regime found itself in a situation where it was not under pressure from an armed political left anymore.

As a consequence, the transformation towards a socialist society lost its importance in the formulation of the ideological foundations. The BSPP – the former vehicle for the 'Burmese way to socialism' – was 'casually dropped' without further explanation (M. Smith, 1999, p. 22). Important discursive elements of the 'Burmese way to socialism' like the achievement of 'socialist aims' disappeared. Along the lines of these shifts changed practices: The new regime embarked on more pragmatic ways to deal with Burma's situation after the coup; marked by a de-facto bankrupt economy, foreign currency reserves on an all-time low, and the sudden end of the financial support from its main creditors (Lintner, 1994, p. 286 ff.). In stark contrast with the BSPP's autarkic programme, the military regime now began selling the country's vast natural resources. Shortly after an official visit by the Supreme Commander of the Thai military end of 1988, a range of business deals were concluded with Thai companies. Logging concessions were granted on a large scale on the Thai-Burma border, and permission

²¹¹ See section 4.3 above.

²¹² The most important of these group being the then Burma Democracy Solidarity Party; today named United Wa State Party (M. Smith, 1999, p. 378).

to fish in Burmese waters also went to Thai companies (Lintner, 1994, p. 290). To follow were deals with foreign oil companies, and, symbolizing the break with autarky and the socialist past, an agreement with Coca Cola for production and marketing (Guyot & Badgley, 1990, p. 191). These openings of the economy brought visible changes especially to the centrally located cities in the early 1990s: Formerly unavailable consumption goods now reached the stores; new hotels welcomed Western tourists whose travelling was made easier; and private business and foreign investment was encouraged (Thant Myint-U, 2006, p. 329 f.). In addition to these efforts, the SLORC also courted the international community with presenting itself willing to fight the cultivation and trade of opium in the country's North-East (Lintner, 1994, p. 305 ff.).²¹³ In short, the SLORC engaged in what could be called a PR-campaign in the international realm.

The times they were a-changing, especially if one extends perspective beyond Burma's borders: The end of the Cold War fundamentally changed the configuration of the international scene. In the wave of democratizations sweeping through Eastern Europe, Burma's regime found itself suddenly confronted with very different expectations from the side of the international community. Thus, also the discourses inside of Burma changed, to which its military leadership had to relate. To be precise, this discursive shift did not come with a shift in the broader personnel in the new regime: Many in the closer circle of the SLORC have been close to Ne Win's regime before, or part of the military that supported it (M. Smith, 1999, p. 4 ff.). The very same people, but relating in fundamentally different ways to concepts they had ferociously discarded shortly before – concepts like multi-party democracy.²¹⁴

While in the past, the 'Burmese way to socialism' has shaped the discourses on political leadership of the country and firmly placed the BSPP at its centre, the rules of what is possible – and what is not – had shifted: In May 1990, Burma went to the polls. Even if the elections cannot be called free and fair, given that martial law was still in place and most leaders of the democratic opposition parties were under arrest (M. Smith, 1999, p. 412), the break with the country's last decades of one-party rule is noteworthy. Despite these changes, this did not mean that the formation of discourse of the past disappeared: SLORC officials were sticking to the image in the elections that all other options than themselves would lead Myanmar to disaster in the form of rightists or leftists seizing power (M. Smith, 1999, p. 414). What had changed, though, was the vehicle that was put in the role of the well-meaning force: Instead of the BSPP that had been dropped before, its inheritor, the National Union Party (NUP) was now backed by the military leadership.

Nevertheless, the NLD won in a landslide. The latter party won 392 out of 485 seats, while the NUP could only secure a meagre 10 seats. Particularly humiliating for the military leadership was that not only large parts of the population, but also soldiers and former

²¹³ This region, internationally known as part of the 'Golden Triangle', has risen to become the world's largest opium producing region by the 1990s (Brown, 1999). See also section 4.6 below.

²¹⁴ Taylor (2001, p. 10) notes that at the end of the 1980s, there was a 'newer' generation of military leaders replacing the old-line socialists. Although stemming from the same circles of the military leadership, this younger generation in the officer corps seemed to be less dogmatic and more open to integrate elements of controlled democracy.

members of the BSPP seemed to have voted for the NLD (M. Smith, 1999, p. 414). However, the election results – as clear-cut as they were – did not result in the SLORC stepping down. In the name of upholding ‘law and order’, the forming of a government was delayed. After a few months, it became obvious that the SLORC planned to ignore the outcome of the election, despite the protest of the elected opposition. On the second anniversary of the 8-8-88 uprising, a vast number of monks took to the street in Mandalay. Although not officially a demonstration, the military reacted nervously: Several monks were shot, others beaten, arrested, or disappeared. The Buddhist monkhood – the *sangha* – reacted with a boycott to accept offerings from soldiers and their families, effectively excommunicating the military (Lintner, 1994, p. 310 f.). This confrontation marked one of the last lines the SLORC had not crossed so far: to move against the *sangha*. But it did so in the next months: Monasteries were raided by soldiers, monks arrested, and local army commanders vested with the right to disrobe monks if they did not comply with government orders. The crossing of this last line also meant the end of any openly expressed opposition to the SLORC: When the *tatmadaw* demonstrated it would not even stop for the most respected part of Burmese society, the democracy movement crumbled (Lintner, 1994, p. 312).

Overall, the SLORC has adapted to the shift in discourses that suddenly constituted new entities like the protest movement as legitimate speakers, or that constituted ‘democratisation’ and procedural legitimacy as a somehow inevitable future. Burma’s heady days after 1988 are illustrative for the complex, and sometimes even dynamic alterations that can occur in the configuration of discourses. New elements may emerge, and gain in importance through societal shifts, while others disappear. The sudden importance of the term ‘democracy’, or ‘multi-party elections’ against the backdrop of the emergence of the democracy movement, but also against the end of the Cold War indicate larger shifts in Burma’s discursive environment. This becomes obvious when compared to the decades under the BSPP, and the ‘Burmese way to socialism’; which heavily relied on the image of an autarkical transformation towards a socialist economy. But the productive force of discourses becomes evident exactly in such situations; when they are faced with contradiction. In the case of these shifts, the dominant discourse in Burma subjugated the new elements to its established order with the resurfacing of older elements that have been present before, re-emerged, and now became dominant – like the *tatmadaw* as the guarantor of the nation’s union, or the pitting of law and order against civil liberties. Against this new environment, the *tatmadaw* resorted to the practices that were enabled through these latter formations: military violence, in the name of ‘law and order’. At the beginning of the 1990s, the underlying *rapproches de force* in Burmese society had not fundamentally shifted in favour of the democracy movement. Rather, the existing structures of how a military leadership related to the population had been reproduced; and even reinforced. Also the change in the military paramount leadership brought more of the same, when Saw Maung was replaced with another person of Ne Win’s former circle: Than Shwe (South, 2008, p. 49). In that sense, the country was not anew after the end of the BSPP, even if from then on it bore a new name: Myanmar.

4.6 Ceasefire capitalism and military economics

In 1989, the SLORC unexpectedly announced that the country would from then on be named 'Myanmar'. Myanmar has always been the name of the country for the Bamar majority population. This came with changes of several cities' names, e.g. Rangoon became *Yangon*, Moulmein became *Mawlamyine*; replacing English or ethnic minority language names with their burmanised version (Lintner, 1994, p. 376). Although there are differing interpretations of SLORC's motivations for changing the names,²¹⁵ it was seen as a message by the country's ethnic minorities: With the SLORC choosing the Bamar name for the country, they saw the recognition of their ethnic identity wither, and the idea of a burmanised nation projecting military force from the centre reproduced. Furthermore, which name for the country someone used quickly became associated with political colour, with being for or against the military leadership (Taylor, 2008, p. 220). Several Western governments and opposition groups refused to use the new name of Myanmar, and have been sticking to this position to this day.

Despite this reaffirmation of the Union based on a narrow, Bamar concept of nation, SLORC began to adopt a different strategy towards the ethnic armed organisations. Before the elections, there were signs that Aung San Suu Kyi would become a symbol for change in the population. Not only for the Bamar majority population, but also for the causes of the ethnic minorities, whose armed groups had been fighting the *tatmadaw* for decades at this point. Daughter of Aung San, whose participation in the conference in *Panglong* still stands symbolically for a nation allowing more autonomy for ethnic identities, Aung San Suu Kyi created concerns in the military's leadership. When she started to tour minority states to rally people behind the NLD, the threat of the democratic opposition joining forces with the ethnic minority groups against SLORC became imminent. And the *tatmadaw* realized that it might not have the military strength to fight insurgencies simultaneously in its centre and its periphery (Callahan, 2003, p. 214 f.).²¹⁶

This gave rise to a new strategy to deal with armed groups; even if SLORC after the coup strongly relied on the discursive formation of the *tatmadaw* as the guarantor of national unity (see above). Over the following years, SLORC started to conclude ceasefire agreements. Although not strictly followed by events on the ground, the *tatmadaw* even announced a unilateral halt to all offensives against ethnic armed organisations in the name of 'national unity' (M. Smith, 1999, p. 425). Until 1995, a total of 14 ceasefire agreements were concluded with major ethnic armed organisations. Another 9 ceasefire agreements with smaller and splinter groups followed until 1998; leaving the Karen National Union (KNU) as the biggest armed force without a ceasefire (M. Smith, 1999, p. xvi f.). As South (2008, p. 120 ff.) notes, these ceasefires were far from comprehensive peace treaties. For most observers from the international scene, these new stances of the *tatmadaw* were mostly interpreted as pragmatic lip service, or military strategy (cf., for instance, Callahan, 2003). Although

²¹⁵ These range from an attempt to whitewash the country's name from the atrocities committed in the 1988 uprisings (M. Smith, 1999, p. 21) to protecting the country from outside influence in times of opening up to foreign capital (Lintner, 1990, p. 180).

²¹⁶ For larger groups of students who escaped during 1988 this military threat to SLORC became reality: Many of them joined ethnic armed organisations in the jungle, forming the All Burma Students Democratic Front (South, 2008, p. 45 f.).

promised for years, political dialogue never materialised. What did materialise though, was an increasing militarisation of the ethnic areas by the *tatmadaw* (Joliffe, 2015). Accordingly, these agreements have been mostly fragile in nature, and were often accompanied by continued conflict.

On the other hand, there were also voices that underlined the genuine will of all sides to bring about peace. Writing from an ethnic minority perspective, Seng Raw (2001) notes that the *tatmadaw* moved away from maximalist position it assumed in ceasefire negotiations in the past: Whilst in previous negotiations, the *tatmadaw* demanded a surrender and disarmament of ethnic armed organisations, it now took a more pragmatic stance and allowed ethnic armed organisations to cooperate with the central government in regional development initiatives. Here, a concept emerges that has become widely accepted in the development and peacebuilding field: the peace dividend.²¹⁷ From this position, peace has to be supported with development initiatives fostering cooperation and incentives to move away from a ‘war economy’. In this vein, Seng Raw (2001, p. 161) deplores the lack of international actors to engage with funding in these initiatives.

On the other hand, these agreements often brought economic benefits only to a small elite of commanders of ethnic armed organisations. Lucrative trade deals and authority over specific ethnic minority territories were used as a ‘peace dividend’. As a consequence, these arrangements were widely seen as a (successful) attempt of co-optation in the broader population, and have undermined the ethnic armed organisations legitimacy over time (Su-Ann Oh, 2013, p. 13).

At the same time, and complementing these new forms of engagement with the ethnic armed organisations the *tatmadaw* also embarked on transforming the country’s socialist economy. The abandoning of the ‘Burmese way to socialism’ was soon followed by practices that would translate this discursive shift into worldly effects. Over the course of the 1990s, the *tatmadaw* built up an economical system that would allow foreign trade. At the same time, these contracts were almost exclusively obtained by people that were almost invariably ex-*tatmadaw*, or well connected to its higher ranks (Ditlevsen, 2014; Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2002).

This also meant a more decisive step of the *tatmadaw* into business. While its role in the ‘Burmese way to socialism’ was confined to protect the socialist economy, Myanmar’s economy in the 1990s was dominated by the *tatmadaw*. Soon after the coup of SLORC, the *tatmadaw* became engaged in a wider range of commercial activities than ever before. Enterprises owned by the military were set up, with the Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Limited being the first venture of this kind (Maung Aung Myoe, 2009, p. 176). And, although the SLORC announced a more open economy, increased engagement of the *tatmadaw* in business activities had the opposite effect: Lintner (1990, p. 178) notes that foreign trade was institutionalized, but quickly controlled by a small group of people closely linked to the military – the cronies. The activities of this small circle squeezed out both the black market and many small and middle-scale traders who were unable to compete with the well-connected new businessmen. Already in 1990, the country’s economy became more centralized than before, now under the auspices of the *tatmadaw* (Lintner, 1990, p. 178).

²¹⁷ See also sections 5.2.3 and 5.3.1 below.

While crony business networks have thrived in Myanmar since independence, the SLORC has most extensively profited from close relationships to business (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2002). Moreover, the economic system developing under the auspices of SLORC placed the military at the centre of the economy, marking a further discursive departure from the previous period under the BSPP. The ‘welfare’ of soldiers now was referred to as one of the four means through which the *tatmadaw* was to be built. In a public speech, Than Shwe (cited in Maung Aung Myoe, 2009, p. 176) emphasises the importance of welfare:

It supplements discipline. It also boosts morale. Therefore, welfare is essential in strengthening the Tatmadaw’s capabilities. Welfare must be properly and correctly provided for Tatmadaw personnel who not only have to sacrifice life and limb, but also have to stay away from their families, going through much hardship [...].

The previous discursive formation of the socialist economy aiming at an equal distribution was replaced by the right to compensation for soldiers who gave ‘life and limb’. What soldiers sacrificed for serving the *tatmadaw* would therefore entitle them to economic benefits. This firmly reaffirmed the *tatmadaw*’s position in Myanmar’s economy, but also its role as a central institution for the country itself; drawing on its self-perceived longstanding tradition in building the nation (Maung Aung Myoe, 2009, p. 173).

Overall, the situation of having ceasefires in areas that have known armed conflict for decades, economies relying on various activities resource extraction and poppy cultivation became apparent, which often involved either armed groups or the *tatmadaw* (Brown, 1999, p. 144 f.; South, 2008). Climbing the ranks of the *tatmadaw*, or being close to somebody in the higher ranks soon became equivalent with having access to a range of business opportunities both in the legal and illegal realm; creating a growing wealth for a small elite. This became visible in the expensive taste in luxury cars of this elite (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2002, p. 93). It provided a sharp contrast with the deteriorating (economic) situation of most of the population both in the periphery (South, 2008, p. 169) and in the centre of the country, where poverty levels made Duffield (2008, p. 7) describe Myanmar as a ‘chronic emergency’.

On the other hand, the economic weight that the *tatmadaw* gained in the country – not least through a strategy of co-opting commanders of ethnic armed organisations with business links after the signing of the ceasefires mid-1990s (L. Jones, 2014a, 2014b) – also allowed the *tatmadaw* to reach a position of practically unchallenged strength in the country. And it was from this position of strength that the ‘transition’ could be initiated (cf. Callahan, 2012).

4.7 The long ‘transition’ towards ‘discipline-flourishing’ democracy

As noted above, there has been a considerable shift in the discourses in Burma in the aftermath of the 8-8-88 uprising. Testifying to the changing domestic and international context, the military leadership dropped important elements of the *Burmese way to socialism*. Most importantly, the legitimate speaking position on behalf of the greater good of Burma constructed exclusively for the military leadership was challenged by democratisation discourses.

While still relying on the problematization of Myanmar's political situation in terms of upholding public order, SLORC embarked on a plan for a transition towards a 'discipline-flourishing democracy'. For more than two decades, Myanmar's military leadership would then describe itself as a transitional government leading the country to democracy (Nyein, 2009).

The elaboration of a new constitution and the holding of elections were generally met with suspiciousness both by the public, but also in academic analyses. For the public opinion, the exercise of starting a transition rang hollow just shortly after the experience of the bloody crackdown on the democratic 8-8-88 movement. Furthermore, with the BSPP giving the country a new constitution and transferring state power to the representatives of the people in 1974 had already provided a historical example of a largely announced act resulting in little change in the actual *rappports de force*. The sarcastic saying of that time was that Ne Win had indeed transferred state power, but 'from his left hand to his right hand' (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2008b). This stance was also reflected in the decision of ethnic minority actors and the NLD – the forces seen as legitimate for 'real' political change – to boycott the national convention tasked with elaborating the constitution (South, 2008, p. 118; 128).

Also the government's reaction to events in the second half seemed to confirm that stance: In 2007, The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) – which succeeded the SLORC in 1997 (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2008b, p. 167) – violently cracked down on demonstrations. Due to the strong and visible involvement of Buddhist monks in these demonstrations, the internationally highly mediated events became known as the 'saffron revolution' – named after the colour of the *sangha's* robes (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2008a). Furthermore, the government followed its plan of putting into place a new constitution with holding a referendum in 2008 – just months after Myanmar was struck by cyclone *Nargis*. Although the devastating storm left an estimated 130,000 people dead, the government initially restricted access to the affected areas to international humanitarian organisations (Kramer, 2011, p. 10), which further crystallised the image of Myanmar's regime as a 'ruthless pariah' in the international discourses.²¹⁸

Nonetheless, the new constitution in 2008 was followed by 'carefully staged' elections in 2010 which replaced the military rulers with civilian parliamentarians of the newly formed, military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) – although a majority had a military background (Ytzen, 2014, p. 25f.). In 2011, former general, but now civilian president Thein Sein was appointed and started a program of reforms towards economic liberalisations, more freedom of speech, legalisation of protests, and announced peace negotiations (L. Jones, 2014a). After different exchanges with the president, the NLD then took the decision to compete in the 2012 by-elections. The NLD won 43 out of 45 seats in a landslide win; one of them for Aung San Suu Kyi (Ytzen, 2014, p. 27 ff.).

²¹⁸ On the other hand, cyclone *Nargis* is also seen as an important revitalizing moment for Myanmar's civil society organisations. In the aftermath of the cyclone, many local organisations and ad-hoc groups provided immediate relief to the victims; and some of the organisational structures from then have endured (Kramer, 2011).

Also in the academic discourses on Myanmar, the ‘transition’ was initially given little credit. International (aid) discourses typically understand democratisation in large parts as a bottom-up, grass roots revolution. Democratisation processes initiated from the top are largely excluded from being understood as leading to ‘genuine’ change. The analysis by A. Smith (2007) is illustrative in this regard:

‘This is not a regime transformation of the ‘transition to democracy’ kind, because it is not being undertaken to achieve a withdrawal of the military from power (return to the barracks) [...]. This military-managed regime transformation must be seen for what it is, a process through which a military, long and much experienced in holding state power, [...] is seeking to entrench elements of a political system that serve its interests and perpetuate its values [...]’ (A. Smith, 2007, p. 188 f.).

A. Smith’s (2007) account is illustrative of how discourses in the international sphere constituted Myanmar (or, in this case, rather ‘Burma’) and its regime as a pariah of the international community and as unable to bring about genuine societal change.²¹⁹ It can be used to show several elements of what could be said about the country in the academic discourse at that time – and what was excluded. An explicit categorization in the first phrase of the quotation is setting apart ‘regime transformation’ from ‘transition to democracy’; with the latter being possible only if there is a ‘withdrawal of the military from power’. The basic argument is centred on the military’s ‘genuine will to reform’, meaning that ‘real’ democratization can only be achieved if it is undertaken with the aim of the military returning ‘to the barracks’. But as Myanmar is presented, it is another mere regime transformation lacking this ‘genuine will’, as the military seeks to build a system serving its own interests and values.

Here, another categorization comes into play, this time implicit and setting apart the interests and values of the military from the interests and values of society. By means of this categorization, two political entities are constituted, which are presented as adhering to differing (or opposed) sets of interests and values and as being clearly distinguishable: the military, and the civilian population.²²⁰ In the first place, this clear cut categorization (military vs. civilian) rectifies the image of the *tatmadaw* as a unitary bloc, which is dominant in activists’ discourses on Myanmar,²²¹ but also implicitly constitutes the civilian population as united by a set of interests and values. Both entities – consisting of a large number of different actors with various interests and values – are lumped together under the image of opposing, unitary blocs. Secondly, to ascribe them as necessarily opposed – the military trying to hold power, and the civilian population being for democracy – is equally problematic. For instance, one could think of the large number of *tatmadaw* soldiers voting for the NLD in the 1990 election (M. Smith, 1999, p. 414); substantially blurring this sharp distinction between military and civilian interests. For the civilian population, one could invoke that its organisations are not following democratic ideals *per se* just because they originate from the

²¹⁹ See also section 5.2.1 below.

²²⁰ In an analysis following a similar argument by Nyein (2009), these two entities are even more clear. Nyein (2009, p. 638) argues the *tatmadaw* has ‘further expanded its role in state and society and pushed back the citizenry’.

²²¹ See Duffield (2008); also section 5.2.1.

civilian population (Lorch, 2006, p. 134). This ascribed, clear-cut image of an anti-democratic *tatmadaw* and a pro-democratic civilian population does not necessarily hold. Nevertheless, this clear-cut distinction is present in the academics', activists', and practitioners' discourses.²²² So, what are its functions?

Nota bene, the point here is neither to assess whether the military regime actually wanted to hand over power at this point or not;²²³ nor to vindicate its past actions. The point of interest here is how military and civilian population are constituted as distinguishable entities in the context of democratisation processes in the academic discourse, and what subsequent problematizations, solutions and practices are enabled by this categorization in the realm of aid and peacebuilding.

With the two entities clearly constituted as anti- and pro-democratic, the necessary agency for a democratisation process is attributed to one side. Consequentially, democratisation processes are problematised in terms of carving out space for agency for the civilian side and constraining space for agency for the military side. This in turn shapes practices of international actors accordingly, mostly in the form of strengthening civil society organisations, and, for instance, by trying to avoid funding government institutions (cf. Duffield, 2008).²²⁴ In this discourse, a transition managed and initiated by the anti-democratic military is practically inconceivable. Accordingly, Myanmar's transition got immediately problematised in terms of the military's 'genuine will to reform': Is it about a 'real' transition to democracy, or about regime transformation, another change of *façade*?

This problematisation of Myanmar has been influential up to the aftermath of the elections of 2010 and is still present in what I termed the 'human rights discourse' discourse today.²²⁵ But with the steps of reform initiated after Thein Sein was nominated president, the discourse of Myanmar in the academic debate changed notably. Ferocious critics of the transition still doubted the genuine 'will to reform' of the government, but their points were no longer undisputed. Increasingly, their position got complemented and challenged by different scholars trying to find explanations for the military regime's decision to initiate democratic reforms. Some of these explanations now allow to ascribe a genuine will to reform to at least part of the government, or to influential individuals. Thus, the debate is now ordered along the lines of *naïveté* and pragmatism: Naïve being the common way for the critics to judge those who position themselves in favour of engagement with the new government, and 'pragmatic' being their own label.

A debate among different authors in the journal *Strategic analysis* is illustrative in this regard. The first essay starts with announcing that

²²² See also chapter 5 below.

²²³ As mentioned above, there is a rich academic debate around the nature of the military's decision to initiate the transition. For an overview of possible explanations, see L. Jones (2014a); for a detailed account of individual actors' hypothesized motivations, see Callahan (2012).

²²⁴ This also enabled a practice that was common among international actors that were present in Myanmar before 2011: 'working below the radar' (see section 5.2.2).

²²⁵ See section 5.2.1 below.

‘Myanmar is in the midst of a phase of historic transformation, both in the domestic sphere and in its external relations. This time the change that is occurring is substantive, not cosmetic’ (Singh, 2013, p. 101).

This both highlights the position that the rest of the essay will assume, and even more so how the academic discourse problematised Myanmar for the last decades: as a ‘basket case’ in terms of democratisation, unable to change from within itself. The contributions by different authors then range from cautious optimism (Bhatia, 2013), to the attempt of drawing a more complex image by differentiating different actors (Lall, 2013; Yhome, 2013), to the outright rejection of the transition’s genuineness by arguing that the transition’s origin can be found in geopolitics (Lintner, 2013a).

What seems relatively undisputed is that the initiation of the transition followed a long-standing plan and that it did not follow a period of weakness of the military regime (cf. Callahan, 2012; L. Jones, 2014a; Lall, 2013). Pressure from the street making the government resign were highly unlikely, although some authors argue that the Arab spring has had an influence on the military regime’s thinking (e.g. Yhome, 2013). Most academic observers would predict that Myanmar follows the ‘Indonesian model’ (Taylor, 2001, p. 11): a controlled emergence of semi-democratic forms, periodic elections, but not a societal transformation that could threaten the ongoing basis of military dominance. The stage for such a process has been set in the new constitution, which gives the commander in chief direct control of 25 percent of the seats in both houses of parliament, and key portfolios of defence, home affairs and border affairs (Ardeth Maung Thawngmung & Maung Aung Myoe, 2007, p. 196).

But the ‘transition’ – understood as the element marking Myanmar’s discursive environment over the last years – also provided the backdrop against which other events that followed since 2011 were interpreted. Two aspects of Myanmar’s most recent histories are particularly noteworthy, because they fed into the continuation of the debate on the ‘genuineness’ of the country’s transition, and illustrate how important problematisations are for the responses that different actors deem legitimate: the intercommunal violence that has been shaking Myanmar since 2012, and the renewed armed conflict that broke out in Kachin in 2011.

In 2012, longstanding tensions between Buddhist and Muslim groups in Myanmar’s Rakhine state in the country’s West erupted into intercommunal violence that left around 200 Muslims dead, and displaced around 140,000. A range of villages of the Muslim minority were destroyed. The Rakhine Buddhist and the Muslim Rohingya communities are effectively segregated up to today, with the latter being denied basic rights and living mostly confined to Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps (International Crisis Group, 2013a). Although most observers initially interpreted the intercommunal clashes as a geographically limited problem, the violence against Muslim minority people spread to other areas of the country in 2013. This revealed more far-reaching causes of the violence, that are usually seen in an extreme Buddhist nationalism – as embodied by the so-called ‘969’ movement, and the growing influence of the ‘organization for the protection of race and religion (known under

their Burmese acronym Ma Ba Tha) – and a growing sense in the Buddhist majority population that Islam is a threat to their religion (Schissler, Walton, & Phyu Phyu Thi, 2015; Walton & Hayward, 2014).

Also another aspect of Myanmar's most recent history contradicts the narrative of a smooth transition: In the North of the country, in Kachin state, Myanmar has witnessed renewed armed conflict since the breakdown of the ceasefire between the *tatmadaw* and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in 2011. Also the violence there has displaced some 100,000 civilians (ICG, 2013b). The hostilities have been ongoing since, and in some instances even intensified (Nang Mya Nadi, 2015). Some observers argue that the fighting in Kachin – together with the clashes in Northern Shan state in 2015 between the *tatmadaw* and other ethnic armed organisations – mean that Myanmar has seen more intense fighting than in the decades before the transition (e.g., Lintner, 2015a).

Unsurprisingly, both the intercommunal violence and the renewed fighting in the country's North continuously shed a different light on the debate of the 'genuineness' of Myanmar's transition; and they have been given differing importance by different actors, as I will show in the next chapter. For the international actors that are active in and around Myanmar, the interpretation of the transition is crucial. Put bluntly, the question on the 'genuine' will of the government to initiate democratic reforms, or seek peace, equals nothing more than the question of which actors can be considered 'good' and 'bad'; defining who can be legitimately supported – and who can't be. At the same time, there is already a set of specific practices, which are enabled either in the construction of the military regime as the 'killing machine' (sanctions); or of the military regime as genuinely interested in democracy (support).

As I will show in the following chapters, just because the 'generals have loosened their grip' (Callahan, 2012) does not mean that all forms of control and power relations magically disappear. Rather, it means that more direct forms of control and coercion are replaced by a new discursive environment based on new societal *rapproches de force*, where new forms of control and discipline, but also new forms of agency become possible: In short, a new governmentality becomes dominant, but still coexists, merges, and clashes with other ways of control.

5

discourses, strategies and practices: the ‘goalition’ in Myanmar

After the last chapter, where I provided the context and historical background for my analysis, the remaining chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the discursive environment of today’s Myanmar. In the chapters before, I have analysed how the discourses of the international aid architecture constitute their subjects of development, peace, and societal change processes. As a reminder, discourses only exist insofar as they are realised by social actors (Keller, 2007, p. 63). Hence, the following part of my analysis brings into focus how these discourses are operationalised, practised, and realise their power effects in the example of Myanmar. I will show how actors draw on dominant international discourses to construct specific problematisations of Myanmar’s current situation, which constrain the range of appropriate ‘solutions’ and, subsequently, enable specific practices. The focus of my analysis therefore now shifts from the detailed analysis of discourses to the larger *dispositif* in which they are embedded.

At the same time, this also implies a shift from a rather structuralist to a rather post-structuralist perspective as a primary guide to my analysis. This puts more emphasis on the networks of power/knowledge, and how they structure the discursive field in which specific actors like INGOs or political activists navigate and operate in Myanmar. My focus of analysis thus shifts from dissecting and mapping discourses or bundles of discourses in their entirety to the analysis of how discourses relate to competing ones: how dominant discourses de-legitimise and subjugate other orders of knowledge, how different actors relate to dominant discourses, and in turn challenge dominant constructions of legitimacy and promote their own. It puts more emphasis on the agency of actors, and how they operate in the networks of discourses, practices, and institutions imbued with power/knowledge. Equally, it gives more weight to inconsistencies in discourses, to shifts, and how they manage to uphold a minimal coherence. In a way, my analysis shifts from the *production* of discourses to the struggles in which their *re-production* takes place.

This also allows going beyond the dominant grid of interpretation that depicts the actors in the development and peacebuilding *dispositif* along the lines of its own – to borrow the term from grounded theory, *in vivo* (Strauss, 1987) – categories. Large parts of practitioners,

policy-makers and academia read the relations between different actors in this field along the lines of collaboration among equals, coordination for more effectiveness, local ownership and empowerment to achieve the uncontested goals of development and peace. To move to the margins of these discourses, and to go beyond the 'cloak of rational planning' (Mosse, 2004, p. 641) that masks them, the framework of analysis I use is a different one: Instead of collaboration, I posit struggles for legitimacy; instead of coordination, local ownership and empowerment, I posit conduct of conduct; and instead of uncontested goals, I posit *rappports de force* on both a societal and global level. Although these categories will (at best) be perceived as cynical by most of the actors in this field – and they by no means do justice to the individual motivations of the people working in the international aid architecture – they offer a tremendously fruitful perspective of analysis, as I will demonstrate in the following.

To analyse how the different actors' discourses and practices relate to each other, I use a set of key questions, that I apply to all discursive fragments: How do they constitute the subjects that they are speaking of, how do they problematise Myanmar's current situation, and what solutions are embedded in these problematisations? How do different actors conceptualise the notions of 'peace' and 'development' in Myanmar; and how constitute discourses the societal change processes leading to 'peace' and 'development'? How do they order access to and exclude from legitimate speaking positions, and create legitimacy for their own interpretations and positions? What practices are enabled by this, and what are the power effects and broader consequences?

I begin with the analysis of international actors' discourses in and on Myanmar. These draw closely on the internationally dominant discourses analysed above; it is thus difficult not to uncritically succumb to their fundamental assumptions, categories, and problematisations.²²⁶ To establish the necessary critical distance, I use the means of synchronous and asynchronous comparison of discourses; namely by comparing the today's dominant discourses embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification to the human rights discourse, which structured speech on Myanmar before the transition. I then turn to the different practices that are enabled in today's networks of power/knowledge, and show how Myanmar is made amenable to be 'normalised' with the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification.

To work out the contingency of these dominant networks of power/knowledge, I then contrast them with discourse fragments documenting the discursive struggles of different actors; or elements of resistance to the order of knowledge that the *dispositif* of managed pacification establishes in Myanmar. These may be uttered or penned by different actors whose organisations are part of this *dispositif* (like the Myanmar government, or INGOs), but also by those groups that are de-legitimised and marginalised by the development and peacebuilding *dispositif* like political activists. With the help of these perspectives, strategies, and struggles for legitimacy, I bring to surface the power effects of the dominant discursive coalition that are easily overlooked.

²²⁶ Especially considering my personal positionality in this architecture (see methodical considerations in section 2.5.2).

5.1 New problems: From 'stagnation' to the 'next tiger'

As I pointed out in section 4.7 above, most actors would nowadays agree that Myanmar is in a transition. There may be points of contention on whether this transition is 'genuine', when it started, or where it is going, but there is an overall agreement that 'things are changing'. Indicators to pin down these changes in everyday life could be the experience of extended freedoms of expression, the news of peace talks between the government and the ethnic armed organisations, or the impressive number of new cars jamming Yangon's roads at rush hour.

But for a complex change process touching upon a myriad of aspects in social life in Myanmar, there is no objective measure to assess change. It would be perfectly reasonable to argue that over the last years, there were more things in Myanmar that have remained the same than things that have changed. And that therefore, Myanmar would be a country in stagnation.²²⁷ For someone living in a village of rural Myanmar, changes over the last years may have been marginal indeed. Also if one looks at the much-applauded democratic reforms, many things have not changed. For instance, the constitution still stipulates that the military commander in chief directly controls 25 percent of the seats in both houses of parliament (Ardeth Maung Thawngmung & Maung Aung Myoe, 2007, p. 196); and the *tatmadaw* is still barring constitutional amendments aiming to curtail its leading role in national politics (Kyaw Kha, 2014).

Nevertheless, the notion of a 'transition' is omnipresent in statements of politicians, everyday conversations, or the news. At some point, it became 'normal' to speak of Myanmar in the terms of a country in transition. But this does not stem from an inherent quality of the current situation in Myanmar. Rather, it is the result of discourses *constituting* Myanmar as a country in transition. It is the effect of a range of actors problematising Myanmar in terms of changes that happen in the country, in terms of reforms, and in terms of 'opening up'. At the same time, it is also the effect of actors *not* problematising Myanmar in terms of continuity, stagnation, and perpetuation of structures.

Myanmar's transition illustrates that the act of defining its situation is not following the imperatives of an objective 'truth', but rather is the contingent product of power/knowledge structures, and the different actors' struggles that continuously reproduce them. From the side of the international community, Myanmar's transition was not given much credit in its early days. The dominant interpretation of nominally civilian president Thein Sein taking office was that of a *change de façade* whose effects would be marginal at best.²²⁸ At this time, the international discourses excluded the possibility of the military regime initiating a 'real' transition, and the regime was more or less the only actor speaking of a transition. It was only when actors ranging from business actors to Western governments re-assessed Myanmar's situation that the discourses started to change. And when actors like donor organisations, INGOs, and political analysts began to speak of a transition, positioned them towards this transition, even when they contested the sincerity of the reforms, they contributed to

²²⁷ This position also exists; as illustrated by a piece written by Ko Ko Thett (2012), who offers a devastating critique of the changes the transition achieved.

²²⁸ See section 4.7 above.

constituting Myanmar as 'in transition'. What the case of Myanmar shows impressively is how fast the constitution of discourses' objects can evolve. Myanmar changed from a 'notorious pariah' to a 'place of opportunities' in a matter of months – all while the discourse had to uphold its inner coherence, and integrate elements that were diametrically opposed to its older structure.

What I attempt in the following analysis is neither to judge whether Myanmar's current situation is a transition or not; nor to assess its potential to become the next 'tiger economy'. In my analytical perspective, both the constructions of a 'majestic new Myanmar and those of the same old military-backed Burma' (Prasse-Freeman, 2014b, p. 97) are contingent. Rather, I aim to analyse the effects of constituting Myanmar as a country 'in transition' on actors in aid and peacebuilding; and what strategies and practices are enabled with it. In the following, I will show that the discursive formation of the 'transition' altered different actors' problematisation of Myanmar. Subsequently, this changes the rationale that international actors construct for their engagement in the country, how they present their role in relation to other actors, and what strategies they deem appropriate.

Especially for business actors, the reforms quickly sparked interest in South-East Asia's last 'frontier market' that was newly 'open for business'. The description of a new report by the McKinsey Global Institute (2013) well summarises the general tone at the beginning of the transition:

'Myanmar is a highly unusual but promising prospect for businesses and investors—an underdeveloped economy with many advantages, in the heart of the world's fastest-growing region. Home to 60 million inhabitants (46 million of working age), this Asian nation has abundant natural resources and is close to a market of half a billion people. And the country's early stage of economic development gives it a 'greenfield' advantage: an opportunity to build a 'fit for purpose' economy to suit the modern world. Managed well, Myanmar could conceivably quadruple the size of its economy, from \$45 billion in 2010 to more than \$200 billion in 2030—creating upward of ten million nonagricultural jobs in the process.' (McKinsey Global Institute, 2013).

The image drawn is that of a place with great potential because it is virtually untouched by modern business. It invokes an empty playing ground for the enterprising spirits; where a successful economy can be 'built' if it is 'managed well'. These promising assessments were accompanied by a 'swarm of visitors' (Rieffel & Fox, 2013, p. 1) ranging from business actors to aid agencies to prime ministers arrived in the country. It was *now* that one had to be on the ground to be 'make a difference', and to support the 'transition' (Rieffel & Fox, 2013, p. 1).

This specific problematisation of Myanmar outlined above – as a country of great abundance in resources that has so far been unable to harness its potential – is also common among aid agencies. It can regularly be found in the first lines of introduction in reports issued bi- and multilateral donor agencies or INGOs. In that line, the country is described as a 'potentially rich' place (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA & Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, 2012, p. 1), whose 'resource wealth and young labor force should yield medium to high growth rates' (Australian Agency for International Development AusAID, 2013, p. 9 f.). But after the advent of the reforms, this potential was

presented as within reach to be tapped: '[t]o many watching, Myanmar seems to be the next big opportunity' (Gurung, Muench, & Wattman, 2014) or 'potentially the newest 'Asian tiger' economy' (SDC, 2013, p. 11).

How this new way of speaking of Myanmar contrasts with older discourses is visible in official documents outlining the strategies of bi-lateral donors, for instance DFID's (2011a) pamphlet summarising the UK's official engagement in Myanmar for 2011-2015. Bearing many traits for the typical international discourse before the transition, the document starts with the following lines under the heading 'why we work in Burma':

'Burma is rich in natural resources, yet it is one of the poorest countries in Asia. Although reliable data about poverty in Burma is difficult to obtain, there is evidence of widespread poverty and vulnerability. A third of the population do not have enough money to meet their basic food and living needs. The country is off track to reach many of the Millennium Development Goals. Its record on health is among the worst in Asia, and suffers amongst the highest rates of malaria, malnutrition (especially amongst children) and tuberculosis in the world. In the border areas of eastern Burma, more than six decades of political unrest and armed conflict has displaced an estimated 500,000 people, severely disrupting their livelihoods' (DFID, 2011a, p. 1).

The problem identified in this paragraph is the lack of the means to satisfy basic needs for survival: food and health. Depicted are immense needs, and it is even difficult to know the extent of human suffering due to lack of data. The image drawn of Myanmar's situation in this account is static: poverty is widespread, conflict has been longstanding. In this image, there is neither an analytical cause for these problems, nor is there any mention of an angle of how this could change in the near future. Realistically, even a large aid program could only hope to mitigate a few of the problems in 'one of the poorest countries in Asia'. In line with this, DFID pledges to encourage other donors to become more engaged in Myanmar in the next paragraph. Although this creates an urge to do something about it, and gives a rationale for DFID to work in Myanmar, expectations that the situation will be significantly improved are kept low.

In the revised version of the very same document (DFID, 2012d) issued roughly one year later, the tone has changed, and now bears the traits of the discourse during the transition. In the version published about a year into the transition, the paragraph cited above now reads:

'A resource rich Burma that is accountable to its people and open to responsible foreign investment has great potential to reverse years of decline. Our aim will be to harness this potential - to help create a better governed, more peaceful & prosperous Burma that uses its increased wealth to reduce poverty. The remarkable process of change witnessed since November 2010 has given the UK a great opportunity to transform the lives of poor people in Burma. DFID is now able to work with new partners in new sectors to achieve a greater impact with British aid' (DFID, 2012d, p. 1).

Firstly, the image drawn of the country is not static anymore, it is now dynamic. Put bluntly, the country described turned from stagnant place plagued by poverty to a place with 'great potential'. Accordingly, the description of Myanmar does not start with today's situation and its problems, but with DFID's vision for Myanmar: A country 'that is accountable to its people and open to responsible foreign investment'. Although the problems

identified in the first version of the document are following in the next paragraph in the document, their meaning in the context has changed. They are no longer problems that can be alleviated at best; they can be tackled now – even by the country itself, using its own resources. Where in the 2011 pamphlet, the problematisation of the country was descriptive; it takes a more analytical form in the 2012 version. The problem is not the lack of means to satisfy basic needs anymore – it is now a problem of using Myanmar's existing wealth to reduce its poverty. In other words, to 'tap its potential'.

Similarly as in the discourse of business actors above, Myanmar is also depicted as a place of opportunity as it is still 'untouched' by aid:

'The sanctions against Myanmar have meant that the level of development aid there is by far the lowest of any of the least developed countries (at USD 7 per person). The rapid changes that have taken place in recent months in Myanmar provide unprecedented opportunities for Switzerland (FDFA & SDC, 2012, p. 1).

In the first place, depicting Myanmar in this way helps international actors to build a rationale for their engagement in Myanmar. As described in chapter 3 above, aid agencies nowadays are mainly justifying their engagement in a specific country in terms of the results that they will potentially achieve. As they have entered into fierce competition for funding with other sectors of public policy, they are under pressure to demonstrate their usefulness, or value for money. Emphasising that Myanmar offers high economic potential allows them to draw on the formation of discourse that puts aid in such a country into relation with the (economic) self-interest of donor countries. The image of an untapped economic potential invokes the possibilities of increased trade with Myanmar, access to the last frontier market, and even decreased flows of refugees. In their country strategy, (AusAID, 2013, p. 10) writes that 'integrating Myanmar into the global economy will open previously untapped trade and economic opportunities as well as partnerships with Australia and others'. Furthermore, '[a]s a major source of refugees and illegal migration, Myanmar is important to Australia's regional efforts to reduce people smuggling and irregular people movement'. Accordingly, 'Australia's aid to Myanmar supports our national interests by creating the building blocks of a prosperous and open country' (AusAID, 2013, p. 10). To put it bluntly, making an 'investment' in aid is thus presented as 'appropriate' – also from the viewpoint of a politician who has to overview government expenses, or who wants to decrease refugee flows.

With presenting Myanmar in terms of its untapped economic potential, international actors thus respond to the discursive shifts that have taken place in aid and peacebuilding over the last decades; and construct legitimacy for their engagement, practices, and budgets.²²⁹ This problematisation can thus be interpreted as an effect of the increasingly prominent discourses emphasising the focus on results, and the application of economic benchmarks in aid and peacebuilding. This illustrates how discourses from different fields can draw on each other, and how actors from one field can appropriate the power effects of discourses in another field. Accordingly, also the way they constitute problems and their solutions takes up elements of the other field. Before the transition, economic engagement or foreign investment in

²²⁹ On this point, see also 3.4 above.

Myanmar was widely branded as immoral, not least because of the continuous campaigns of human rights activists and the international sanctions in place. International discourses constituting Myanmar's government as a pariah excluded economic engagement strategies with the regime from what could be said.²³⁰ The general stance was marked by the idea that a pariah should not benefit from any kind of economic activity or foreign investment.²³¹ The isolation and being cut off from trade links were thought to make the regime crumble at a certain point, and thus sanctions and non-engagement were perceived as the appropriate strategy for international actors. Implicitly, these discourses relied on democratic protest movements as the 'solution' for Myanmar's 'problem'. But sanctions have been neither successful in sparking political change (e.g., see Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2004), nor has the experience of the regime's reaction to democratic uprisings been promising.²³² In the new discursive order to speak of Myanmar, the older logic is reversed: Foreign economic investment is now treated as a given, and as having prospects to turn Myanmar into a 'prosperous' country, if it happens in a 'responsible' way. Hence, the way is paved for foreign investment to be seen as a part of the solution – and not as part of the problem anymore.

For the international aid actors, this also marks the passage from a problematisation of Myanmar in terms of 'human rights violations' towards a problematisation in terms of 'development'. The comparatively low rankings of Myanmar in terms of typical development indicators have been pointed out before. But if one looks at problematisations dating from before the transition, these are more of a side-note, compared with the rest of the country's problems. As an example, the European Commission writes in their strategy paper for the years 2007-2013:

'Burma/Myanmar is one of the least developed countries in the world, with a population of approximately 50 million people, bordering Thailand, Laos, China, India and Bangladesh. For the largest part since its independence in 1948, the country has seen civil wars, with government forces battling communist insurgents, ethnic rebels and drug warlord militias. Burma/Myanmar represents today a complex post-conflict challenge, similar to other war-torn societies elsewhere. Violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms are widespread. Political parties, including the winner of the 1990 elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD), are being impeded from functioning. The NLD's leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is kept under house arrest' (EC, 2013, p. 3)

In this account of Myanmar's situation before the transition, the main problems are clearly identified in the longstanding armed conflicts and the presence of the authoritarian regime. In 2014, the announcement of the EU's next strategy pledges a bilateral cooperation programme worth 688 million Euros and states that

'[t]his programme will serve as the multiannual indicative framework for our cooperation over the next seven years and reflects the new partnership the EU and Myanmar have been building

²³⁰ This mainly pertains to the global 'West'. ASEAN countries have taken a more moderate stance of 'constructive' engagement with Myanmar, which also enabled economic ties (see section 4.5).

²³¹ This was the case also beyond the professional fields of international cooperation. As an illustration: the Lonely Planet travel guide's 2011 edition proposes specific itineraries for individual travellers that are supposed to limit the amount of money that goes to the military government (Allen, Smith, & Smith, 2011, p. 20).

²³² See section 4.4 above.

since 2011. It underlines EU's full commitment to support sustainable development and poverty reduction in the country for the benefit of all people living in Myanmar. (EEAS, 2014).

While the intervention areas 'peacebuilding support' and support of democratic and institutional reforms are still present in the new programme, the budgets are indicative that these areas are quickly pushed to the back of the EU's agenda: For eradication of poverty and education, 241 million Euros are pledged each, peacebuilding and democratisation projects only receive 103 million and 96 million Euros, respectively (EEAS, 2014).

But the effects of the discursive formation constituting Myanmar as a 'country in transition' are more far reaching than that. Embedded in this new formation of discourse comes a shift in the underlying assumption on how social change processes can happen in Myanmar. For years, the idea that change would come from a democracy movement was dominant in the discourses of international actors.²³³ The ethnic armed organisations saw their armed struggle as the means to bring about change, or at least to keep the central state at a distance from their territories and their people. Now, change seen as 'genuine' suddenly can come as a result of reforms from the top. This means nothing less than that the discursive order in which speech of Myanmar was structured, topples: It changes the way that legitimate speaking positions on notions like democracy, peace, or development are created; it changes which entities are seen to be legitimate to speak on these topics; and it changes what practices are seen as legitimate. In short: the formation of the 'transition' has altered the complex strategic situation in Myanmar, or the societal *rappports de forces* in the sense of Foucault (1976, p. 123). This shift in the problematisations of Myanmar – but also in the more tangible manifestations such as aid budgets – are indicative that with the transition and the ensuing discursive changes, the way has been paved for a new form of engagement of international aid actors with Myanmar. With these new problematisations focusing on poverty reduction and development, Myanmar is made amenable to the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. Before the transition, only a minimal engagement was possible in the form of humanitarian aid, and small-scale development and peacebuilding activities. Now, the full-fledged aid machinery is about to arrive; accompanied by its actors, their way of doing things, its hierarchies, and knowledges.

In the following sections, I will thus analyse the role of this *dispositif* in today's Myanmar; and how it realises power effects of the discourses of aid and peacebuilding.

5.2 New forms of engagement: from 'pariah' to 'development partner'

As outlined above, Myanmar's discursive environment has been changing decidedly over the last few years. The 'transition' has been deeply restructuring how things about Myanmar can be said, what can be said, and what is seen as legitimate to be done. To a large extent, this has also altered the way that different actors engage with each other, and what role the discourses constitute for different actors, entities, or institutions in the new environment of the 'transition'. This new environment thus offers a perfect space to observe how different actors

²³³ See section 4.7 above.

adapt to the new environment, how they take up elements of new discourses to justify their own role and create legitimacy for what they are doing. At the same time, it is also ideal to observe how in these discursive struggles, a new structure of discourse is forged, which prioritise specific interpretations, and exclude or marginalise others.

In the centre of my analysis in this section will be the roles of different actors, and how they relate to each other. Because Myanmar's discursive environment has been changing profoundly over the last years, these relationships are all still 'in the making', and the friction between different discourses – both from inside and outside the country – are still clearly visible. Also, today's Myanmar offers one of the few examples where the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification can be directly observed, and where it has not been in place and crystallised decades ago. With the arrival of new actors and the redefinition of roles of older actors that are enabled in the 'transition', I can analyse how the notions and practices they bring along impact on the discourses already in place; and how the new formations of discourse emerging from these clashes make Myanmar amenable to the *dispositif of managed pacification*.

In the following, I will analyse the ways that speaking of Myanmar was possible before the 'transition'. This means to examine the discourses of the different organisations that have been working across the border of Thailand and Myanmar. Then, I will turn to current discourses of aid and peacebuilding, and compare them to the discourse of the Myanmar government.

5.2.1 The discourse of the 'border crew'

In the decades before the 'transition', Myanmar was perceived in the West as a country sealed off from the outside world. The image of the country was dominated by the accounts of the violent crackdowns on the democratic movement at the end of the 1980s, and the authoritarian government internationally branded as a pariah.²³⁴ Academics usually emphasised the brutality of the military regime in waging war against its population; a message already passed on by the titles of publications like *Living silence in Burma: surviving under military rule* (Fink, 2007), or simply *Karaoke Fascism* (Skidmore, 2004). Introductions to publications on Myanmar were usually dominated by a long list of human rights abuses. For instance, Collignon (2001, p. 70) writes that

'Burma holds the sad record of one of the worst and most long-lasting dictatorships on earth. An unelected government, draconian laws, military tribunals, widespread arrests, torture, forced relocations and poertering, mass refugee movements, crackdowns on political leaders, closed universities, repressed freedom of the press, expression of speech and information are the everyday reality in Burma.'

This formation of discourse of Myanmar –in this case, referred to as 'Burma – is common among human rights advocacy organisations, the myriad of organisations that are actively involved with the humanitarian response for the refugees in the camps along the border of Myanmar with Thailand, but also the Burmese diaspora (Duell, 2014, p. 110). Their base on

²³⁴ See section 4.4.

the Thai border makes that proponents of this discourse are often labelled as the 'border crew' by those who are working from the inside of the country.²³⁵ These transnational networks have reached a prominent and influential position in the forging of the discourses of the international community on Myanmar (Maung Zarni & Taneja, 2015). Exemplary for this network is the human rights advocacy group Burma Campaign UK. It follows a similar problematisation of Myanmar – or in this case, Burma – as in the statement above:

'Burma is ruled by one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world. [...] That repression continues to this day. Democracy activists are treated as criminals, under constant surveillance, subjected to harassment, intimidation and arrest for peaceful activities. There are at least 1,100 political prisoners in Burma, many of whom routinely face physical, mental and sexual torture. Across Burma thousands of men, women and children have been forced to work for the regime without pay and under threat of beatings, torture, rape and murder. Such systematic and widespread use of forced labour has been called a 'crime against humanity' by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The regime continues to wage war against ethnic minorities, such as the Karen, Karenni and Shan, driving hundreds of thousands of people from their homes. More than 3,000 villages have been destroyed, countless civilians killed and rape is systematically used as a weapon of war against ethnic women and children.' (Burma Campaign UK, 2006a, p. 6).

In their publications, this enumeration of human rights abuses is usually supporting a specific problematisation of the country, which centres almost exclusively on human rights abuses. Also the reports by the bodies of the United Nations emphasise the systematic nature of these violations of rights:

'As the Special Rapporteur stated in previous reports, there is a pattern of gross and systematic violation of human rights, which has been in place for many years and still continues. Given the extent and persistence of the problem, and the lack of accountability, there is an indication that those human rights violations are the result of a State policy, originating from decisions by authorities in the executive, military and judiciary at all levels' (Quintana, 2010, p. 2).

In this discourse, Myanmar's state is constituted as a sophisticated, systematic machinery tasked with the repression of dissent and waging war against its own people. At the same time, it also tends to omit the agency of resistance of the ethnic minority populations, and often constitutes them as simple 'victims' (Malseed, 2009). With this problematisation, the regime becomes the 'root cause' for all the problems in Myanmar:

'The root cause of this humanitarian crisis is the lack of an accountable democratic government. Better governance remains the only ultimate answer to Burma's humanitarian crisis. Any strategy for tackling poverty in Burma must take this into account' (Burma Campaign UK, 2006a, p. 5).

Not only human rights abuses that are directly committed by the government, but also other problems are attributed to the regime:

'Burma is one of the poorest countries in Asia. Four decades of military rule and economic mismanagement have resulted in widespread poverty, poor health care and low educational standards. [...] By contrast to the 30-50% of the budget spent on the armed forces, the government allocates only 3% of its budget to health and 8% to education. In terms of health

²³⁵ For example, Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

care delivery, the World Health Organisation ranks Burma 190th out of 191 countries. Public investment in education and healthcare combined is less than \$1 per person per year - one of the lowest levels of public investment in the world' (Burma Campaign UK, 2006b, p. 6).

The human rights discourse followed here clearly identifies the problem; namely that the 'regime in Burma has no interest in providing basic services for the population' (Burma Campaign UK, 2006a, p. 5). Accordingly, the solution to this problem is presented as relatively straightforward: regime change. In this discourse, other strategies of addressing Myanmar's problems are just trying to mitigate the symptoms, but not addressing the root cause of the problems. Regime change thus becomes inevitable in this discourse; and other strategies are marginalised. It is in this line of argumentation that the Burma Campaign UK (2006a) criticised DFID for not spending enough on aid to Myanmar, but more importantly, for not providing enough support to projects promoting democracy in the country.

'Without genuine political change the people of Burma will continue to be impoverished, oppressed and abused. It is vital therefore that humanitarian assistance by donor countries does not replace political pressure for democratic change' (Burma Campaign UK, 2006b, p. 7).

The problematisation outlined above has implications for who is posited as legitimately in charge of dealing with Myanmar's problems; or put differently, who is supposed to bring about change. It becomes evident that the narrow focus on the regime as the root cause of problems also narrows down the solution it proposes. An important influence on a range of issues like poverty, public health, or peace is directly ascribed to the actions of the central government. In turn, this also means that a new, democratic, and legitimate government would also have a similarly high influence on these issues, and would be able to quickly change them for the better. And, at the same time, it also denies the agency of the local populations, which would render the political processes more complex – even for a government democratically elected government that is seen as legitimate. To a certain extent, this explains the high hopes that human rights organisations, but also large parts of the broader population have placed in a new, democratically elected government.

For a long time, the dominant discourse of human rights organisations and Myanmar's diaspora has been drawing a simplistic picture of a brutal military dictatorship on the one hand, and the figure of hope in the person of Aung San Suu Kyi on the other side (cf. Holliday, 2011, p. 183; Ytzen & Gravers, 2014, p. 47). Hence, it is not a coincidence that the statements of the Burma Campaign UK mentioned above also quote Aung San Suu Kyi to give their problematisation more weight. She is quoted with '[t]he underlying cause of the social, political and economic crises which have created untold hardships for the people is the lack of good governance' (Burma Campaign UK, 2006b, p. 7); underlining the general stance of the Burma Campaign UK.

While the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi is powerful to rally support for the cause of the human rights discourse, the 'simplified heroic narrative commonly associated with Suu Kyi' (Maung Zarni & Taneja, 2015, p. 45) also creates limitations. The narrowing down of any possible solution to her assuming her 'legitimate' role in leading the country make it impossible to envisage other solutions to Myanmar's problems in the human rights discourse. Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2007) notes that it has even become difficult to openly criticise her:

'For many people in Myanmar, Suu Kyi can do no wrong. Regardless of the attacks from the government and other critics, many people continue to observe that any political solution without Suu Kyi is not a genuine solution' (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2007, p. 374).

With this almost exclusive focus on the Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the NLD, as the legitimate actor to form the government after winning the elections in 1990,²³⁶ a lot of the country's progress is projected into the role she plays in the country's politics. Aung San Suu Kyi thus becomes the indicator against which Myanmar's transition is measured – for the good or the bad. Maung Zarni and Taneja (2015) note that the focus on Aung San Suu Kyi has allowed Western policy-makers to adhere to a narrative that reduces the country's transition to her fate. With her release from house arrest under the reformist government of Thein Sein, and the admission of the NLD to take part in the by-elections it was thus easy to conclude that Myanmar has embarked on the path of genuine reform. In the words of Maung Zarni and Taneja (2015, p. 47), 'the opposition has stunted its own growth by limiting its communication with international actors to one channel and one message' (cf. also Min Zin, 2014). This in turn is now limiting what strategies can be envisaged from within this discourse.

Also in the current discursive environment, organisations like Burma Campaign UK uphold the basic formation of the human rights discourse on Myanmar. The basic problematisation of the country in terms of its record in human rights abuses has remained stable; and so did the recipes for engaging and acting upon Myanmar. As an example, the organisation writes in 2015 that

'[w]ith the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and some reforms in Burma, there is a growing perception by many people that everything is ok in Burma now. But it isn't. Burma still has one of the worst human rights records in the world. Hundreds of political prisoners remain in jail, attacks against ethnic minorities continue, reports of rape by Burmese Army soldiers have increased, and almost all repressive laws remain in place. International pressure is still needed to promote human rights and democracy in Burma' (Burma Campaign UK, 2015).

The statement above is telling for the broader discourse of the human rights advocacy organisations in the sense that it draws a static picture of the situation in Myanmar. Although it acknowledges some changes, and a change in the country's perception by the broader public, it enumerates a range of issues that have not changed – or changed for the worse. Thus, it draws a continuity of a decades-long history that is portrayed as stasis, and which does not acknowledge transformations in Myanmar's society that might have taken place – neither during the 'transition', nor before.²³⁷

Pointing out the many aspects of Myanmar that have not changed has several effects: Firstly, it creates legitimacy for the continuation of practices of human rights campaigning and advocacy. A specific campaign on points that are 'still not ok' in Myanmar was launched in May 2014 (Burma Campaign UK, 2015), to emphasise that there is still a need to uphold 'international pressure'. Secondly, it constitutes the current 'transition' as a sham, which is

²³⁶ See section 4.5 above.

²³⁷ The static image of Myanmar has also been common in the academic accounts of Myanmar, where notions like 'time-warp' or 'stasis' are frequently used (L. Jones, 2014b, p. 145).

not able to bring about far-reaching societal change in the country; and discredits the current government as lacking the 'genuine will' to reform.²³⁸ It also upholds that the current government should not be trusted. One of the images used for the campaign just mentioned reads:

'President Thein Sein lied about releasing all political prisoners by the end of 2013. Political prisoners are still in jail' (Burma Campaign UK, 2015).

Using a more analytical tone, a representative of the Burma campaign UK explains in an interview:

'Burma's is still a military-backed government. The undemocratic constitution and repressive laws remain in place, the number of political prisoners has increased, human rights violations by the state have increased in many ethnic areas, including murder, rape and sexual violence against women, torture and detention of innocent farmers, the obstruction of aid for IDPs [internally displaced persons], the ongoing military offensive and many more' (Nyein Nyein, 2015a).

Accordingly, attempts to engage with this government to support its reforms are discredited as *naïveté*; or as an inappropriate strategy to bring about democracy. Rather, the strategy pursued by human rights organisations of international pressure and economic sanctions is posited as still appropriate. An article by journalist Bertil Lintner (2015b) adds more analysis to this broader stance. He argues that the West was won over by the generals following a geopolitical strategy to distance Myanmar from China's sphere of influence. He thus portrays the engagement of Western policymakers or the discourse of aid and peacebuilding, who see the transition as a genuine reform, as *naïve*. In his view, the transition is all about geopolitics. So he writes that the military leadership understands

'that any rapprochement with the West would require certain political initiatives such as the release of political prisoners, more press freedom and freedom of expression, a proper constitution for the country and a government that was not overtly military in nature. However, to give up power to a democratically elected government was never—and is still not—on the agenda' (Lintner, 2015b).

The proponents of this discourse are thus presented as the victims of a charade, or, even less flattering, as engaging in the narrative of being concerned with democracy in Myanmar while they are in fact driven by economic self-interest to engage in South-East Asia's last frontier market (Lintner, 2015b).

The contrast between the sceptical human rights discourse and the discourses of the international business community, or the discourses of aid and peacebuilding could hardly be any sharper: As opposed to the stasis that dominates the human rights discourse, the latter actors constitute Myanmar as a country in transition, where most aspects are dynamic, fast changing, and broadly optimistic. And because these discourses are clearly antagonistic, there are also specific formations of discourse that have developed in response to the pronounced stance of the 'border crew'.

²³⁸ On this debate, see section 4.7 above.

In the first place, they create a legitimate speaking position on Myanmar that is drawing a line of exclusion between those that are 'on the ground' – meaning in the country – and those who are not. An opinion article in the *Myanmar Times* illustrates this:

'Depending on who you ask, it's still all too common to hear people exclaim that 'nothing has changed' in Myanmar. They usually point to problems with the reform trajectory, the lack of true democratic participation and the persistence of military influence in politics. It's easy enough to make a list of what's going wrong.

Those who see the country in this way have often spent a lot of time gazing across the border from Thailand, or advocating for the dispossessed and downtrodden. From such a vantage, Myanmar can apparently look like a diabolical failure, one worthy of criticism, even scorn. Those who play active roles in seeking to right Myanmar's wrongs are usually dismissed for their naivety' (Farrelly, 2015).

To a certain extent, the formation of discourse in response to the stance of the border crew follows the broad lines of the debate shaped in the latter's discourse. For instance, it endorses the problematisation of Myanmar along the lines of the 'genuineness' of the transition. But at the same time, it also shifts the debate to a meta-level; namely to the credibility of the claims made by the 'border crew'. The statement above takes into account the many criticisms that can be levelled at the reform process in Myanmar, but at the same time discredits them as being uttered to follow an agenda to advocate for a specific side, and to rely on an simplified image of Myanmar – which is the result of 'gazing across the border from Thailand'. The article goes on:

'What grates with these negative impressions is that they serve to undermine rightful opportunities for criticism and make a mockery of the progress that has occurred. While much is still wrong with how Myanmar is managed and certain problems appear intractable, it is too easy to dismiss the genuinely useful and constructive changes that have occurred' (Farrelly, 2015).

The article establishes a legitimate speaking position from where a more 'objective', 'nuanced', or more 'realistic' appraisal of the ongoing change process in Myanmar can be made; and from which the 'rightful opportunities for criticism' can legitimately be seized. Hence, it implies that the picture of Myanmar drawn from across the border is simplifying, glossing over important details, and prematurely dismisses the transition as a failure. On the other hand, the legitimate speaking position established here relies on a more detailed examination of the situation in Myanmar, from which one can appraise the 'constructive changes' and level the 'rightful' criticisms.

There are two different elements on which this speaking position is drawing; both excluding the group 'gazing across the border'. The first element appropriates the power effect that comes from positioning itself as 'scientific'. The article thus calls for a more 'objective' assessment of what is really the case, using the instruments of science to come to a more nuanced picture:

'These are the realities that get missed in the doom-and-gloom analyses of those who cannot comprehend that some things are getting better, while others stay the same or get worse. It is the inconsistency and contradiction of Myanmar's situation that so often baffles those who want to

offer a ready prognosis. It defies the simple plus-minus game and undermines any insistence that there is simply one story of what's happening to more than 50 million people.

From where I sit, getting better information about the lives of those 50 million people will help to drive better assessments of what's going on. For now, too much is still defined by the lack of a baseline about the most basic experiences. Instead, there is a rolling maul of inadequate and often erratic data points, all of which tell us something but never come close to painting the full picture. It is that overall image, one where shapes make sense up close but also from a distance, that eludes us.

[...] Yet what is guaranteed is that more flux and change awaits. This means the answer to the assertion that Myanmar isn't changing shouldn't be a simple retort. The better response is to accept that the divergence of paths, and the mish-mash of trends, is killing off the certainties some have come to hold dear. It is those certainties that are now genuinely threatened by the ever-shifting picture of reform' (Farrelly, 2015).

This account thus draws on the formation of discourses in (traditional) scientific research, who posit the discovery of 'real facts' or 'truth' based on an adequate base of data for 50 million people as superior; especially when compared to the reliance on individual stories and experiences that marks the discourse of the 'border crew'. 'Science' is thus put to work to bring up a more adequate picture 'of what's going on' in the country on a macro-level. At the same time, this further de-legitimises the discourse of the human rights activists, whose information is mostly relying on accounts of the micro – in the form of personal experiences of those they advocate for.

In a sense, the clashing discourse formations I just outlined also reflect the broader shift that has taken place in the international discourses of aid and peacebuilding, and which I have analysed under the label of 'evidence-based policy-making' earlier.²³⁹ As in these broader debates, the article above draws on the idea of letting 'science' decide what is best to do in terms of policy. It is left up to science to assess the situation in Myanmar, and to determine the 'best' options to intervene accordingly in terms of policy. Also, the article above almost naturally assumes that this is perceived as a superior approach in comparison with the approach of the human rights organisations, whose statements are constructed as 'non-scientific', and ideological. The article above reproduces the basic notions of evidence-based policy-making, where evidence shows 'what works', and where 'what works' is automatically assumed to be the 'best' option.

The second element which is pivotal for the construction of the legitimate speaking position mentioned above is a legitimacy of knowing 'what is going on for real', which is constructed around the notions of 'being on the ground' or 'in the country'. The following passage from an interview with a diplomat based in Yangon is exemplary for this:

'These people also have the task of reflecting, of researching. One of them once [told me]: 'I was in Yangon. On a tourist visa. [...] I saw these roundabouts. All green, nicely made. It is all to move the troops faster.' What troops? How many soldiers have you seen here 10 years ago? Exactly zero. It was a worldview that was not in line with reality, but which was widely influential abroad.'²⁴⁰

²³⁹ See section 3.6 above.

²⁴⁰ Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

He draws on the ability to make sense of events or to contextualise rumours without falling for conspiracy theories that stems from his position of being 'in the country'. The legitimate speaking position is thus closely linked to being (geographically) close to what is happening to give an accurate representation of the 'facts'. Accordingly, this person also blames the external critics that 'they didn't even try to be here'.²⁴¹ This is also the case for the article cited above:

'It's also true that in Myanmar's major government institutions there are changes under way. They never make headlines but the new tone in official Myanmar is arguably the most important trend of all. Unless you spend a lot of time with public servants it's hard to get a sense of just how far opinions have shifted' (Farrelly, 2015).

From this position of the country 'insider', then, the diplomat quoted above assesses the situation in Myanmar by putting it into perspective, and by sketching out a decidedly more nuanced picture:

'[...] it was never the absolute evil. [...] We have never been at this point here. When you travelled the country ten, twelve years ago... This was not North Korea. You always had a relatively liberal Yangon, a relatively Chinese Mandalay, and a terrible poverty in the countryside. And then, you had the zones where there was civil war, or insurrection. But there were always people – even during the worst times – that were just living along, who didn't care about politics. For them, the government was the local bureaucrat, the mayor of the next village. They didn't know that there is something else in Yangon. That was a reality that people didn't want to see from the outside, but which actually existed here.'²⁴²

This second element thus draws on a clear distinction between people who are here, and thus, 'able' to understand the nuances of the situation, and those abroad who have to rely on guessing and hearsay. To spend time in the country, and to take the effort of understanding the reality on the ground is used to forge the speaking position from where one can legitimately speak on Myanmar:

'And all the critics from abroad [...], they totally lost ground, no? They are absolutely irrelevant, and they have always been irrelevant, here. And now they also are irrelevant on the international level. They have lost their legitimacy. Never had any, but even less today. [...] I would even claim [...] that these hate groups abroad have hampered the [positive] processes here. If at all.'²⁴³

Here, it becomes obvious how far-reaching the changes in the discourses of Myanmar of the last years were: The typical older stance of the human rights discourse is discredited by the discursive environment shaped by reforms and the 'transition', and its proponents risk getting side-lined (cf. Duell, 2014). Now, more pragmatic discourses of collaborating with the government to achieve changes become dominant: the discourses of aid and peacebuilding. At the same time, this also enables new entry points for foreign actors, and new practices. As I will show in the following, it is this the formation of the discourses of aid and peacebuilding that posit a pragmatic stance towards the situation in Myanmar – and particularly towards the

²⁴¹ Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

reformist government – that enable the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification in the first place.

5.2.2 The aid discourse in Myanmar: from 'below the radar' to supporting the transition

After the events of 1988, the discourse in the international community on Myanmar was relatively clear – at least in the Global West. In the broad lines, the governments of most Western states followed the lines of the human rights discourse outline above. Also the lines of engagement that this discourse allows were straightforward: Governmental aid from Western countries was cut off in response to the events in 1988, the agencies of the United Nations were on tight budgets – mainly targeting the grass roots level in order to avoid financing the government, and there was no financing from multilateral agencies like the world Bank (M. Smith, 1999, p. 432). The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly throughout the 1990s followed a similar tone. The UN General Assembly showed itself

'[g]ravely concerned that the Government of Myanmar still has not implemented its commitments to take all necessary steps towards democracy in the light of the results of the elections held in 1990, gravely concerned also at the continued seriousness of the situation of human rights in Myanmar, including reports of torture and arbitrary execution, continued detention of a large number of persons for political reasons, the existence of important restrictions on the exercise of fundamental freedoms and the imposition of oppressive measures directed in particular at ethnic and religious minorities' (United Nations General Assembly, 1993, p. 2).

This stance of the Western world sharply contrasts with the way that the neighbouring countries engaged with Myanmar (cf. M. Smith, 1999, p. 452). Especially in terms of economic ties, the ASEAN countries followed a pragmatic approach, and engaged in different economic collaborations (Lintner, 1994). A range of companies – also from the West – thus followed the military government's new policy welcoming international investment (Guyot & Badgley, 1990, p. 191; Thant Myint-U, 2006, p. 329 f.).²⁴⁴ Also, the sanctions in place were not without their gaps: Lintner (2013a, p. 108) argues that the sanctions by the United States and the European Union were mostly symbolic, as for example oil companies have been exempted from the US sanctions.

In this discursive environment, it was clear from a perspective of aid organisations that a direct engagement with the government was off limits. On the other hand, some organisations started operating from the inside of Myanmar again in the mid-1990s (Tegenfeld, 2001, p. 109). Confronted with the human rights discourse dominant at this time, these organisations had to find ways to construct legitimacy for their engagement. In this sense, Duffield's (2008) analysis of Myanmar is informative. Besides the physical violence, he notes that Myanmar is also a global battlespace of ideas and values; where a military government confronts both external political activists and international human rights organisations. Both sides have established their fully developed orders of knowledges, or 'truth regimes'; and both are legitimising their practices by drawing on these. Duffield (2008, p. 6) describes a variety of

²⁴⁴ See also section 4.5 above.

actors – government, ethnic armed organisations, business, aid agencies – that 'either trying to coerce, tax or dispossess the people, or else, protect, educate and better them'.

Interesting about this analysis is that both sides are acting upon the population – although in different ways. And both sides need to discursively construct legitimacy for their practices. For the international NGOs that came to operate from within Myanmar, Duffield (2008, p. 7) notes that this happens mainly via their emphasis on the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. The international actors constitute themselves and their programmes as a politically impartial instance, which operates as a 'buffer' between the political blocs; and which can carve out political space for new practices and different forms of dialogue between the sides.

On a side-note, the humanitarian principles and self-image of politically neutral aid drawing by the purely humanitarian value of helping those in need, has been under increasing criticism especially when taking place in the context of armed conflict. As Anderson (1999) famously pointed out, even if humanitarian actors understand themselves as neutral, this does not necessarily hold for how they are perceived by the conflict parties. Automatically, their interventions become part of a specific conflict configuration, and are positioned accordingly. Following this, a range of tools under the labels of 'do no harm' or 'conflict sensitivity' have been developed to help humanitarian actors to 'manage' these aspects. With the increasing perception of humanitarian actors in Myanmar as biased towards the Muslim minority,²⁴⁵ different actors have started to call for more conflict-sensitive approaches, and to balance their provision of aid to different groups (MacLean, 2013).

But while the call for a wider application of these tools can be subsumed under the label for international actors to become more 'politically savvy' in the local context that they are intervening, the practices described by Duffield (2008) above rely on the exact opposite: They rely on a construction of humanitarian aid that is not only impartial, but taking place outside of political struggles because they rely on humanitarian values that are posited as 'universal'.²⁴⁶ The international actor as an organisation that is 'external' to the conflict and thus politically impartial is still an influential aspect of the formation of discourse of aid agencies. For instance, South and Joliffe (2015, p. 9) suggest that international actors 'may bring technical competence and a degree of political impartiality' when working in partnership with local community-based organisations.

Constituting external organisations as less implied in (domestic) political questions is one of the important characteristics of the aid discourse, and as I will show in the following sections, the de-politicisation of aid or peacebuilding practices is also one of the main strategic functions of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. But while this concerns discursive processes that take place on a global or at least on a country level, de-politicisation can also be used as a specific strategy of actors. In the examples mentioned above, the international actors used it as a cover for more politically oriented programming that took place 'below the radar' of the government. Also local NGOs actively 'de-politicised' the

²⁴⁵ See section 4.7. below

²⁴⁶ The discursive production of humanitarian values and their reproduction through practices would merit their very own analysis. I thus restrict myself here to mentioning this aspect without an in-depth analysis.

framing of what they are doing, and used mainly technical terms like 'capacity building' when describing their activities that had components aiming at political change.²⁴⁷ Some actors also recognise this as a deliberate strategy to overcome political deadlocks: As one interview partner explains, it can be a strategy to

'solve the kind of problems that you cannot solve politically; that are then reframed as procedural problems. [...] Politically, then procedurally. And if it doesn't work at all, technically. An example for this was the case of Serbia and Kosovo. We couldn't talk about it, they don't want to talk about states, and sovereignty. [...] We then framed it technically, started to talk about passports that are accepted when crossing the border.'²⁴⁸

What unites these different strategies to engage in Myanmar is that they are following the basic formation of the human rights discourse outlined in the section above. Accordingly, they avoid directly engaging with the government or the military, which is identified as the 'root cause' of Myanmar's problem and thus should not benefit from any international funding. As a cooperation partner, the 'regime' is 'off limits' in the discourse of the 'border crew' outlined above.

All the more astonishing is thus the change of this stance that came with the ascendance of the discourses of aid and peacebuilding when speaking of Myanmar. The emergence of the notion of the 'transition', allowed for swiftly redefining the government from a 'pariah' to a 'development partner'.

Again, DFID's (2011a) strategy pamphlet already quoted above is illustrative of this change. The 2011 version of DFID stated that 'aid is delivered through a mixture of large-scale multi donor trust funds, UN agencies, and reputable international and local NGOs' and that DFID does 'not provide aid through the Burmese central government' (DFID, 2011a, p. 2). In the 2012 version, the same paragraph reads as follows: 'The UK-led suspension in April 2012 of EU sanctions on aid allows us to start a new partnership and dialogue with the government' (DFID, 2012d, p. 2).

For USAID, the shift in practices of engagement was even more extreme: In the summary of USAID's work in Myanmar for the years 2008-2012 (USAID, 2012b), the Myanmar government is literally omitted as a potential partner for collaboration. In fact, its mere existence is mentioned exactly once; namely as denying democracy advocates access to higher education. Also in 2012, USAID published a document stating the following:

'The United States recognizes the ongoing reform efforts to build a modern, peaceful, and democratic country and welcomes the opportunity to deepen engagement with the people of Burma and their government. Consistent with the aspirations of the people of Burma, the United States Government is launching a joint partnership with the Government of Burma to advance democratic reform, and lay the groundwork for a peaceful and prosperous future (USAID, 2012a).'

This much more positive outlook on the relationships between the United States and Myanmar was accompanied by two visits of president Obama in 2012 and 2014, where Obama said he came to 'extend the hand of friendship' (Kurlantzick, 2014). Also the United

²⁴⁷ Interview # 48 (FI1310_48) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

²⁴⁸ Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

Nations quickly endorsed the new stance towards the government. Their strategic framework for the years 2012-2015 is introduced as follows:

'Myanmar is at a crossroad: with the first elections in twenty years held in 2010 and the inauguration of the new civilian Government in March 2011, there is now a new window of opportunity to strengthen the collaboration between the UN, the Government and other partners to promote socio-economic progress in Myanmar. This UN Strategic Framework (2012- 2015) is a testament to the commitment of the UN Country Team in Myanmar to work together with the Government and partners to help address the priority development needs and challenges that the country face. UN Country Team is focused on supporting the people of Myanmar, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, in partnership with the Government at all levels, non-governmental organizations, private sector, members of the donor/diplomatic community and other stakeholders. We believe that our collective efforts will contribute to Myanmar achieve its MDG targets and promote democracy and human rights in the country.' (UN Country Team in Myanmar, 2011, p. 3)

A simple question arises from these accounts: In a matter of a few years – if not months – the Myanmar authorities, the long-standing pariah, has evolved into a 'development partner'? How became this possible?

The answer to this lies in the growing dominance of the aid discourse over the human rights discourse. Enabled in the 'transition', elements of the aid discourse have steadily gained ground in problematising the situation in Myanmar; and this in turn enables the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. In the statement above, the transition is presented as the 'window of opportunity' to promote 'socio-economic progress', in collaboration with the government and other 'partners'. The overall goal of this collaboration is to 'address the priority development needs'. And, it is the collective effort that will help Myanmar to achieve its MDG targets, democracy and human rights. The aid discourse thus constitutes the different actors in Myanmar as a big coalition, who all work for the larger goal to bring about development – or more precisely, to achieve the MDG targets. In short, the 'goalition' analysed for the international aid discourse above²⁴⁹ is deployed to Myanmar.

The difference to the human rights discourse is striking: All confrontational aspects, or attempts to pressure the government through sanctions are absent. Also the problematisation is different: Myanmar's largest problem is not systematic violations of human rights anymore; its largest problem seems now to achieve the MDG targets. Human rights and democracy are still present, but their role has changed: From the almost exclusive focal area in the human rights discourse, they are relegated to the status of something that will be promoted or achieved along the way to development.

For Lintner (2013a, p. 109), the quick change in the perception of Myanmar's government was clearly motivated by geopolitical considerations, especially for the United States. In his analysis, the quick embrace of many states of Myanmar's reform shows how eager the US has been to pull out the country from China's close sphere of influence. Also Maung Zarni and Taneja (2015) note that the Western governments have quickly constructed a narrative of the transition that was aligned to their domestic and strategic interests, and not necessarily ensuring that it was in line with the changes the people of Myanmar wished for. It is not my

²⁴⁹ See section 3.5.

goal here to speculate about the motivations of the different actors in this complex shift of the situation in Burma, and the configuration of international actors that are involved in it. Noteworthy for my analysis is how these changes are problematised in the discourses. Striking in this regard is that geopolitical agendas, and the neo-realist understanding of power or *Realpolitik* are not part of the formation of the discourses aid, and only to a certain extent of those of peacebuilding. As noted above,²⁵⁰ this discourse constitutes the international sphere as a space of collaboration, where different actors come together to work for a common interest: development and peace. Especially the discourse of aid makes it virtually impossible to take into account forms of practice or justifications that are not following the overall rationale of bringing about development to a country.

Hence, this discourse has a tremendous capacity to gloss over differing interests of parties, suspend conflict by constituting them as a 'coalition for development', or a 'goalition'. Similarly, it omits political relations that are not motivated by development, and subjugate domestic political agendas by realigning them towards the goal of development. At the same time, this makes buying into this discourse attractive for policy-makers: Acting in the 'greater interest of the people to bring about development' precludes opposition from the outset. The broader goals of development or peace are not objectionable: Who could be opposed to better maternal health, higher alphabetisation, and better economic opportunities? Or to less violence, more cooperation, and more effective states?

In any case, it offers an attractive framing of the engagement with a government that has been branded a pariah for decades; compared to framing it in terms of geostrategic or economic interests. In the discourse of aid, such an engagement with Myanmar's government is easily transformed from a self-interested piece of *Realpolitik* to an act of mutual benefit through better economic opportunities for everyone. Accordingly, the specific problematisation of a country like Myanmar in terms of its 'development' – or its 'lack' of development – embedded in the discourse of aid is used to create legitimacy for a new engagement with the government of Myanmar. The main terms of how the international community can engage with Myanmar's authorities are reversed, and the former strategies of non-engagement and sanctions are swept away by the new goal of achieving development. For example, the European Union openly acknowledges this change in their 'comprehensive framework for the European Union's policy and support to Myanmar/Burma':

'Myanmar/Burma has embarked on a remarkable process of reform under the new Government that took office in March 2011, significant both for its own people and for the region. Dealing with the legacy of conflict, poverty, oppression and weak institutions will be the work of decades. The European Union - which has, over the years, called for change and imposed sanctions - has a responsibility to help' (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 1).

The wording of this discourse fragment is telling: While the former stance towards Myanmar was marked by a confrontational approach of 'calling for change and imposing sanctions', the new form of engaging is now prescribed by a 'responsibility to help' with the transition. The transition has thus gained a materiality in itself, which is even able to create a 'responsibility' for foreign actors to support it.

²⁵⁰ Particularly, see section 3.5.

Overall, this is exemplary of how discourses uphold their inner coherence, and are able to subjugate contradicting elements to their established order of knowledge. That Myanmar's government announced a transition to democracy in itself is not enough to make an engagement with this government an appropriate strategy; too deeply rooted was the mistrust towards the authoritarian regime on the side of many actors. And one could legitimately argue along the lines of the 'border crew' discourse that the current 'reformist' government still consists in large parts of people hand-picked by the former regime, that the parliament of the transition is for the most part²⁵¹ not legitimised by free and fair elections, and that the promise of democracy is just a *change de façade* (e.g. cf. Lintner, 2013a). What was necessary to make the engagement with the government legitimate was a re-problematisation of Myanmar in terms of achieving development; which subjugated the older problematisation in terms of human rights abuses.

Important for my analysis here is that this subjugation of the human rights discourse is enabled by the notions and concepts of the aid discourse, which are extended to be applicable to Myanmar. In a sense, the formation of discourse is changing towards a problematisation of Myanmar in terms of finding the most effective strategy to bring about development; a discursive playing field on which the human rights discourse cannot compete with the sophisticated instruments, technologies, and concepts of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. Or, put in the words of the Council of the European Union (2013, p. 5) in its comprehensive strategic framework: 'This is a formative moment in the country's transition, allowing more possibilities for achieving results'.

Of primary importance in this shift is thus the self-representation of the aid discourse as 'pragmatic', to 'finally achieve something'. This means mainly to engage with a process that has not been the result of the former engagement in terms of sanctions, but which has emerged from within the country and that now needs external support. In the words of a Yangon-based diplomat:

'The influence of the EU, or the US here was negligible. To the contrary, we mostly hampered the [positive] processes here. [...] the whole transformation here is home-made. It was not triggered by external pressure, sanctions, or the like. It was not triggered by domestic pressure from the street; a new 1988 was not likely or possible. This process was triggered in Myanmar, in part by the government, second generation, business actors, and civil society. [...] Thus the conclusion: our role can only be to turn the page; to say the past is the past, we now talk about the future.'²⁵²

The pragmatism in this discourse fragment is extraordinary: The processes of reform and the transition are presented as a unique opportunity to support a change process that might actually be successful. Implicitly drawing on the notion of 'local ownership', the transition here is presented as possibly breaking a long-standing deadlock to whose stasis also the West has contributed. Thus, 'supporting the transition' emerges from this statement as a strategy that might finally be effective – as opposed to the former attempts to bring about change through means of external pressure, imposed from the outside. Noteworthy here is that the

²⁵¹ Except the parliamentarians that were elected in the by-elections of 2012, which were generally seen as free and fair (cf. Steinberg, 2015a, p. 6).

²⁵² Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

prospect of an effective strategy seems strong enough to propose to turn the page on Myanmar's recent history. As a reminder, this implies to turn the page on decades of human rights violations; a proposition which would not be possible – and barely thinkable – within the human rights discourse. It also reveals the power effects of the neoliberal governmentality and of the focus on results: the statement above draws on the formation of discourse that posits that 'what counts is what works'; in opposition to the normative, principled, or moral stance that one could identify in the human rights discourse. The prospect of results thus justifies the means, even if this implies to engage with a 'pariah'. The diplomat continues by articulating what 'supporting the transition' means in practice:

'In the bad, old days of the sanctions, all we did was humanitarian aid, and a tiny bit of development cooperation lately. [...] If we want to support the fantastic and positive ongoing processes here, we have to contribute to all the sectors. Political dialogue, economy, trade and investments, development cooperation, media, tourism, academic cooperation, etc. In practice, this means we basically start from scratch. This is the minimum in comparison what is possible and happening in similar countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh, Thailand [...], Cambodia. What I want to achieve is normality. To help Myanmar to get back, to get to where it actually belongs. [...] The country should find its way back into the international community. [...] How much development assistance do you spend in a country like this? In 2008, it was 8 million per year. Afterwards, it was raised to 11 million. That is as much as they burn in Mozambique per week.'²⁵³

Several points emerge from this account. Firstly, a minimal engagement with Myanmar as it existed before the transition is clearly discredited as a thing of the past. Sought now is far-reaching engagement in all sectors imaginable to support the processes of the transition. Secondly, and perhaps, more interestingly, this sort of engagement is described as 'normality'. 'Achieving normality' in this context implies that the former situation was not normal; especially compared to Myanmar's neighbouring countries. At the same time, it implies that the current situation can be 'normalised' by scaling up cooperation; and that this is necessary for Myanmar to become a 'normal' member of the international community. Put differently: Myanmar has been made amenable to the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. The transition is therefore used to constitute two periods in Myanmar's recent history; a fundamental difference between the 'bad, old days of the sanctions' and the current situation, where 'normality' can be achieved. At the same time, this reproduces the assessment of the transition as a far reaching one, which is going beyond a *change de façade*; further subjugating the problematisation proposed by the human rights discourse.

This account makes evident that the recent dominance of the aid discourse in structuring speech on Myanmar enables a range of new strategies, policies, and practices; which I will examine more closely in section 5.3 below. But it also constitutes the role of the different actors in new ways; especially those of the government and of the international community.

In the first place, the practices linked to 'supporting the transition', and the role of the government in 'developing' the country are closely linked; they mutually enable one another. With the aid discourse constituting the 'transition' as a unique opportunity to effectively contribute to a change process in Myanmar, the 'transition' has gained the status of a goal

²⁵³ Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

worth pursuing in itself. The 'transition' is constituted as a fragile and delicate process, which is taking place against all odds. For instance, Mercy Corps writes:

'But for all the visible signs of promising change, Myanmar's transition remains fragile. Five decades of military rule, an isolated economy and war in the ethnic minority areas have left the country weak, divided and largely unprepared for the responsibilities that come with an open society' (Gurung et al., 2014, p. 2).

Fears of different scenarios capable of derailing these processes are regularly stated by different actors. These scenarios include specific events that might give parts of the military a pre-text to re-seize government; either in the name of upholding public order, like in the case of intensified intercommunal violence, or in the name of preventing the non-disintegration of the union of Myanmar, like in the case of the conclusion of a peace agreement that makes too many concessions to the demands of the ethnic minorities. But also other scenarios are invoked: for instance the successful amendment of the 2008 constitution in the parliament – again potentially triggering a takeover by the military; the breakout of new fighting between the warring parties; or simply the 2015 elections, which might bring less reform-oriented people into office.²⁵⁴ Some of these scenarios might be more credible than others – e.g., Schissler et al. (2015) show that the perception of intercommunal violence in terms of a national security problem is common in Myanmar – but of more central interest to my analysis is what these scenarios make possible, make thinkable, make speakable. They help in constituting the transition as a delicate balancing act between change and stability, which has to be properly managed, where turmoil has to be reduced to a minimum, and where 'rocking the boat' equals risking the overall process. Accordingly, the proponents of these inherently fragile change processes must be supported to go on with their reform-oriented course, taking small, incremental, and gradual steps in the transition.

As an effect, the current government becomes the guarantor for the continuation of the reforms, and so do parts of the military that were instrumental in initiating the reform process. For international actors, engaging in supporting the transition thus means engaging with these entities, as they are the architects of welcome societal changes that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. Also, including a 'wide range of stakeholders' becomes a strategy to mitigate the risk of 'rocking the boat'. As an example, the risk assessment of the Asian Development Bank (ADB):

'Country-level risks include those associated with the implementation of the economic reform program, the extent of Myanmar's reliance on the development of natural resources, political economy factors, and the impact of ethnic and sectarian conflict. ADB and other development partners can help mitigate these risks by supporting the reformist government through technical and financial support, dialogue, and the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders' (ADB, 2012, p. 8).

At the same time, it also means to tread carefully, as these actors are presented as being able to undo previous reform steps any minute. The fragility of the transition thus gives rise to unexpected conceptual oppositions in Myanmar. Everything that might slightly upset the

²⁵⁴ Informal conversations #13 (IC1410_3) with a quasi-governmental organization, Oct. 2014; #15 (IC1410_5) with an international NGO, Oct. 2014; and #16 with a researcher, Jan. 2015.

process is seen as a potential threat or harmful in the discourses of aid and peacebuilding. While this is not surprising in the case for events like intercommunal violence or renewed fighting among the warring parties, it is clearly more surprising that also the next elections are seen as a potential threat.²⁵⁵ In the peacebuilding discourse, the elections are mostly invoked in terms of an 'artificial pause' imposed on the ceasefire negotiations, which may lead to pressure on the process.²⁵⁶

Also in terms of the actors that are constituted as necessary to have 'on board' for the transition, and how their importance is justified, there are surprises. For example, a representative of peacebuilding organisation emphasised the pivotal role of the military with the following words:

'After 2015, there will be a lot of new people in the parliament. People think that democratic leaders are able to better respond to the need of the country. But the military will still be there. And it is the military who initiated this process in the first place'.²⁵⁷

The *tatmadaw* thus plays an interesting double role for the formation of the peacebuilding discourse in Myanmar. On the one hand, it is pictured as potentially derailing the peace process – by re-seizing power, or triggering the return to open fighting with ethnic armed organisations. In such accounts, it is usually described as a black box, difficult to understand from the outside, and thus difficult to predict – in short: an instable part in the equation. On the other hand, and as the statement above shows, it can also be portrayed as a potentially stabilising factor in the transition. Like the government, also the *tatmadaw* thus becomes a partner to engage with, or which has to be 'improved' in order to support the transition.²⁵⁸

On a more abstract level, this point can also serve as an example to work out the essence of the different formation of the human rights discourse outlined above, and the formation of discourse of peacebuilding. In the peacebuilding discourse, the construction of legitimacy for an engagement with a certain actor follows the logic of assessing what good comes out of it. For the human rights discourse on the other hand, whose formation is more closely linked to normative, universalistic values, there are clear lines that cannot be crossed. In this sense, an engagement in a collaborative way with certain actors is simply off limits, or excluded from what can be said. In a sense, the two discourses reproduce the two different ethical positions identified by Slim (1997). In his analysis of the shifts in normative debates in the humanitarian field, he identifies a transition from a deontological ethic to a teleological ethic.²⁵⁹ For the first, deontological, position, there are some actions that are inherently good, and thus should be pursued in any case – and, one could add, in turn, others are inherently bad and should not be pursued. For the second, teleological decision, it is the wider implications and consequences that decide whether an action is good or bad, and whether it should be

²⁵⁵ The idea itself is not unique to Myanmar though. In his seminal criticism of the 'liberal peace', Paris (2004) argued that both elections and economic liberalization are inherently tumultuous processes, which can run contrary to the goal of stabilising an armed conflict.

²⁵⁶ Informal conversation # I6 (IC1501_6) with a researcher, Jan. 2015. This problematisation was also brought forward by the government (for example, see Ei Ei Toe Lwin, Lun Min Mang, & Ye Mon, 2015).

²⁵⁷ Informal conversation # I3 (IC1410_3) with a quasi-governmental organisation, Oct. 2014.

²⁵⁸ See section 5.3 below.

²⁵⁹ See section 3.4 above.

pursued or not. Thus, while an engagement with the government of Myanmar is off limits from within the human rights discourse – representing the deontological position – the formation of the peacebuilding discourse allows constructing legitimacy for such an engagement by following a teleological position; i.e., if the greater outcome of such an engagement is positive, the engagement is good, too. Or, as a minimum, justifiable.

This might seem like a rather abstract debate to make sense of the different practices of organisations working for human rights, development, or peace. The reason why I bring it up is because this debate is also part of these discourses, and astonishingly common in the discourse of peacebuilding to construct a 'peacebuilder's self' in distinction from a 'human rights activist'.²⁶⁰ Discussing his stance on the engagement with the government of Myanmar, the diplomat already quoted above said the following:

'It is a philosophical question, and there is no conclusive, logical answer to it. But you have to ask yourself at some point: Let's say we have a dictator with a horrible track record of human rights violations. And someone comes, saying: 'Here are 100 million dollars, transferred to your Swiss bank account. Let bygones be bygones, you take it and leave'. [...] There is no conclusive answer to it. Is there a point somewhere, where you just have to accept this as the price to pay? If the dictator disappears after that, and there is peace – yes or no?' ²⁶¹

The construction of the whole moral dilemma is following the teleological position, which makes it a question to consider in the first place. The moral dilemma stems from the (teleological) question whether the good that emerges from it is large enough to justify the means by which it has been achieved. What then is of direct relevance to make sense of a lot of the discursive struggles that I will discuss in the following sections,²⁶² is his application of this dilemma to the situation in Myanmar:

'Here, the continuity of the elites in power is rather a guarantee for the reforms to go on. In America, you have the concepts of the WASPs, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. They exist here, too, in the form of Burmese, Buddhist, male, and somehow linked to the military. [...] In principle, there is a ruling elite here. And if this elite remains the same, but changes its governance, its way of governing, and the processes – this is positive. That's what they wanted; this is what they have written in their resolutions. And it is positive here in the country, because the same people are now rallying behind the reforms. There is no organised resistance to it. There are possibly groups or individuals fearing to lose their privileges, but no broader or organised resistance.' ²⁶³

Usually, the slightly softened version of the above prevails, which argues for a pragmatic engagement with the elites for the time being, while still keeping in view extending the transition's benefits to a broader population. As a staff of a donor agency puts it:

'It is an elite society. This means that at the moment the whole peace negotiations are conducted by the elites – and that is ok. *Per se*, I don't have an existential problem with a society that

²⁶⁰ Although there might also be more nuances to this simplifying distinction, and also different positions according to the different subfields of each community.

²⁶¹ Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

²⁶² See sections 5.3 and 5.4 below.

²⁶³ Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

works that way. But if we want to achieve a genuine transformation of society, we have to work on the lower levels, too. In the end, this is what makes the difference for the people.’²⁶⁴

Especially the first statement may be an extreme case for the peacebuilding discourse. But it is useful to work out the contingency of this discourse and to move to the margins of the notions and problematisations it makes appear as ‘normal’. The proposition above means in the first place to argue for the exact opposite of what could be said in the human rights discourse, but also what a large part of Myanmar’s population – and probably even more so its diaspora – would see as legitimate.²⁶⁵ To propose that the current elite needs to stay in power because it guarantees a continuation of the reforms is diametrically opposed to the call for regime change that is characteristic for the human rights discourse. Also in the peacebuilding discourse, it can only work because it is drawing on the legitimacy stemming from a positive outcome that can be achieved with this strategy; or, put differently, because it is presented as ‘being effective’. The teleological position thus shares a lot of the discursive DNA with the focus on results or of evidence-based policy; which similarly posits that ‘what counts is what works’.

Being an extreme case, the discourse fragment above also contradicts many statements that are formed within the aid or peacebuilding discourse, whose formations are dominated by the emphasis of good governance, equitable growth, and equal economic opportunities for different groups as broader goals. To keep the reforms going seems to be legitimising a suspension of these values – at least for a certain period, in which a stabilisation of what has been achieved so far is posited as the key for a successful transition of the country. Again, the transition’s materiality overrides other considerations, and it develops the status of a goal that is worth achieving in itself. Accordingly, the country’s path to its future is constituted as a gradual, incremental process, which has to be carefully managed in order not to derail.

But what has changed is not only the status of the government, but also the role that is foreseen for the other institutions of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. With the transition, Myanmar is made amenable to the deployment of this *dispositif*. Accordingly, the aid in this transformation now takes centre stage – while its role was negligible before. Again, the two versions of the operational plan of DFID already quoted earlier²⁶⁶ are illustrative in this regard. In the 2011 version, British aid it was confined to a marginal role to alleviate Myanmar’s problems (DFID, 2011a). In 2012, it is taking centre stage; as the change process ‘has given the UK a great opportunity to transform the lives of poor people in Burma’ (DFID, 2012d, p. 1). It may seem like a small detail, but that the UK now suddenly is posited as the actor who has the opportunity to transform the lives of poor people is telling for the configuration of actors that is embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification. It prescribes a configuration where the different international (bi-lateral donors, UN agencies, and INGOs) work in partnership with the local government and civil society organisations to bring about development. This ‘goalition’ working together for their shared interest of ‘developing’ a country is now ready to be deployed in Myanmar. At the same time, it is

²⁶⁴ Interview # 62 (FI1310_62) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.

²⁶⁵ See section 5.4.3 below.

²⁶⁶ See page 174 above.

constituted as the entity that is in charge to bring about development; and is replacing the formation of the human rights discourse that posited a new government as in charge for handling the country's problems.

Also other bi-lateral donors interpret the 'transition' as offering new possibilities. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation writes:

'The sanctions against Myanmar have meant that the level of development aid there is by far the lowest of any of the least developed countries (at USD 7 per person). The rapid changes that have taken place in recent months in Myanmar provide unprecedented opportunities for Switzerland. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) can help consolidate the restoration of peace by providing tangible benefits to vulnerable sectors of the population and can also help support the opening up and democratisation of the country' (FDFA & SDC, 2012, p. 1).

The 'unprecedented opportunities' in this context refer to the low levels of aid that Western donor countries spent in Myanmar. With the transition, there is now an opportunity to deploy the *dispositif* of managed pacification; and to come to a situation of 'normality' where development can be achieved.

But while the discourses of aid propose an order of things built on the achieving of the higher goal of development that is easily followed in official utterances, this does not necessarily mean that all actors uncritically subscribe to this order. The following excerpt from an interview with another diplomat is telling:

After twenty years in the field of humanitarian aid and development, I acknowledge that we are transmitting values. [...] It is a certain way of seeing the world that you transmit; it is your way of seeing the world. [...] My impression is that the humanitarians and the development people often adhere to the illusion that they are above that. Not us, no, we are doing good. [...] So now after working four years in the political domain, I think it is almost more honest. [...] You are defending the interests of your country. Yes. I do defend the interests of my country. And what is my interest; it is that in your place, you have peace, so that I can develop a market, and that is interesting for [my country].²⁶⁷

The new opportunities that emerge from the transition and the subsequent deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification are not exclusively to be understood as opportunities for aid, but they are also closely linked to new opportunities in terms of trade. Development here comes as a goal that is achieved by aid, but not exclusively. Also foreseen is a role for economic prosperity; and lifting the country out of poverty with economic growth.

This is interesting on two levels: Firstly, the configuration of actors that are constituted as in charge to bring about development here also includes economic actors. While in the typical aid discourse, aid itself is in charge of bringing about development,²⁶⁸ this account is more open to acknowledge that in international relations also the economic self-interests of countries may be driving certain engagements. And, that the engagement of economic actors cannot be meaningfully left out of the equation for the future of Myanmar – where money spent for aid is easily dwarfed by the amounts of money that is invested in the country for business (cf. Aung Hla Tun, 2015; Turnell, 2014). Secondly, what is noteworthy is that from a

²⁶⁷ Interview # 1 (FI1301_1) with a diplomat, Jan. 2013.

²⁶⁸ See section 3.5 above.

diplomat's perspective, aid is relegated to the status of one tool among others to improve relationships between countries. The same diplomat on the negotiations to get a memorandum of understanding in trade relations signed:

'You want your MoU signed, but you are not talking directly about that. So what you can do in the conversation, [...] is that you talk about what we are developing, that we are doing a vocational training there, that we are doing peacebuilding, and all of that. [...] It also shows that our engagement is thorough, complete. [...] That the interest of [my country] is genuine.'²⁶⁹

Compared to the aid discourse, which subjugates all other forms of engagement under the larger goals of development, this conceptualisation of aid – as one tool among others – puts the aid discourse into perspective.

Nonetheless, the discourse fragments in this section are clearly indicating that the discursive environment in Myanmar has changed substantially with the transition. The 'transition' allows redefining the role of different actors as institutions embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification; and makes Myanmar amenable to the latter's discourse, practices, and strategies. At the same time, the new discursive formation of the transition does not only enable a range of practices linked to scaling up cooperation; it also delegitimises past practices and forms of engagement. In this vein, the formerly dominant human rights discourse is subjugated to this new configuration of networks of power/knowledge, and practically marginalised as an 'outdated mind-set'.

5.2.3 The discourse of the government

After having analysed the discourses of different external actors in some length, I will now turn to analyse the government's position in this new discursive environment of Myanmar. As pointed out in the last chapter,²⁷⁰ Myanmar's transition was initiated by the former military regime. The transition is the result of a long-standing plan, which foresees a 'discipline-flourishing democracy' as its endpoint. Although considered as a democracy of some sort by its planners, this does not mean that Myanmar's coercive apparatus will leave the political stage. Under the 2008 constitution, it is still granted an influential position in the country's political processes, and maintains a large autonomy from civilian government (e.g., A. Smith, 2007; Steinberg, 2015b).

Nonetheless, the 'transition' has substantially reshuffled the discursive environment – both domestically and abroad – that regulates speech of Myanmar. The most important aspects for my analysis are the new models of engagement, new practices, and new problematisations that emerge from the new order of knowledge of the 'transition'; and how the discourse of the government and the *tatmadaw* relates to other discourses.

The starting point of the government's 'new' discourse can be found in the inaugural speech that President Thein Sein gave in 2011, where he outlined the three-fold transition on which the country is to embark. This means the transition from conflict with ethnic minorities to peace, to reconcile with the democratic opposition in the centre, and the transition to a

²⁶⁹ Interview # 1 (FI1301_1) with a diplomat, Jan. 2013.

²⁷⁰ See chapter 4 above.

market economy. Already in the introduction to the announcement of the reforms, he makes clear that the understanding of the role the *tatmadaw* has played for the country will not change fundamentally:

'The Tatmadaw with a strong sense of duty and loyalty saved the country several times whenever the country was close to collapse and loss of independence and sovereignty. Also in 1988, the Tatmadaw government saved the country from deteriorating conditions in various sectors and reconstructed the country. Now, it has laid sound foundations to build a peaceful, modern and developed nation' (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 1)

He sticks to the formation of discourse characteristic for the former military government, which constitutes the *tatmadaw* as the institution that saved the country from collapse; reproducing the notion that the country in 1988 was 'threatened' by turmoil. And, he also makes clear that the *tatmadaw* has made the transition possible in the first place. He goes on by reiterating the 'three main national causes' of the former military regime: 'Non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, and perpetuation of sovereignty' that also this government will have to safeguard (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 3). The three national causes constitute the country as on the brink of collapse, requiring an institution to hold them together. Although Thein Sein reproduces that problematisation of Myanmar threatened by 'disintegration', he also comes up with a new strategy to prevent this from happening:

'If national unity is disintegrated, the nation will split into pieces. Therefore, we will give top priority to national unity. Lip services and talks are not enough to achieve national unity. So, it is required to build roads, railroads and bridges to overcome the natural barriers between regions of national races; and to improve the education and health standards; to lay economic foundations to improve the socio-economic status of national races. [...] The greater number of roads, railroads and bridges the nation sees, the smoother transport there will be between one region and another, and friendlier relations there will be among national races' (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 3).

The problematisation of the conflict with the ethnic minorities is straightforward: Due to a lack of economic foundations and opportunities, as well as the lack of access to education and health services, the relationships between the centre and the ethnic minorities are not peaceful. The building of connecting transport infrastructure, and to improve the socio-economic status of the ethnic minorities is thus enabled as an appropriate 'solution' to the problem. 'Development' is constituted as the overall solution to overcome 'natural barriers' that separate the different parts of the population of Myanmar. What is striking about this account is its a-historicity: It omits decades of warfare of the *tatmadaw* against the myriad of armed groups of the ethnic minorities, and focuses exclusively on the future that holds 'development', which will bring 'peace'.²⁷¹

But 'development' or economic growth is also constituted as the key to the reconciliation with the democratic opposition in the centre. A transition to a market economy is posited as the appropriate means to that:

²⁷¹ This problematisation is present in discourse fragments of a range of different actors; e.g. Lintner (2013b) observes a similar stance in how China's positions itself towards the conflict in Myanmar.

'Regarding national reconsolidation, there are so many individuals and unlawful organizations inside and outside the nation that do not accept the State's seven-step Road Map and the constitution. [...] National economy is associated with political affairs. If the nation enjoys economic growth, the people will become affluent, and they will not be under influence of internal and external elements' (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 3).

Economic growth that makes people 'affluent' thus helps to curb the influence of the 'elements' that are opposing the order foreseen by the *tatmadaw*. Again, lack of 'development' is constituted as the main problem of Myanmar, and to bring about 'development' is posited as the appropriate 'solution'. An important aspect of this is improved 'governance', meaning to make government institutions more effective, and thus seen as legitimate in a democratic outfit:

Democracy will promote only hand in hand with good governance. This is why our government responsible for Myanmar's democracy transition will try hard to shape good administrative machinery (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 6).

On the other hand, the formation of discourse in the transition brings some new aspects to the fore, especially in the way the new government is willing to engage with other institutions. Correspondingly, its discourse is clearly conciliatory in terms of engagement with those who are willing to accept the terms of the transition:

'Moreover, it is still necessary to show our genuine goodwill towards those who have not accepted the constitution because of being sceptical about the seven-step Road Map in order that they can discard their suspicions and play a part in the nationbuilding tasks. [...] To do so, I promise that our government will cooperate with the political parties in the hluttaws, good-hearted political forces outside the hluttaws and all social organizations. I urge each and every citizen wishing to see the interests of the nation and the people to serve those interests only in the constitutional framework and not to try to disrupt democratization process outside the constitutional framework and harm peace, stability and the rule of law. The Union Government will welcome all actions done within the constitutional framework but prevent and take necessary action against all actions done outside the constitutional framework' (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 6).

The formation of discourse followed here constitutes the societal change ahead as a planned, gradual process that has to take place within the limits of the constitutional framework. Actions outside this framework are constituted as a 'disruption' of the democratisation process, and as 'harming peace, stability and rule of law'. And, against the latter, 'necessary action' will be taken. It has to be noted here that in the framework of the 2008 constitution, broader reform without the agreement of the *tatmadaw* is impossible. Amendments to this constitution are only possible with 75 percent of the votes of a parliament in which 25 percent of the seats are guaranteed to the military (Kyaw Kha, 2014). Abiding to 'actions within the constitutional framework' and a gradual reform process thus means that the *tatmadaw* has a de-facto veto position on these actions – guaranteed by the legal framework.

Particularly interesting from a discourse analytical perspective is how Thein Sein invokes the national interest:

'Particularly, I would like to exhort all to work together in the national interests ignoring any negative attitude such as the government and the opposition, which was conventional in Myanmar politics' (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 6).

At the first glance, the conciliatory tone is striking. 'Working together' for the national interests and overcoming differences constitutes as the different actors as a 'big coalition of development partners', who can work together to bring the country forward – the 'goalition'. This enables not only engaging with organisations in the country, but also with the international community – especially to improve the sectors of health and education:

'Regarding the health sector, we will improve quality of the hospitals opened over past two decades and skills of medical staff. In addition, we will improve the quality of rural health centres and medical staff. In the process, we will work together with international organizations including the UN, INGOs, and NGOs' (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 5).

At the same time, the formation of discourse removes the actual content of the national interests from what is objectionable. The 'non-disintegration of the union', 'development' as the means to get there, and the constitutional framework setting the limits for these change processes cannot be put into question anymore. They are posited as a given, thus de-politicising the question of what national interests might look like. Possible debate on these questions is excluded by the call for everybody to work together, and to avoid 'negative attitude' – thus de-legitimising possible conflicts over the union, or the national interest, as a thing of the past. Political conflict is glossed over; and all actors are subjugated to the 'coalition of development partners'. Furthermore, that all actions outside of the constitutional framework are constituted as a threat to peace and stability narrows the range of possible societal change to the change approved by the *tatmadaw*.

Although the inaugural speech of Thein Sein clearly marked a different tone by the government, it does not mean that the basic formation of the older discourse of the former regime disappeared.²⁷² The same basic formation of discourse can be observed in the statements of the *tatmadaw*. For instance, in a recent interview with senior general Min Aung Hlaing on the possibility of amending the constitution:

'Regarding the constitution, nobody has a perfect one. Our constitution might have some parts that need to be amended, I don't deny it. There are constitutions in countries such as India, Thailand, USA, and they also amended later. So, accordingly, we have to amend it legally. Some clauses can't be amended, because of the situation of the country. So some clauses can be amended, some can't. [...] I explained earlier to you about the situation of the country and ethnic armed insurgencies. It all depends on these two factors. We can then see, how much peace and stability we have, and how much security there is. [...] It is impossible to leave people with all these problems, and without real security. Rights for ethnic people can only move forward if we get peace. Moreover, we still have got many difficulties in political reforms. I would like to urge that these things move forward in a disciplined way' (Fisher, 2015).

²⁷² As a telling side note, the government newspaper from which Thein Sein's inaugural speech is quoted also contains the official page that used to be printed into every publication in Myanmar under the former regime. It reads as follows: 'Anarchy begets anarchy, not democracy. Riots beget riots, not democracy. Democracy can be introduced only through constitution' and lists the 'People's desire: We favour peace and stability. We favour development. We oppose unrest and violence. Wipe out those inciting unrest and violence' (New Light of Myanmar, 2011, p. 16).

Also this discourse fragment reproduces the structure of discourse that constitutes the *tatmadaw* as 'in charge' for stability and security in the country, and the ethnic armed organisations' struggle as a threat to these. Stability and security are constituted as the highest priority, and trump a possible necessity of amending the constitution. Also the national interest is evoked in the statements of the *tatmadaw*. In a publication citing soldiers of the *tatmadaw* on current political issues, the following statements can be found:

'I am a soldier and my job is to defend the country but the soldiers from the ethnic groups are only protecting their areas and ethnic group, they are not worried for the nation' (Kirkham, 2015, p. 28).

'For example, the Karen say they have their territory and for the Chin they have their own territory, with this ethnic nationalist spirit in place it is difficult to get peace' (Kirkham, 2015, p. 28).

'They should talk about unity and focus on it to prevent disintegration of the country and promote unity off all ethnicities' (Kirkham, 2015, p. 29).

Also for lower ranking soldiers, the *tatmadaw* is the guarantor for the non-disintegration of the union, and stands for the national interest. And, at the same time, the agendas of the ethnic armed organisations are constructed as a threat to the interest of the country. This is not to say that this formation of discourse rules out that the *tatmadaw* has an interest in peace. But it is clear that a peace can only be achieved on the terms of the non-disintegration of the union, which is non-objectionable. It is in this vein that the following statement by a soldier can be understood, which may seem paradoxical at first:

'If you ask me about peace, all I know is that I truly want it. We are fighting to get peace [...].'
(Kirkham, 2015, p. 23)

That the 'disintegration of the union' is clearly off limits also in the discourse of the government is illustrated in an article written by Aung Min, the lead negotiator on the government side. He urges the ethnic armed organisations to sign the nation-wide ceasefire agreement (NCA) with the following words:

'[T]his government is 100 percent committed to finding a mutually agreeable end to the armed violence that done so much damage to our country. It should have no part in Myanmar's future. To be sure, the NCA is not an exhaustive agreement, but no ceasefire agreement is all-encompassing. The current agreement is meant as the best possible first step in a process that can include any decision, so long as it does not lead to secession by any part of the country or any infringements of Myanmar's sovereignty. The political talks should start as soon as possible; the NCA specifies, indeed, that they must begin within 90 days of signing. To discard the NCA now, without a viable way forward, would be extremely irresponsible, and those that advocate this must bear the consequences' (Aung Min, 2015).

Peace, in this account, is only possible on the terms set by the governments discourse. And, it is up to the ethnic armed organisations to seize this opportunity for peace, made possible by the effort of the current government. Aung Min thus warned recently that the 'process will be a new one' (Ei Ei Toe Lwin et al., 2015) if it is left to the next government after the elections in November 2015.

As the process is planned, there will be political talks after the signing of the ceasefire, where the questions around the future government structure of the country will be discussed.

While this may seem like a reasonable sequencing of steps to make a complex process of societal change manageable, it is also clearly contingent. And, it is marginalising other accounts by drawing on the problematisation of the transition in terms of managing its different aspect into a gradual, well sequenced and planned process. That it is not without alternative becomes evident if this sequencing – and the dissection of the questions of ceasefire agreements and political dialogue into two separately manageable problems – is contrasted with the perspective of the other actors on the negotiation table: the ethnic armed organisations.

South' (2015, p. 171) analysis is interesting in this regard: He points out that the ethnic armed organisations insist on being referred to as 'revolutionary ethnic armed organisations'. With this label, they emphasise that many of these actors see the current Myanmar as illegitimate in its state structures, and that they revolt against this basic structure of a centrally dominated state. Their agenda is thus to more radically change the state (South, 2015, p. 171), and they want the negotiations on these topics already addressed or at least discussed in the ceasefire negotiations. In this understanding, the political dialogue – which is supposed to include questions of basic state structures – cannot be easily separated from the ceasefire negotiations as proposed by the government. And, even more importantly, the armed conflict cannot be expected to be solved exclusively by providing more development in the ethnic minority areas.²⁷³

It becomes evident from this comparison of how the different actors understand the situation that the different actors in Myanmar have indeed established what Duffield (2008, p. 6) has named 'competing regimes of truth and legitimacy'; which are not necessarily compatible with each other. This also makes it understandable that from the perspective of the government's discourse, the reforms have been successful and on track, while from the perspective of the human rights discourse or the ethnic armed actors, they haven't gone far enough. It is in this vein that Kan Zaw, Minister of National Planning and Economic Development gave the following advice to foreign investors in an interview:

'I would like to say to potential investors and friends of Myanmar that the present time is the best time, they do not need to be too cautious, the way ahead is clear. Myanmar is a country that is working for the people and with the people we will move forward, shoulder to shoulder in the ASEAN community and the global community, in a peaceful energetic mode of development. Please come and see; seeing is believing' (Peninsula Press, 2013).

Or, similarly but more poetic, Kyaw Tin, Myanmar's representative to the United Nations, responded to criticism by the special rapporteur on human rights:

'We regret to say that the special rapporteur has set her eyes only on the thorns, but failed to shed light on the beauty of budding rose. [...] Myanmar continues to face never ending pressures for perfection. The country is now open. Everyone can visit Myanmar to see for themselves' (McLaughlin, 2014).

But while the government's discourse is not necessarily compatible with the human rights discourse, there is a stunning compatibility of the government's discourse and the discourses

²⁷³ On this point, see section 5.4.4.

of aid and peacebuilding.²⁷⁴ They share a similar formation of discourse in how they constitute their objects; namely societal change processes in the form of a plannable, gradual, and controlled process of reform – rather than sudden revolutionary changes. They problematise 'development' as the unifying goal for different actors; or in the wording of the international frameworks like the New Deal (OECD, 2011c), fragile and conflict-affected states are 'problematic' because they do not achieve the MDG goals. They are thus focusing to make institutions more effective, in order to make them more legitimate in the eyes of their population. They are concerned about the dangers of change processes that are not well managed, and thus spiral 'out of control', or about the threat to stability posed by 'not enough development opportunities'. As an example, the FDFA and SDC (2012, p. 1) state in a fact sheet on their cooperation strategy:

'The unemployment rate among young people is an estimated 70%. Job creation is a priority. With the greater freedom of speech that has now been granted, there is a high risk of young people giving vent to their frustrations and revolting, as happened in the 'Arab spring' (FDFA & SDC, 2012).

As I will show in the next section, the discourses of aid and peacebuilding have affinities for managing change processes in a top-down manner; where specialists identify the 'best' policies with the help of evidence that shows what 'works'. Despite their notions of participation and local ownership, the discourses of aid and peacebuilding realise their power effects by deploying a system to manage gradual change processes with bureaucratic means, which are clearly hierarchic. Given these similarities in the basic formations of the discourses of government and of the discourses of aid and peacebuilding, it is not surprising that the international community quickly embraced the government's reforms. But while I so far only compared the basic formation of discourse, the similarities become even more obvious when comparing the more specialised discourses of how the transition will be planned and managed, and how 'development' will be brought about. Here, the government's specialists have quickly adopted the discourses of aid and peacebuilding.

As an illustration, the introduction to the *Nay Pyi Taw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation*, which is regulating how donor countries and the government of Myanmar work together for the transition, reads:

'The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has embarked on a far-reaching reform programme to transform Myanmar into a modern, developed and democratic nation that improves the livelihood of its people. The Government has high aspirations for people-centred development while staying focused on achievable results. It shall start modestly, but move decisively with international assistance to enlarge capacity and skill development to reduce incidence of poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. [...] The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and its development partners agree to take concrete actions to make their cooperation more effective. The Nay Pyi Taw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation is a set of localised commitments that take in its foundation Myanmar's unique history, values, governance systems, and socio-economic circumstances to create a country-specific set of clear, measurable and monitorable actions' (Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2013).

²⁷⁴ For the analysis of the following points in the international discourses, see section 3.9 above.

The transition is constituted as a matter of the right planning, to ensure its gradual and smooth progress towards the achievement of the MDGs. The discourse fragment above is drawing on virtually all the notions that are characteristic for the aid discourse, and explicitly mentions that it is drawing on the different frameworks to make development cooperation more efficient and effective; namely the Paris Declaration (OECD, 2005b), the Accra Agenda for Action (OECD, 2008), and the Busan Partnership agreement (OECD, 2011a). Accordingly, the transition is problematised along the large questions of the aid discourse, namely along its effectiveness and efficiency in bringing about development, or more specifically, to achieve the MDGs. And, the different institutions and actors of Myanmar – some of them sharing a history of decades-long warfare with each other – are constituted as a big 'goalition' of 'development partners', all working together towards the greater goal.

Following these different frameworks, the government of Myanmar – among other things – commits to 'focus on achieving national priorities', 'further develop coherent and efficient aid management systems', and to 'strengthen public administration to enhance the transparency and effectiveness of government programs and foreign assistance' (Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2013, p. 2 f.). On the other hand, the 'development partners' – among other things – commit to 'align development assistance with national priorities', 'participate in and be guided by country-led coordination processes', and 'work with government to strengthen institutions, build capacity, reduce transaction costs and increase aid effectiveness' (Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2013, p. 4 f.). Following the basic formation of the aid discourse and its problematisation of public policy in terms of their effectiveness, the government of Myanmar and its administration and institutions are identified as targets to be strengthened, in order to bring about development – as effectively as possible.

Here it becomes evident that the aid discourse conveys an understanding of the state that is quite specific – and historically and spatially contingent.²⁷⁵ In Myanmar, the government is not necessarily seen as the legitimate entity that is in charge of developing the country. Myanmar is a contested state, especially in its periphery. Some of the areas controlled by ethnic armed organisations have only seen minor influence of the central government: Difficult to access from the centre due to ongoing conflict, mines, and missing infrastructure for decades, they have more functioned like independent state entities than like an integral part of the central state (Callahan, 2007; M. Smith, 1999, 2007; South, 2008; Taylor, 1987). It was often the ethnic armed organisations and their civilian organisations that assumed the role of patrons, or service deliverers (Joliffe, 2014). In these areas, the central state has mainly been visible in the form of soldiers fighting 'insurgents', and perpetrating various human rights violations. Accordingly, the central state is far from being accepted as the entity of legitimate politics, let alone the only one (Callahan, 2003; Joliffe, 2014; M. Smith, 1999, 2007; South, 2014).

The aid discourse – and the neoliberal governmentality on which it draws – constitutes the notions of efficiency and effectiveness of public policy as purely technical principles. But in Myanmar, they imply to choose and strengthen one actor out of different possibilities – and

²⁷⁵ See section 3.9 above.

thus veil a highly political question as a technical exercise. At the same time, differing interests are glossed over by the notion of 'goalition', whose members are working towards their 'common' goal of development.

In looking back onto the last sections, the question emerges of what importance one should give to the changes that took place in the discourse in Myanmar when speaking of development or peace, and of the role that different actors are playing. These changes could easily be interpreted as 'natural' adaptations of different actors to a new reality that comes with a far-reaching transition. What I have argued over these pages is that the transition in itself is not a tangible process that is equally appraised by all actors. Rather, it is the product of specific discourses, which constitute Myanmar as a 'country in transition', and that also reshuffle the *'rapports de force'* in this society. In this sense, the transition – and the discursive 'goalition of development partners' it enables – are contingent. Hence, from a discourse analytical perspective immediately emerges the question of the specific power effects of this contingent order of knowledge. Who profits from this specific way of ordering things? And whose accounts are marginalised? And, which practices and institutions gain legitimacy and are seen appropriate; and which are excluded, omitted, or discredited? While the first two questions seem sufficiently answered so far by my analysis, I will now turn to find answers to the third question.

5.3 Managing the transition, statebuilding and the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification

The new role that the discourses of aid and peace assigned to the government of Myanmar in a short amount of time is remarkable. As I have shown above, the discursive environment to speak about Myanmar, its situation, and its different actors has changed decidedly in a matter of a few years, if not months. Myanmar's 'transition' has become the accepted problematisation of the country; and no politician, aid worker, or development planner can simply ignore this new formation of discourse in their speech if they want to be taken seriously. But while the discursive formation of Myanmar's transition is contingent, it is by no means arbitrary. To problematise Myanmar as a country in transition is far more than just a new interpretation, or a different intellectual label: It enables a range of new practices to be meaningful and to be seen as adequate solutions. At the same time, it subjugates other accounts and other practices, makes them 'inadequate', 'outdated', or 'counterproductive'.

The transition therefore provided the opportunity to break a long impasse to a variety of different actors – for different reasons. In this chapter, I am analysing the how the 'transition' is realising its power effects through the practices of international and local actors; and how the transition makes Myanmar amenable to the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification.

5.3.1 Supporting the transition and international approaches to societal change

Given the vast number of INGOs, bi-lateral donors, or multi-lateral organisations that have deployed to Myanmar or scaled up their engagement over the last years, any attempt to summarise their manifold strategies is likely to be simplifying. But while I have to admit that I am not able to do justice to all the nuances of the rationales that are followed by different organisations and institutions, the similarities between large parts of the strategies are still striking. Put differently, the presence of a discourse structuring these organisations' speech on Myanmar is visible. For my analysis, the crucial question is thus how this discourse relates to the international discourses analysed earlier,²⁷⁶ and they are realising their power effects in the specific case of Myanmar. In analysing the international actors' strategies in the following, this will be my main focus.

Although the aid discourse understands itself as addressing all kinds of issues – and has a tremendous capacity to evolve and integrate new topics at an impressive frequency²⁷⁷ – the overall influence of the neoliberal governmentality that permeates this discourse, and even increasingly provides its foundations, also narrows down its priorities. As shown earlier,²⁷⁸ the aid discourse increasingly links different problems like governance, the 'capacities' of states, and economic development; and constitutes them as interdependent 'problem systems'. What becomes evident from the discussion above is that in this interlinked understanding, not all the problems are seen as equally important to address. There is a clear priority to achieve 'development', and the other problems' solutions will quasi be a side-effect of reaching the MDG benchmark. But this implicit prioritisation is not openly acknowledged. Rather, it stems from the structure of speech, the ordering of things and problematisations that are embedded in the discourses of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. It stems from the regulation of what can be said, and what is excluded from being said in the aid discourse. How the UN document continues after the fragment quoted above²⁷⁹ is illustrative of this:

'The UN Country Team (UNCT) in Myanmar stands ready to jointly support the new Government both at the central and regional levels in building a democratic nation for the benefit of all people in Myanmar. It is expected that there will be an increased space for dialogue on issues such as development priorities, good governance, budgets and allocation of resources, as well as on reforms in key socio-economic sectors. [...] The UNCT therefore welcomes the President's inaugural speech, declaring that the new Government 'will promulgate all necessary policies and laws so that the fruits [of development] will go down to the grassroots level and the entire people enjoy better socio-economic status.' The Government recognizes that it is now a priority to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy in order to translate this vision into pro-poor and equitable growth' (UN Country Team in Myanmar, 2011, p. 8)

Firstly, the building of a democratic nation as the result of this coalition of all partners is constituted as 'in the benefit of all people in Myanmar'. The larger goals that the *dispositif* of managed pacification aims to achieve thus become non-objectionable, as they are in

²⁷⁶ See chapter 3 above.

²⁷⁷ A point also raised by Escobar (1984, p. 387).

²⁷⁸ See chapter 3 above.

²⁷⁹ See page 189.

'everybody's interest'.²⁸⁰ Secondly, it becomes clear which direction the debate for the future of Myanmar is bound for. 'Increased space for dialogue' is expected – which invokes the idea of a broader, participative process – but the topics are narrowed down to the development priorities and sectors that are the key entry points for the *dispositif* of managed pacification. The debate is thus restricted to the technical terms of the aid discourse, which reserves legitimate speaking positions to actors who are able to express their views along the wordings of 'good governance', 'budgets and allocations of resources', and 'reforms in key socio-economic sectors'. The priority then becomes drafting a Poverty Reduction Strategy in order to 'implement' this vision. It becomes clear that the future of Myanmar will be 'built' by the bureaucratic means and on the terms of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. And, accordingly, a 'better socio-economic status' that is hoped to be achieved with this will be the main area of concern.

Overall, these strategies can be subsumed under the broad label of building capacities to manage the transition. My analyses so far have made clear that this understanding of Myanmar's 'problem' – and its 'solution' – is very specific one. It is drawing on the formation of international discourses that problematise 'fragile and conflict-affected states' in terms of their performance to achieve on the MDG benchmark, and in terms of the effectiveness of their institutions to achieve this. 'Building capacities to manage the transition' thus refers to a very specific understanding of capacities, which rely on the neoliberal governmentality, and more specifically, on the model of evidence-based policy making. Posited as a solution for Myanmar is thus the building of institutions that function according to this order of knowledge; which suspends conflict, de-politicises discussions of policies on the quest of finding 'what works', and proposes to 'free' policy making from ideology through the deployment of science.²⁸¹ The institutions of the administration and the government thus become the primary target to be 'improved' along these lines, and the 'lack of capacities', which have to be built now becomes the *mantra* of the external donor community. As an example, the comprehensive framework of the Council of the European Union (2013, p. 3) states that the EU will help to

'[r]ebuild state institutions and reform the civil service. The success of the transition depends on a professional civil service and capacity of state institutions to implement policies. Reliable national statistics is a necessary element of such capacity.'

Pronounced examples are also the documents of the Asian Development Bank. In their interim country partnership strategy, the bank writes that

'Myanmar ranks poorly on most global indicators of governance including corruption. Central to public sector governance—and effective service delivery—is the country's public financial management (PFM) system. In ministries and agencies, budget planning, transparency, execution, reporting, and accounting have weaknesses. The continued prioritization of reforms to achieve accountability and transparency will be essential for more effective PFM and use of

²⁸⁰ This construction has striking similarities to the discourse of Myanmar's government in earlier decades, which equally constructed legitimacy for its actions that are constituted as being in the name of 'all people' (see section 4.3 above).

²⁸¹ See sections 3.6 and 3.9 above.

aid. [...] Reliable and accurate statistical data is indispensable for policymaking purposes and good governance' (ADB, 2012, p. 3).

Furthermore, they identify 'risks to the baseline projections [that] include domestic and external uncertainties, as well as low capacity for macroeconomic policy making and implementation (ADB, 2012, p. 2). The form of engagement ensuing from this is clear:

'[S]ustained support will be required to strengthen public institutions so they can effectively manage the reform process, undertake planning and implementation of development programs and projects, coordinate external assistance, and deliver essential public services. [...] [P]rograms should help the client country develop, prioritize, and sequence its reforms agenda; the introduction of policy reforms, adapted to the country's situation through significant TA support (especially analytical, advisory, and capacity development), should be embedded in the reengagement program; and [...] a longer-term framework for capacity development should be applied' (ADB, 2012, p. 4 f.).

What the transition needs in the first place – according to this problematisation – is the necessary capacities of the relevant institutions to smoothly manage the process. The transition is thus narrowed down to a process of macroeconomic reform, which is dependent on the necessary expertise and the institutional capacities to transform this expertise into viable policies. In this process, specific knowledge is posited as key:

'Providing new knowledge is essential to helping the government chart its transition to a market-based economy, implement reforms and development programs, and leapfrog development processes where possible by applying regional development knowledge and lessons to the challenges facing Myanmar. [...] Analytical and advisory knowledge support will be provided to selected government agencies to help them identify and tap relevant knowledge, experience, and lessons from the region; share international good practices; and foster exchanges with other developing economies (ADB, 2012, p. 6).

The Asian Development Bank is reproducing the basic notions of evidence-based policy-making: collecting evidence that certain policies have worked in another context, with the help of expert advisors. The 'lessons' that can be learned from this exercise and the knowledge gathered should then help to avoid 'mistakes' that other countries in comparable situations have committed. The metaphor of the 'leapfrog' is telling here for the potential that is posited in the 'learning' from other examples. As a metaphor, it is also used by presidential economic advisor Aung Tun Thet: 'There are advantages to being a latecomer [...] We went straight to colour television, skipping the black and white phase of other countries' (UNESCO, 2014).

Myanmar's transition is thus constituted as a process that can be properly managed, and where knowledge and 'lessons' from other countries can help avoid mistakes and identifying what 'works'. The role of research and specialised economic advice are crucial in this. Accordingly, international expertise becomes indispensable, as the 'necessary expertise in economics is difficult to find locally', as an international economic analyst puts it.²⁸² The debate around policies for economic reform quickly evolves into the realm of technical experts, where the legitimate speaking position is reserved to people with the necessary

²⁸² Interview # 67 (FI1410_67) with a quasi-governmental organisation, Oct. 2014.

academic background. And, the necessary academic background cannot be considered as neutral: For instance, Hughes (2011) argues that bringing back people from the diaspora that studied in the West is an attempt to smuggle in Western knowledge hierarchies, which subjugates locally present knowledge and expertise. That these 'technical' aspects are more political than generally presented is also acknowledged by the technical expert quoted above:

'The real game of the transition is not in the elections. It's in the technical things, in the budgets. They show where the money actually goes.'²⁸³

Following that, he reproduces the demand for more transparency and accountability in public financial management in Myanmar already present in the problem statement of the Asian Development Bank quoted above, stating that the non-accessibility of today's government budgets is problematic:

'You can only know what should be if you have an idea of what is the case now. But at the moment, what is, is unknown. So more transparency would help; also to contest power structures.'²⁸⁴

In this problematisation of Myanmar's transition, more transparency is one of the key elements to make the reform process successful. It starts from the basic assumption that the accessibility and transparency of government data would allow to hold the government accountable, and that active citizens also will do that.²⁸⁵ It thus glosses over the restriction to the debate that is posed by the required expertise to make sense of the information, and to formulate alternatives that would be seen as legitimate. Even if the data was fully accessible, this does not mean that power structures would be automatically contested. Rather, access would still be narrowed down to a small group of people: the economic experts and advisors.

But economic reform is not the only field where expert knowledge gains in relevance with the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. Practically all domains where this *dispositif* intervenes rely on the constant collection of data, evidence, and information as a base for programming – or, to put it with Scott (1998), to 'make society legible'.

It is in this light that the conduct of a nationwide census in 2014 has to be understood. Already in the Nay Pyi Taw Accord, the government committed to

'build and use an evidence base for decision making, including by increasing the quality of statistics and statistical systems (Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2013, p. 2).

Conducting a census delivering accurate data for 'effective decision-making' thus is a key achievement to make future decisions more 'evidence-based'. The overall stance of the aid discourse towards this endeavour is well resumed in an editorial of a newspaper:

'Last November presidential adviser U Myint said the government's approach to statistics would start from scratch. Decades of 'disastrous' meddling had long twisted facts to the

²⁸³ Interview # 67 (FI1410_67) with a quasi-governmental organisation, Oct. 2014.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ International actors like, e.g., DFID adhere to a similar problematisation of aid, where more transparency is seen as a requirement for better aid, enabling citizens to hold institutions accountable (see section 3.3 above).

government's favour, counting what it wanted to be true rather than what was true. He called accurate stats a 'crucial governance tool' vital to democratic transition. All this comes to mind as results are released from last year's nationwide census. The 2014 count – the first since 1983, the broadest since 1931 – cost US\$60 million. Why bother? Because nothing – elections aside – stands to affect our future more. Prior to last August's provisional results, most thought Myanmar contained 5-10 million people too many. Now we can allocate funds properly, giving each a fairer share. And the new data is already revealing much about what kind of country we live in: for example, that urban residents live on average seven years longer than rural residents. Stats like this galvanise change. Last week the president said results would 'play a crucial role in shaping the future of our country and our society'. Without a bedrock of accurate data, reforms could only leave us back where U Myint admitted we'd been for decades' (Myanmar Times, 2015).

It is the improvement of the statistical data available that is seen as a crucial tool to 'allocate funds properly, giving each a fairer share', and even 'shaping the future'. Noteworthy – besides the enthusiastic tone and the pivotal role given to the census – is that the account above posits that the statistics are 'galvanising' changes. 'Giving each a fairer share' now becomes possible as more accurate data is available. Conversely, this discourse fragment suggests that the main reason for the current situation – where not everybody gets their 'fair share' – is the result of inaccurate information. Such a statement becomes possible because the discourse fragment reproduces the model of evidence-based policy-making, where decisions on social policies are to be taken purely based on evidence of what 'works', and not along political ideologies. In this understanding, more accurate statistics also lead to better policies. Put differently: the census helps to bring about development more efficiently and accurately with the help of scientifically collected 'evidence'. As I have already pointed out above,²⁸⁶ the model of evidence-based policy-making attempts to de-politicise decision making by drawing on the legitimising effect of a high-modernist understanding of 'science' that is posited as identifying objective solutions. In turn, also the collection of such evidence is constituted as an apolitical endeavour, helping to increase the efficiency of policy-making.

Remarkable about this census – besides that it clearly had a positive influence on the GDP per capita, as it found that Myanmar's population is almost 10 million people less than expected – is that it was presented as an apolitical exercise, although it's political implications were pointed out prominently beforehand. For example, Human Rights Watch warned that

'the census is a technical project that has taken on major political overtones and risks inflaming an already tense environment [...]. The government and the UN should listen to the concerns of ethnic minorities and go back to the drawing board to make sure they get this process right' (HRW, 2014).

Also the usually more cautious International Crisis Group gave out a conflict alert for Myanmar with regards to the census, pointing out that including questions on ethnicity is highly sensitive:

'Myanmar is one of the most diverse countries in the region, and ethnicity is a complex, contested and politically sensitive issue, in a context where ethnic communities have long believed that the government manipulates ethnic categories for political purposes' (ICG, 2014).

²⁸⁶ See section 3.6.

While for most observers, the political implications of the census were evident, the dominant discourse of the 'coalition of development partners' weighted the benefits of better data as more important than considerations on raising tensions. Indeed, the census led to tensions and riots in some areas, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) who provided technical assistance faced heavy criticism for its role (Goddard & Manny Maung, 2014). But while the spokesperson of UNFPA promised to draw lessons from the whole endeavour (Goddard & Manny Maung, 2014), the government more direct in making its priorities clear. In response to the Kachin Independence Organisation refusing to allow the census on their territory due to ongoing fighting with government forces (Hein Ko Soe, 2014), Khaing Khaing Soe, the director of the Department of Population was quoted saying:

'Even in countries where fighting is breaking out in every corner it could be possible to conduct a census. Our country is conducting the census to initiate development projects and we urgently need the information' (Hein Ko Soe, 2014).

The predominance of 'development' over concerns of armed conflict is evident in this discourse fragment. Furthermore, there were reports of the *tatmadaw* threatening local officers of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) to allow the census to take place in KIA-controlled areas, or face military action (Euro Burma Office, 2014, p. 3).

But the census also points to a more fundamental aspect of the dominant discourse of the *dispositif* of managed pacification: As already pointed out, it problematises Myanmar mainly along the lines of 'achieving development'. Besides specific events like the census, where 'technical' development has clear political implications that are also pointed out, the question of armed conflict is conspicuously absent from this problematisation. Given that Myanmar has known over six decades of ongoing internal armed conflict, this is remarkable. In the first place, it reveals the underlying assumption of the *dispositif* of managed pacification of how peace can be achieved. As I showed in the chapter above,²⁸⁷ the underlying assumptions of how the problems of development and armed conflict are interlinked substantially changes with the merger of the aid *dispositif* and the peacebuilding *dispositif*. While I have analysed this topic mainly around the increasing centrality that is attributed to the different benchmarks for development like the MDGs, the discourse fragment above also reproduces the increasing dominance of the economic dimension of peace. When conflict-affected or fragile countries are problematised in terms of their underachievement in reaching the MDGs, then the solution to this problem is constructed along the very same lines. The solution offered by the *dispositif* of managed pacification thus posits that equal economic opportunities and a better socio-economic status for all groups – in short, more 'development' – decrease the probability for armed conflict.²⁸⁸

This understanding of the origin of armed conflict that this solution implies is a historically contingent construction. Although it represents itself as universal, it only becomes possible in the order of knowledge and the power/knowledge networks commonly subsumed under the label of the neoliberal governmentality, which have emerged in the global West in the second

²⁸⁷ See section 3.9 above.

²⁸⁸ The Myanmar government's problematisation is similar, see section 5.2.3 above.

half of the 20th century. It is only in the image of the *homo oeconomicus*, and the image of humans as displaying primarily rational behaviour that this interpretation of the origins of conflict is enabled, and which also allowed the neoclassical economic theories of conflict to claim an important role in 'science' (cf. Cramer, 2002). The widely debated works of Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2004) are illustrative for the academic debate in this regard. By applying the assumptions of neoclassical economic theories to armed conflict, they challenged the then dominant explanation for the origins of intra-state armed conflicts. Instead of looking for the explanations of armed rebellions in the realm of ideological grievances held by the people who resort to arms (e.g., Gurr, 1971), their hypothesis is that 'rebels will conduct a civil war if the perceived benefits outweigh the costs of rebellion' (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998, p. 563). This is a prototype of the understanding that the origins of civil war can be primarily explained by the economical, rational considerations of their actors – or in their word, in terms of 'greed' – as opposed to the ideologically motivated 'grievance'.

Noteworthy here is that the larger order of knowledge enabling these theories is also visible in the recipes of the international community to build peace – and in a quite simplified form. Most scholars of peace and conflict would accept that economic considerations play a role for peace, especially when access to economic opportunities is unequal or perceived as unequal.²⁸⁹ On the other hand, in the aid discourse, this seems to become part of an implicit understanding that if socio-economic development takes place, this also prevents conflict. While the different discourses of aid and peacebuilding have seen an evolution towards an understanding of the different problems like poverty and conflict as interlinked,²⁹⁰ it paradoxically also has enabled an understanding that re-categorises, dissects, and re-makes problems amenable to sectoral solutions. With the problematisation of fragile and conflict-affected states as 'under-achievers' on the MDG benchmark, it becomes possible to subjugate other problems as 'minor' issues that will be solved if development occurs.²⁹¹

This formation of discourse can also be observed for the peace process: government and the army mainly seem to interpret the 'solution' to the armed conflicts as the provision of development to the ethnic minority areas (cf. also Joliffe, 2015; South, 2015, p. 171).²⁹² That this interpretation is similar with the formation of discourse of the *dispositif* of managed pacification is obvious; and epitomises the ease with which the *dispositif* of managed pacification and the government formed a discursive coalition of development partners in Myanmar.

In the formation of discourses of aid and peacebuilding, economic development in the ceasefire areas thus becomes an appropriate strategy to convince the population there of the benefits of peace. What the World Bank (2011) in the influential *World Development Report 2011* stipulated as the recipe to build peace, namely the formula of 'security, justice, jobs', also emerges as a recipe in the specific context of Myanmar.

²⁸⁹ Examples include (but are not limited to) Galtung's (1969) concept of structural violence or Stewart's (2008) 'horizontal inequalities'.

²⁹⁰ See section 3.9 above.

²⁹¹ A perspective that rings well with Li's (2007) analysis of how 'development' has served as a justification under changing regimes in Indonesia (see section 2.3. above).

²⁹² See also section 5.2.3 above.

For example, the AusAID (2013, p. 4) writes in their aid program strategy that

‘Australia will also support the ongoing peace process and look for ways to extend the reach of our assistance to communities in Myanmar which have been isolated from essential services, to help them enjoy the benefits of peace’.

The so-called ‘peace dividend’ emerges as an appropriate means to build peace, namely by providing tangible economic benefits to the local population; either to incentivise ‘peaceful behaviour’ or to reward the people for remaining peaceful and motivated. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2012, p. 1) even entitles its overview of planned economic cooperation projects with

‘[t]o spread the dividends of democratization, national reconciliation and economic reforms to the people of Myanmar.’

The understanding that tangible economic benefits are an appropriate measure to stabilise and contribute to peace is only enabled in the problematisation of conflict as the result of rational choices by individuals, which in turn is only enabled by the order of knowledge stabilised by the neoclassical economic theories in science. On the other hand, from the perspective of the human rights discourse, bringing development quickly to the ceasefire regions in the framework of the ‘coalition of development partners’ would be viewed as a one-sided intervention, potentially fuelling conflict. Accordingly, civil society groups have voiced concerns against Japan’s development projects in Karen state. Susanna Hla Hla Soe, director of the Karen Women’s Action Group, was quoted in a newspaper article:

‘This is the peace-building period. [Japan International Cooperation Agency] JICA is one-sidedly working with the Union government and the Karen State government, while neglecting communities and organizations’ (Yen Snaing & Saw Yan Naing, 2014).

The discourse fragment above implies that ‘quick wins’ are not automatically seen as a proof of good will by the government, nor as automatically contributing to peace. Rather, it raises memories of the round of ceasefires in the 1990s, where the military regime actually gained more influence in the ethnic minority areas with a strategy of ceasefires followed co-opting the armed group commanders by the means of economic co-operations.²⁹³

In the de-politicised understanding stabilised by the aid and peacebuilding discourse, where ‘development’ is non-objectionable, a similar assessment is excluded from what can be said. Or, it would be met with the call for more ‘conflict-sensitive’ approaches, including more consultations with stakeholders to mitigate the risks of ‘peace dividends’ to feed into tensions. But this would probably not lead to a reconsideration of the more fundamental strategies of engagement of international actors, whose mission is to support Myanmar in the achievement of the MDGs.

²⁹³ See also section 4.6.

5.3.2 New practices: the deployment of the aid machinery and civil society building

Although the transition has led to a new focus of the international actors on Myanmar's government and administration, also the country's civil society also has increasingly attracted interest. Also here, the formation of discourse around the 'transition' has substantially changed the overall environment: It has enabled the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. With the overall problematisation of Myanmar in terms of its achievements – or non-achievements – on the MDG benchmark, international aid agencies are now working on deploying the 'normal' model of engagement and collaboration with civil society organisations that is characteristic for most 'developing countries'. The deployment of the typical international aid architecture – or, to put it with Duffield (2001b, 2002), the 'public-private networks of governance' – typically already comes with clear structures: a hierarchy among different kinds of organisations that is deployed in any country context. Although the discourses of aid and peacebuilding emphasise the importance of partnership, plurality of perspectives and inclusive decision-making, they continuously reproduce a hierarchy that places bi- and multi-lateral donor organizations on top; followed by international aid agencies, and their local partner organisations at the bottom.

The different weights or importance that the *dispositif* of managed pacification ascribes to the different organisations in this hierarchy becomes clear when analysing the direction of accountability procedures built into the system. As a director of a civil society organisation puts it:

'Most of the time, accountability in NGOs - including our organization, we are also a bit self-critical - most of the processes and the systems, you try to be accountable to the donors. Sometime a bit careless about the community, about accountability to the community. So this is one thing we are saying, that we provide regular reports to the donors, but not to the community. I think we are not really good with downward accountability. With donors, with government, yes.'²⁹⁴

Also in Myanmar, the aid and peacebuilding discourses are making this hierarchy appear as the appropriate 'solution'. The neoliberal underpinnings of the *dispositif* of managed pacification and the practices clustered around accountability and the focus on results are playing a pivotal role in this. As I will show in the following, they are shaping intervention strategies; are mobilised to construct legitimacy for this hierarchy; and reproduce the power effects of the aid and peacebuilding discourses through daily practices, procedures, and institutions.

Similar to the government institutions, civil society organisations are problematised along their capacities to play their role 'effectively' in the 'transition'. For instance, Mercy Corps writes in a report assessing the situation in Myanmar:

'A resilient society has a rich tapestry of networks among government, civil society and citizens. In Myanmar, these connections are weak. Creating and growing horizontal linkages – across context, issues and actors – requires effort. External organizations can help catalyze this

²⁹⁴ Interview # 48 (FI1310_48) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

process by providing opportunities for interaction between actors or creating situations in which these different groups can work together. Efforts should focus on supporting the capacity of civil society to be productive and responsible accountability partners for government' (Gurung et al., 2014, p. 2).

The role that Myanmar's civil society organisations are supposed to play is rather narrow in this account: a 'productive and responsible accountability partner for government'. This role is specified in the broader frameworks that structure the practices of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, and is not part of the debate anymore. If one looks at the evolution of the discourses of peacebuilding, this can also be interpreted as an effect of the shift from an understanding of peacebuilding-as-civil-society towards one of peacebuilding-as-statebuilding (cf. Heathershaw, 2008), or statebuilding as the new paradigm of aid (cf. Marquette & Beswick, 2011; Mosse & Lewis, 2005). There is an extensive ongoing debate in academia about the role of civil society for peace or conflict,²⁹⁵ and of the practices of civil society and statebuilding²⁹⁶. Overall, it is noted that the current debates are more state-centric in focus, and the role constituted for civil society in 'transitions out of fragility' is clearly less important than a few years ago. Frameworks like the 'New Deal' (OECD, 2011c) hardly foresee a role for civil society that goes beyond checking on the state – which is constituted as the main actor – or that goes beyond 'being consulted'.²⁹⁷ Accordingly, international actors invest heavily in engaging with the government, to 'build' its capacities for better governance, service delivery, and to make its institutions more 'legitimate'.²⁹⁸

Paradoxically, civil society organisations have not disappeared from the agenda of international agencies. With the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification to Myanmar in the wake of the transition, and with a large number of international aid agencies becoming operational in Myanmar, local civil society organisations are more important than ever. But not in the sense that they would contribute to the transition as an important element of democratisation. Rather, the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification makes that they are needed as 'implementing partners'; the entity firmly placed at the bottom of the aid hierarchy (cf. also Local Resource Center, 2010).

This new role is enabled in the specific formation of the aid discourse, which problematises the activities of civil society organisations along the lines of the tangible and visible results they achieve. Mercy Corps' report already quoted above brings this new way of speaking of civil society to the point:

'Civil society organizations (CSOs) across Myanmar are finding their footing. Many such CSOs do not understand the potential scope of their role in the emerging governance system and economy, nor how change will realistically occur. This is most evident in organizations that operate in the democracy and human rights space. The gap between theory and practice within these groups is large; many understand the conceptual bases of the principles but are uncertain about how to promote them in practice. Because of this, CSOs have pursued a more confrontational posture, making them disengaged and unproductive in the change process. The

²⁹⁵ See, for instance, Ferguson (2007b); Paffenholz (2010); or Verkoren and van Leeuwen (2013).

²⁹⁶ See, for instance, Pouligny (2005); de Heredia (2012); Gabay and Death (2012, 2014).

²⁹⁷ See also section 3.9 above.

²⁹⁸ See also section 5.2.2 above.

habit of democracy in a country that has had little experience with this will be slow to emerge (Gurung et al., 2014, p. 3).

Several points about this discourse fragment are noteworthy. Firstly, it subjugates the human rights discourse's stance towards the government already discussed above²⁹⁹ as a thing of the past: The human rights organisations are described as 'disengaged and unproductive in the change process' because of their 'confrontational posture'. These organisations are presented as not yet having adapted their habits to the new setting of 'democracy' in Myanmar. The clear cut with Myanmar's past that is operated by this discourse fragment is striking: It reproaches a lacking 'habit of democracy' in human rights organisations, as if democracy would be what suddenly came to Myanmar as soon as the transition was declared.

Secondly, but linked to this, is that this account seems to be both completely ahistorical and apolitical. Omitted are the historical reasons why human rights groups are likely to show a 'more confrontational posture', and may be thinking twice before becoming closely engaged in a change process closely managed by a government towards which they have been confrontational for decades, and which has a longstanding record of cracking down on civil society. Also the political implications for these organisations of closely engaging in the transition with the government are glossed over. Rather, these organisations are constituted as lacking the understanding of how their role works, and of how they could 'realistically' contribute to change. Their strategies thus appear as inappropriate for the new environment because they lack the knowledge. In short, they are problematised as not effective, because they are lacking the capacities. Hence, the 'solution' that follows from this is straightforward:

CSO leaders – vanguards in defining the roles of citizens groups and building initial bridges between them and the government – need training and mentoring to better understand both the demand and supply side of democracy and support the emergence of effective democratic practice and the creation of robust representational systems. CSOs with similar missions would also benefit from greater coordination to streamline messaging and present a cohesive voice to government and private sector partners' (Gurung et al., 2014, p. 3).

Civil society organisations are made amenable to be acted upon by the international community; in order for them to get to 'a better understanding of their role'. Put bluntly, this means to be trained, mentored, and made effective – as opposed to confrontational, which is constituted as 'not productive'. It also means to become a part of the big coalition that is managing for development and peace, to be subjugated to its approaches and procedures, and to be squeezed into the role the aid hierarchy foresees for local civil society organisations.

It is in the same vein that economic analyst McCarty (2014) can postulate in a newspaper article that 'it is time for local NGOs to grow up and boost capacity', because these organisations 'lack one thing: project management capacity'. At the same time, he makes clear what kinds of capacities are expected:

'Now, however, the [Official Development Assistance] ODA scene has dramatically changed, and so must [local NGOs] LNGOs if they want to grow and have an impact. Donors would love to pour money into LNGOs, but they know that LNGOs lack the full range of project management capacities: writing winning proposals, ensuring financial accountability across

²⁹⁹ See section 5.2.1 above.

complex projects, designing and running professional monitoring and evaluation systems, and producing impressive progress and impact reports' (McCarty, 2014).

The author of this statement also demands a more important role for local civil society organisations.³⁰⁰ But it becomes clear from this discourse fragment that in the current environment, a more important role for local organisations is only possible if they subscribe to the conditions of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, if they become 'better' along the lines it prescribes. 'Having an impact' outside of these structures is not possible anymore in the 'transition'.

Thus, even if INGOs seek engagement with local civil society organisations in terms of partnership, there is a clear imbalance against the local organisation, and 'most local NGOs sense a lack of equal power in the partnership' (Local Resource Center, 2010, p. 5). Through partnerships, capacity building and funding, civil society organisations are tied into the aid hierarchy. Not necessarily by means of domination: As Abrahamsen (2004, p. 1454) notes, partnerships are both voluntary and coercive, and thus produce both new forms of agency and discipline.

On a broader level, this marks a clear departure from the ways of engaging with civil society organisations that were common before the transition. As the staff of an international actor puts it when describing the history of this engagement:

'We always had that softer, 'we give you a space'-role. From the mid-2000s onwards, it was a bit more direct. We offered classrooms for youth, for civil society networks (especially ethnic networks) [...]. Still popular now, even if there are places to go out there now. But many of those have been quite influential. [...] So I think we've had a significant influence on some of the key individuals and key groups within the broader political movement here in Burma. Yeah, that provision of a space and some support for building capacity. [...] But that was a nice place for people to come and talk about the issues. And also within themselves to coordinate particular initiatives that they had and we didn't know about. The kind of interactions that those spaces allow. [...] there was no grant to go out and do any civic education; but we know that a number of things happened as a result of this forum.'³⁰¹

This account emphasises that before the transition, allowing a space for civil society to meet and exchange was already considered as a goal worthy to be pursued in itself. The relationships with civil society thus were less formalised, there was no specific planning or follow up on initiatives that went beyond meeting and exchange. With the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, this has changed:

'[N]ow, we are being looked up, we are being attended to, we are being asked to deliver results. Back then, we were left on our own devices. Because they weren't expecting too much from us, they thought it would be 2 or 3 people sitting behind a dusty desk [...]. The opposite was true. Incredibly vibrant centre, a lot of creativity. And real reach into the issues and support for civil society. [...]

³⁰⁰ On a side note: The reaction to this article in online fora was rather dire; especially pointing out the vested interests of the author whose consultancy business offers exactly the kind of services he prescribes to civil society organisations (Paung Ku, 2014).

³⁰¹ Interview # 61 (FI1310_61) with an international NGO, Oct. 2013.

Given that change in the environment, we have also increasing interest from the [...] headquarter. We've had to adjust. We are testing income targets now. I have to bring projects in, because that is how I am judged.' ³⁰²

From the vantage point of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, Myanmar has seen a 'normalisation' over the last years. It is not the exceptional place anymore, where practically nothing is expected or seen as possible; and thus 'softer' approaches are deemed legitimate. With the transition, the deployment of the normal partnerships embedded in the aid hierarchy become possible; and thus, also the practices of management, planning, and accountability that come with these.

An important aspect of the currently dominant discourses of aid consists of linking the notions of performance, results, and accountability, to the disbursement of funding. Money disbursed by donor organisations comes with a range of requirements, with which the organisations at the lower levels of the hierarchy have to comply. In exchange for funding, both INGOs and national NGOs have to show that they are using the funding according to the agreed plan; and to prove that they deliver value-for-money according to management standards.³⁰³ This typically happens in the form of regular reporting on all activities, but also takes the forms of mid-term and end-of-project evaluations, as well as financial audits. All of these requirements demand that the contracted organisations have specific technical knowledge. To live up to these requirements is often only possible for larger, professionalised organisations. This means that in the case of Myanmar, only a small number of national organisations are able to meet typical donor requirements.

The staff of donor organisations is aware of these shortcomings, and denouncing the overly technocratic approach of donors in informal or semi-formal conversations is quite common.³⁰⁴ Also formal documents like the 'New Deal' acknowledge that (OECD, 2011c, p. 1) aid is often provided in 'overly technocratic ways'. A staff of a donor brings this problem to the point when asked about common assessment of the lack of capacities in local organisations: 'I think they do have capacities. What they lack are the capacities that *we* need to spend our money.'³⁰⁵ The far-ranging regulations and accountability procedures enabled in the neoliberal governmentality form a constraining environment; which is increasingly not debatable anymore. The country director of an INGO brought up an example illustrating this:

'We are providing support to this local organisation, because [the donor] won't fund them directly; so we are acting as an intermediate. The reason why we put our time in this is that we want to see civil society grow to the point where donors fund them directly. [...] So we still get the fees for admin, even if we do nothing. But this is the donor's choice; they should just fund them directly. [...] They would be perfectly capable to do it themselves.' ³⁰⁶

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ See section 3.3 above.

³⁰⁴ Similar statements were made in a range of interviews, namely interview # 1 (FI1301_1) with a diplomat, Jan. 2013; interview # 24 (FI1308_24) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013; interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013; interview # 61 (FI1310_61) with an international NGO, Oct. 2013; interview # 62 (FI1310_62) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.

³⁰⁵ Interview # 62 (FI1310_62) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.

³⁰⁶ Interview # 24 (FI1308_24) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.

So even if they are leading to situations where the codified and rigid regulation of aid procedures are counterproductive, and going against the rationale of making aid more efficient – directly funding the local organisation would be more cost-efficient in this case – the rigid framework is realising its power effects. Noteworthy here is that even if practitioners are aware of the sometimes-perverse effects of this framework, and discourse allows denouncing these effects as inefficient, the regulations own materiality is strong enough to trump that. On a second level, the criticism of these regulations can only take place in terms of their inefficiency, hence, in the terms and problematisations set by the aid discourse itself.

What mainly makes these regulations so influential is that they are directly linked to disbursement of funds. As the INGO country director quoted above notes:

'With all these rules and regulations, if something goes wrong, they want the money back. Five years ago, when something went wrong, you told them and said sorry, we are making sure that it doesn't happen again. Now you tell them 'something went wrong', and they say 'ok, give us the money back'. There is no negotiating with donors, there is no acceptance at all that things might and do go wrong. So you do need to have the financial means to cover for that. [...] and we are speaking about procedure manuals that are two feet thick, so some things may go wrong.'³⁰⁷

Drawing on the notions of the plannability of societal change processes that are embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification, rules and regulations have been set up accordingly. Also the rules and regulations in the relationship between donor and INGO assume that planning societal change processes indeed is possible, and that they best occur according to the procedures set. In case of failure, the INGO has to be blamed for improper management. Accordingly, the financial risk associated with failures to comply with procedures – that do happen indeed – is shifted towards the bottom of the aid hierarchy.

The effect of these practices is that they regulate access to funding in the aid hierarchy, and that they reproduce the ordering of the relations within this hierarchy. Only few organisations have the formal procedures to live up to highly specialized standards of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, especially as higher education with these specific specialisations still has to be considered a privilege in Myanmar. In an environment where only years ago, most civil society organisations were operating without an official registration and even organisational bank accounts were rare (Local Resource Center, 2010, p. 33), complying with international financial management standards cannot be taken for granted.

But compliance to these standards often sets the entry bar for directly accessing donor funding. If an organisation is not able or willing to comply with these standards – for example, out of the political considerations that are linked to the process of registration³⁰⁸ – they can only access international funding through an INGO that 'builds their capacities'. One way or another, local organisations are subjugated to these bureaucratic procedures and technical ways to do things. And, this is not only concerning the access to funding, it also has implications on other dimensions. Entering the aid hierarchy equally means joining the

³⁰⁷ Interview # 24 (FI1308_24) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.

³⁰⁸ Political considerations here are to undergo the risk or perceived risk of increased scrutiny by the government when applying for registration. In any case, applying for a registration means to engage in high-level contact with the government (Local Resource Center, 2010, p. 33).

'goalition' that is constituted as 'in charge' to bring about development and peace in Myanmar. As shown above, the discourses construct legitimacy for the actors, approaches and practices that are part of this coalition. At the same time, they subjugate and exclude other actors along the lines that they are non-efficient, out-dated, or counterproductive. The *dispositif* of managed pacification thus regulates access to 'legitimately' working for societal change in Myanmar – or to be more precise, to work to make the 'transition' a success. In short, the institutions of the *dispositif* of managed pacification present in the goalition present themselves as being without an alternative. Once entered the hierarchy, the work of civil society organisations is then structured along the terms set by the *dispositif* of managed pacification, realising the power effects of its discourses in the form of contracts, procedures, planning frameworks, regulations, standards, best practices, audits and reports. In the short time of its deployment, the *dispositif* of managed pacification thus has become a network of power/knowledge that substantially contributes to structuring the *rapports de force* in Myanmar's society.

But what are the effects of that? One very direct consequence can be observed when talking to the organisations that actually do meet the requirements to enter the aid hierarchy. With the influx of a large number of donor agencies over the last years, these organisations have been put under considerable strain. International actors quickly identified the organisations that are able to meet their technical demands, and 'inundated' them with propositions for project implementation. As economic analyst Rieffel puts it in an interview, they are 'smothered with love' by international actors (Boot, 2013; also cf. Rieffel & Fox, 2013). The bureaucratic workload that comes with project implementation for several donor organisations and their differing frameworks and requirements is substantial. Some organisations say that they have been so busy with reporting requirements that it actually kept them from doing their essential work.

'All the time, whatever happens, we have to focus on like 3 months projects. Trust me, my colleagues are just writing proposals, writing reports, writing proposals. [...] [W]e produce 77 reports, separate reports. And 10 audit and financial reports. [...] We are still facing this problem. To avoid this, we are trying to consolidate our projects into programs. From project approach, we move to program approach, sectoral. But there is only like [2 INGOs] providing that sort of program support, that we can decide. Others are very project specific. So in the end, we ended up writing separate reports to each and every project.'³⁰⁹

In the above-quoted interview, Rieffel also sees the same problem for policy-makers in the government:

'too many non-Myanmar people are coming to Myanmar to 'make a difference.' They all want to meet with the top policymakers and as a consequence these policymakers are not giving enough attention to the crucial tasks of policy formulation and implementation (Boot, 2013).'

Accordingly, Rieffel (2012, p. 31) proposes that 'outsiders' would be more helpful at the moment if they were giving policy makers more space to concentrate on their essential work on the reforms.

³⁰⁹ Interview # 48 (FI1310_48) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

But there are also broader effects of the bureaucratisation that accompanies the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification to Myanmar, and the practices of capacity building to make local organisation 'fit' for their foreseen role in the aid hierarchy. In the first place, they are linked to the understanding of civil society that is embedded in the discourses of aid and peacebuilding. This understanding emerged in the mid-1990s as a specific form of peacebuilding within the liberal peace framework (Heathershaw, 2008) and posits the creation or strengthening of civil society as a precondition for sustainable peace – assuming that these organisations would serve as a counterbalance and watchdog for the government (cf. also Pouligny, 2005).³¹⁰ Usually, the term 'civil society' is understood as the organisations in the sphere outside of government and the private sector. This may include media, political parties, activists, NGOs, religious institutions, sports associations, and more (e.g., cf. Kaldor, 2003; Verkoren & van Leeuwen, 2013). Of importance here is that the understanding of the term 'civil society' typically observed in the discourse in Myanmar is much more specific: 'strengthening civil society' is *de facto* mostly practised as 'strengthening civil society organisations' that reproduce the organisational form of Western NGOs (cf. Maung Zarni, 2011). Indeed, the focus of the various activities to 'build capacity' for local civil society organisations does not primarily lie on their needs, but rather on the needs of the international actors. While a focus on creating or strengthening national NGOs helps reducing the 'shortage' of 'capacitated' partner organisations in Myanmar, this strategy excludes other parts of civil society, most importantly, political activism. As long as it is not taking an institutionalised form, political activists are generally excluded from the international aid hierarchy, from funding, and other support. With the bureaucratic demands that have to be met by national partner organisations, INGOs or donor organisations are facing practical constraints when partnering with activists. Given their often loosely and non-formalised form of organisation, the latter are hardly in a position to meet the technical standards of project implementation and accountability; and their activities rarely fit the typical project cycle management, planning, and predictability that is characteristic for the development and peacebuilding *dispositif*. Equally, this excludes them from delivering results or impacts that could be measured with the traditional, widely used methods – or to successfully pass an audit.

These organisations – or individuals – thus are excluded from entering the aid hierarchy. With the discourses of aid and peacebuilding constituting 'development' and 'peace' as the result of 'aid' and 'peacebuilding', or as the result of the work of the 'goalition'; other approaches or means to bring about societal change are subjugated. Political activism, for instance, is excluded from a legitimate speaking position on topics of 'development' and 'peace'. What is constituted as legitimate practices for societal change is now closely tied to professional and technical standards associated with a stable organisational form, and the integration into the aid hierarchy. This, in turn, again reveals the strategic function of the *dispositif* of managed pacification: 'Development', and 'peace' as concepts are de-politicised; they can only be the result of the accepted (technocratic) forms of aid and peacebuilding.

³¹⁰ See also analysis of the discourse fragment by Mercy Corps in the beginning of this chapter (p. 215)

Political debates about the different visions of 'development' and 'peace' are excluded from what can be said.

Naturally, this favours the societal structures in Myanmar that are already in place, and the groups and elites that have already been in charge before the *dispositif* of managed pacification was deployed in the country. Consequently, this *dispositif* has an overall stabilising and reproducing effect on the *rappports de force* in this society, by subjugating more radical approaches to societal change – which would put the existing structures more fundamentally into question. What is enabled in terms of societal change is gradual reform through technical approaches, whilst at the same time, revolutions and abrupt changes are excluded. Also the often-declared goal of fostering local ownership for societal change processes rings hollow against this backdrop: local ownership is only allowed as long as it remains within the prescribed limits of technical, gradual reform. In short, this *dispositif* is acting like an anti-politics machinery in the sense of Ferguson (1990): bureaucratising, de-politicising, and making the country amenable to be 'developed' and its 'peace' to be 'built'.

In the context of Myanmar, the consequences are striking. It means that large parts of civil society are excluded from either being recognised as legitimate actors for societal change by most international agencies, or from their support. This concerns, among others, the *sangha* – the Burmese monkhood; informal self-help organisations; and groups of political activists that refuse to take on the institutional form of a Western NGO or to be integrated into the aid hierarchy. Further, many national organisations that are in fact similar to the prescribed organisational form are facing challenges, because they have been operating underground and are not officially registered (Local Resource Center, 2010). This in turn poses substantial problems for them to enter into partnership with organisations of the aid architecture.

Myanmar's history shows that these parts of civil society are not negligible for larger societal change processes. Following the dominant discourses of aid and peacebuilding today, the political activists that formed the democracy movement at the end of the 1980s would not have been eligible for support by the international aid architecture. When strictly following today's discourse, they would hardly be even recognised as legitimate agents of change; although their goals were clearly in line with the self-proclaimed goals of the international aid architecture, and also much acclaimed in the West. Nevertheless, they were pivotal in triggering the democratic uprising in 1988, long before some of them took on an institutionalised form.³¹¹

Another example is the more recent events around the suspension of the construction of the Myitsone Dam in the North of Myanmar. Civil society groups managed to build up public pressure on a multi-billion-dollar construction project, protesting against the project's environmental and social impacts (Min Zin, 2014). In September 2011, President Thein Sein suspended the project. By many observers, this was interpreted as an important step showing the new quality of democracy in Myanmar (Lintner, 2014). Or at least as the government giving more emphasis to international standards in large development projects, which contrasts positively with past practices (Wells, 2015). Also here, the groups of activists that

³¹¹ See section 4.4 above.

managed to build up this pressure would hardly fit the criteria for being integrated into the aid hierarchy. A staff of an international agency on this:

'It wasn't through organisation X putting a bid in for EU funding. Even the very thought of it, it's madness. How can such a material impact on development and democracy, the crowning achievement of the modern civil society movement here, not be funded through any kind of instrument?' ³¹²

So while strengthening civil society still figures high on the agenda of international agencies, the events that are generally seen as the fruits of a vibrant civil society stem from more political or activist approach. Ironically, this approach and its proponents elude the strict management of the aid hierarchy, and are excluded by the *dispositif* of managed pacification. In fact, their confrontational stance is even branded as 'counterproductive' in the transition.

So, one could ask: what is the problem of having these different approaches co-exist? None, most practitioners would answer; both approaches are needed and can complement each other. While this might be the case, I would argue that the two approaches are not simply coexisting. In the current situation, the activist model is subjugated by the *dispositif* of managed pacification. This happens – as discussed above – via exclusion and marginalisation, but also via the 'colonisation' of the political activist approach by the tools and technical approaches of professionalised peacebuilding.

As noted in the chapter on the international discourses, neoliberal governmentality is extending its reach into all kinds of public policy. And, as it is observable in Myanmar, also the technical approach of the *dispositif* of managed pacification is extending its problematisations into related domains. This means that it makes other approaches – e.g., political activism – amenable to its technical instruments and practices. In the words of a staff of an international agency:

'It has been very interesting in the past few years, seeing the institutionalisation of the civil society here. And its increasing shift towards technical models. What was before really vague, but drawing a lot from ideals, becoming slowly, via workshops and various seminars, external groups coming in, [...] a creeping technicality finding its way in. In the most ardent sites of human rights, democracy, and anti-state types. As well as the development side, where you expect it. All the way through.

Policy advocacy. That was a very early example of this. It became a hot topic for workshops, to design, deliver, or go to. Just after 2010 elections. Policy advocacy! Maybe we are able to advocate policy, and they were going to policy advocacy workshops to go through endless seas of flipchart papers and fucking post-it notes. Jesus, mate.' ³¹³

This account underlines that the application of technical instruments cannot be considered a neutral add-on to make practice more effective. The discourses that prepare the ground to make their application possible, that make certain fields amenable to these instruments, and the problematisations that make their application inevitable are equally structuring these practices in new ways; they make new practices possible – and others impossible. What Escobar (1984, p. 387 f.) already pointed out for the 'deployment of development', also holds for this case. With the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, an increasing

³¹² Interview # 61 (FI1310_61) with an international NGO, Oct. 2013.

³¹³ Interview # 61 (FI1310_61) with an international NGO, Oct. 2013.

professionalisation and institutionalisation to deal with the problems of development, peace, or democracy can be observed. At the same time, it narrows down the options at the actors' disposal. For this case, this means that legitimate practice is restricted to interventions that can be put in a project frame, that are gradual and manageable in the change they want to achieve, and at best, producing visible and evaluable results. A staff of an international agency on this topic:

'[A] really senior type, is dropping into town. [...] There is always this frantic phone around to find someone who is doing something that person X can see. [...] This women's resource center, can they see it. Is it there, is it finished? It is finished, but nothing is happening there. Oh, we can't go there, it needs to be filled with women raising their fists. But at the same time, doing nothing too radical and outrageous.'³¹⁴

In sum, the discourses of aid and peacebuilding constitute legitimate actors for societal change in terms of their technical capacities to comply with the demands, standards and approaches of the international aid architecture. Other forms that could be seen as producing legitimacy – for instance, popular support, numbers of members – are marginalised. Maung Zarni (2011) sees in this an 'orientalising' attempt to model a Burmese civil society after Western standards: A reproduction of Western societal structures that are implicitly set as the standard that Burmese society has to achieve, brought about by Western actors on a new 'civilising mission'.

In any case, the technical expertise needed to be eligible for integration into the international aid architecture restricts potential partners to a small elite of people and organisations that had the privilege of higher education. The exclusion of all other actors from being recognised as legitimate agents for societal change may not be in the intention of the organisations in the aid architecture, but *de facto* takes place – and is clearly at odds with their self-declared goals of inclusive development, participation, empowerment, and so forth. And, as I will show in the next section, it is running counter to the ideas that Myanmar's civil society has of a successful transition of the country.

5.4 'Changing the elites': Criticism and resistance to the *dispositif* of managed pacification

After having outlined the framework of the dominant discourse of the 'goalition', I offer a change of perspective in the next sections. Instead of the dominant speech radiating from the clearly visible centres of power/knowledge networks, I dig into the discourses often subjugated, in the perspectives of the marginalised, and their ways to resist and construct legitimacy for their own actions. One could argue that bringing to the fore these marginalised points of view already has an intrinsic value, and should be part of every thorough scientific analysis. But in the view of my overall framework of analysis, it also serves a different purpose: Namely to move 'to the margins' (Maasen, 2003, p. 125) of dominant discourses to better understand their internal structure, but also their contingency. Foucault (1982b, p. 780) has termed this research strategy as

³¹⁴ Ibid.

'a way which is more empirical, [...] and which implies more relations between theory and practice. [...] Rather than analysing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analysing power relations through the antagonism of strategies'.

It is not in its crystallised, univocally accepted and taken for granted form that power is visible. Rather, it is observable in the discursive struggles for legitimacy of different actors; where discourses are 'at work' to uphold their internal coherence and subjugate other approaches. It is observable in the way that actors construct their positions as legitimate speakers on a certain subject; always drawing on discourses of expertise, professionalism, or scientific knowledge to strengthen their own claim to 'truth' and subjugate other 'truths'. It is observable in the way that actors problematise a specific situation, devise strategies, and define their solutions; and how they relate to others' problematisations, strategies, and solutions.

It is in these struggles that the power effects of the *dispositif* of peace and development are most easily dissectible. Both in actors justifying their practices along the lines of the dominant discourses – e.g. in the name of more 'effectiveness' – or in the justifications of actors that are opposing themselves to the dominant discourses, the structuring force and the power effects of the *dispositif* are observable. Because even in opposing dominant discourses, actors inevitably relate to them, and thus contribute to their reproduction.

Although these discursive structures ordering development and peace in a specific context like Myanmar may seem crystallised and rather impenetrable, this does by no means imply that actors in such a setting are strictly determined by discourses, or devoid of agency. If one looks closely at discursive fragments like an organisations' statement, a conversation with a practitioner, or a country strategy, the image is clearly more complex. In most of my data, I easily identified elements of different, even competing discourses present in a single discursive fragment. Actors use these different elements in their reasoning and draw on different discourses to construct their very own, individual position and legitimacy for their practices. This entails two points: Firstly, it is a reminder that my reconstruction of the dominant discourses is a subjective and incomplete one, and that it cannot claim universal acceptance. Thus, there are necessarily other ways to order things and construct one's reasoning, which may be incongruent with my analysis. Secondly, and perhaps more important here, it shows that discourses are hardly specific enough to determine detailed practices. While different discourses and the *dispositif* are incorporated in different organisations, and clearly structure what is seen as legitimate practices and what is not, there is still an amount of interpretation on behalf of individuals necessary and possible. The *dispositif* thus provides a grid of what practices are possible, and structures the benchmark to assess the legitimacy of practices, but it does not determine practices in a detailed manner. To say it with Ferguson (1990, p. 13), my analysis proceeds in a 'way which underlines the ambiguities of resistance and the scope for choice and political action in a world that is always structured but never determined'.

This understanding of the link between discourses and practice forms the basis for my analysis below and it also aims to prevent it from falling into the trap of oversimplification. Although in my further analysis I will create categories of actors like 'national organisations',

'political activists', or 'peacebuilders', and analyse their discourses, this should by no means imply that they are coherent groups necessarily following the same agenda, interests, or interpretations – or the same coherent 'discourse'. While these categories are useful for my analysis to order the sea of utterances in my data, I still part from the idea that every actor constructs its very individual position, which may very well deviate from my categorisations. And, given the multitude of ways and elements of different discourse that the different actors in Myanmar draw upon to construct their position, I withstand the temptation to lump them together under the simplifying label of a 'local discourse'. Rather, there is a spectrum ranging from actors fully subjugated to the aid and peacebuilding discourses, over actors integrating some elements of these discourses, to actors that use elements of these discourses as a resource to criticise the system on its own terms.

Thus, this complex understanding of actors and their positions also provides a safeguard against simplifying and romanticising certain groups of actors. In this understanding, it is not possible to depict the 'local' as a place of greater authenticity or 'better' solutions for peacebuilding compared to the international (cf. Carl, 2003).³¹⁵ Rather, both the 'international' and the 'local' are offering political landscapes of different actors and groups, with their interests and positions reflecting societal and international *rapproches de force* and struggles for legitimacy.

Accordingly, I have structured this section not along certain categories of actors, or certain discourses, but along thematic issues, points of contestation, and definitional struggles that emerged in my data. These provide the anchor point to analyse how different actors relate to dominant discourses to construct legitimacy for their way of ordering things.

5.4.1 Challenging the coalition: the office rent debate

In Myanmar, there are few points where criticism of the international aid architecture would reach a wider audience. One of these flashpoints was the so-called 'office rent debate'. This debate thus provides an entry point to work out the specific instances of resistance to the dominant discourse of the coalition that is encompassing the civil society in Myanmar. Again, given the myriad of organisations that can be understood to form the civil society, I will only be able to give an incomplete snapshot of these instances discursive environment in Myanmar with this endeavour. But it allows identifying points where I can observe 'discourses at work', where they are in the process of subjugating other accounts, to structure the world according to their problematisations, where they face resistance, and struggle to uphold their coherence.

In a series of articles by the newspaper *Irrawaddy*, international agencies' practices in relation to renting office space in Yangon came under heavy criticism. In the current 'gold rush' in Myanmar, that saw an important influx of external organisations, office space is a rare commodity, and prices for office space meeting international's requirements are high. In some cases, outrageously high: different bi- and multilateral donor agencies have been reported to pay up to 87,000 US dollars per month to rent their office. In some cases, office

³¹⁵ On the 'local', see also section 2.4 above.

rent made up to 10 percent of their overall annual budget in Myanmar (Aung Zaw, 2014; McDowell, 2014).

In the way that this criticism was brought forward, two aspects merit closer examination. The first aspect is closely linked to the different ideas of justice brought forward by different actors. Given that also during the 'transition' Myanmar's economy is still dominated by a network of 'cronies' with close ties to the former military regime, many real estates on the market are owned by people stemming from this small, wealthy elite. Accordingly, not only the fact that international agencies would pay enormous amounts of money for rent was criticised, but even more so whom they are paying it to. In Yangon's 'golden valley' neighbourhood, international agencies have been renting from close relatives of the leading figures of former military regimes, including former General Khyin Nyunt, who headed the notorious military intelligence service (McDowell, 2014). Accordingly, the press has accused the international aid architecture of helping the continuous enrichment of a small elite:

'While the country's people certainly need all the help they can get after decades of neglect, the danger is that some of such efforts will only enrich those who have kept the country down for so long, and who are now undeservedly reaping the rewards of 'reform' ' (Aung Zaw, 2014).

Similarly, the governments standing behind these international agencies are criticised in another newspaper article:

'With almost all property in the biggest city Rangoon owned by former and current generals and their cronies, much of which was seized during military rule, many organizations find themselves funding a tarnished elite that still holds sway despite elections. The U.S. government, via its aid proxies, has been lining the pockets of former spy chief Gen. Khyin Nyunt since Washington eased economic sanctions two years ago' (McDowell, 2014).

Underpinning these criticisms is an understanding of justice and of a 'successful' transition that is clashing with the understanding that is embedded in and implemented by the *dispositif* of managed pacification. In this understanding, a 'genuine' or 'real' transition in Myanmar is closely linked to the idea of replacing the former elite, and stopping their privileged access to lucrative business contracts allowing them to continue to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few. In this understanding, this is an integral part of justice that the transition should achieve; namely to address the problem of the 'ill-gotten gains' (Aung Zaw, 2014) of the former military regime. But the discourses that are part of the *dispositif* of managed pacification exclude such a far-reaching change in the societal *rappports de force*. Their discourses foresee a stable, manageable, and gradual transition, which builds in large parts on this very elite and the remnants of the former military regime as 'development partners'.

To voice this unease with the perpetuation of the old ways that are privileged by internationals, notions like Western governments 'lining the pockets' of the former military regime construct an explicit complicity of Western governments, their aid agencies, and Myanmar's elite. For the latter, the office rent debate is the result of deplorable neglect, which is excused with the complicated situation in Myanmar today, as illustrated by the response of one agency concerned: A spokesman stated that his agency 'failed to take proper account of the political context of Myanmar' (McDowell, 2014). But for people adhering to the principle

The criticism of perpetuating Myanmar's societal *rapproches de force* is thus combined with an element that stems from the formation of the aid discourse common in Western contexts. It is the idea that NGO's actions should be judged according to an efficiency benchmark that defines 'good' NGO-practice as the minimisation of overhead costs, and which posits that they have a duty to deliver value-for-money. This construction holds that spending as much as possible in visible and tangible services for the local population is legitimate, while spending on expensive offices, administrative procedures, or high salaries is illegitimate. It is in this context that the depiction of 'luxurious' Yangon offices by the press has to be understood:

'There are few offices as ostentatious as that now occupied by the World Health Organization, located in a palatial mansion on one of Rangoon's busiest thoroughfares, and surrounded by an imposing 8-foot-high concrete wall and cast-iron gates. [...] the rent came to nearly \$1 million a year. That's enough to immunize 30,000 children against diseases such as measles, polio and hepatitis B' (McDowell, 2014).

The image of the international agency spending too much on luxury not directly related to its mandate is then connected with the comparison of how many items for development this money could buy – if it was put to 'proper' use. This specific construction has two effects: First, it reproduces the problematisation of the activities of international agencies along the lines of efficiency – which is enabled in the neoliberal governmentality and its notions. Secondly, it constitutes aid as 'provision of development related items'. This defines the efficient delivery of countable and tangible items – usually vaccinations, malaria bed-nets, or school uniforms – as good practice for international agencies; as opposed to following 'inefficient' agendas to achieve non-tangible, non-measurable, and lofty goals.

The main point to retain here is that these elements are clearly stemming from the international discourse of aid. While also the first form of criticism implicitly judged the organisations of the international community by its own standards of democracy and justice, the use of the international aid architecture's self-proclaimed values in the second form of criticism are explicit. That elements clearly associated with neoliberal understandings of social policy in the global West emerge in a 'local' discourse is illustrative of how actors draw on different discourses to construct legitimacy for their own position. The use of such elements to criticise the international aid architecture in Myanmar clearly shows that actors' discursive strategies are more complex than a dichotomy of 'international' and 'local' discourses. Rather, they can combine, use, and re-interpret elements stemming from different discourses, appropriate certain elements and leave out others to make their point. But it is also through these complex ways of actors relating to different discourses that the latter's basic structure is reproduced: When local actors appropriate the legitimising power effect of the discursive formation of 'inefficient NGOs', they strengthen the claim to legitimacy for their point. At the same time, they reproduce and reinforce the dominance of international discourses that foresees to frame the activities of NGOs along the lines of efficiency. Hence, the power effect of 'inefficient NGOs' is dissected from the historically and spatially specific conditions of its origins. Originally, its meaning was enabled in the discussions that emerged with the rise of neoliberal governmentality in the global West - debates around the 'inefficiency' of social policy and state action, and the 'efficiency' of market-based solutions

(Foucault, 2004, p. 253).³¹⁸ If local actors relate to this discursive formation in the construction of their position, its meaning is also enabled in Myanmar through their act of reformulating and making it applicable for their context. That NGO's activities have to be judged along the lines of their efficiency in Myanmar is not a given; nor is it meaningful *per se*. It is through the sum of these acts of uttering statements, constructing a position, and appropriating the power effects of certain discourses – in short, through the discursive production of all actors – that NGO's activities in Myanmar are constituted as the legitimate object of judgement in terms of their efficiency. Therefore, by structuring their criticism of Western agencies in Myanmar along the lines of 'inefficient NGOS', local actors also contribute to realise the power effect of aid discourse in Myanmar.

With every actor taking up such elements, with every new context to which their power effects are projected, these formations of discourse are more detached from their conditions of origin. Accordingly, it becomes more difficult to question them: They are not easily seen as historically and spatially specific and thus contingent, but get closer to being universally accepted and taken for granted. Thus, they are removed from the realm of what can be questioned; they become deeply entrenched in the basic structures ordering the global *rappports de forces*. Hence, local actors' discursive strategies are reproducing global networks of power/knowledge. Ironically, these are the very same networks of power/knowledge that also constitute Myanmar as a target for the *dispositif* of managed pacification: These networks draw on the same notions of efficiency for state action and its legitimacy to cast Myanmar as an underachiever in reaching the MDGs, which in turn makes the deployment of the international *dispositif* of managed pacification to this country an appropriate necessity. Hence, by employing these discursive strategies to criticise INGOs' activities in Myanmar, local actors reinforce the broader order that enables these activities in the first place. In short, their way of criticising contributes to subjugating Myanmar to the very order and practices whose effects they criticise. To put it in the words of Ferguson (1990, p. 13): 'it is, ironically, *through* this resistance that the task of 'reproduction' is eventually accomplished.'

5.4.2 Changing the elites: civil society approaches to societal change

What becomes evident from the debate above are the different understandings and hopes for the transition that are present in today's Myanmar. As pointed out above, the *dispositif* of managed pacification produces a need for a 'pragmatic' stance of engaging with the government and the military in order to ensure the success of the transition. In broad terms, the dominant approach thus follows the prescriptions of international frameworks like the New Deal positing that the priority is making the government's institutions more legitimate by improving their effectiveness and accountability.³¹⁹ This 'institutionalist' understanding (cf. Lemay-Hébert & Mathieu, 2014) of legitimacy parts from the assumption that institutions themselves will be seen as legitimate, if their performance is improved – almost independently of the question of who is in office. A transition to democracy is to be achieved

³¹⁸ See section 3.2 above.

³¹⁹ See section 3.9 above.

with gradual, controlled steps, which keep the different stakeholders on board, and which prioritise stability during the transition period.

For the democratic opposition, this is clearly not enough. Although it acknowledged the reforms initiated by the Thein Sein administration by taking part in the by-elections in 2012, there are still major points of contention with regards to the 2008 constitution. Different actors and academics have pointed out the illiberal aspects of this constitution, which reserves 25 percent of the seats in parliament to the *tatmadaw*, and effectively bars Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming president. Accordingly, there has been extensive debate around the genuine will to reform of the government, and on how far the elite is willing to go through with the 'transition' (Bhatia, 2013; Callahan, 2012; L. Jones, 2014a; Lintner, 2013a; Rieffel, 2012; Singh, 2013; Taylor, 2012).³²⁰

This makes clear that Myanmar today is essentially not a fragile state – it is a contested state. In the centre, the NLD and many of its followers see the current order as illegitimate; as the result of the military government ignoring the outcome of the 1990 elections. In this view, the current transition is not a genuine transition, but a system set up by the military to protect its interests in the long run. As a member of an opposition party puts it:

'It is hard to believe that the government is genuinely working for democracy. We fear that we are manipulated, and the military will continue to hold power.'³²¹

The constitution has become a visible symbol for this order created by the former military government and their transition to a 'disciplined' democracy. That the opposition sees this order as illegitimate becomes evident in the NLD's current efforts to amend the 2008 constitution, in order to allow Aung San Suu Kyi to run for president. In this view, it is imperative that the NLD takes over government in the upcoming 2015 elections. 'We have already lost our 20s, our 30s. All we ask for is justice.'³²² This demand for justice has nothing to do with the strengthening of the legal institutions to facilitate individual access to justice.³²³ It is the system itself that is considered illegitimate – namely designed by the former military regime, protecting the *tatmadaw's* autonomy and interests³²⁴ – and the elites that have designed it must thus be replaced by actors that are considered legitimate. And this does not only concern the top level, but all levels of government. As an analyst of a local civil society organisation puts it:

'Now the different ministries and the administration, they are still in the hand of the very same people. [...] Following the same rules and procedures as under the military regime. [...] Only if we can trickle down people from the NLD and the ethnic groups [into these positions], we can talk of real reform.'³²⁵

³²⁰ This debate is ongoing and has gained momentum ahead of the elections 2015 with the discussion on whether the reforms have moved forward, stalled, or even regressed (see, for instance, Aung Naing Oo, 2014; Ei Ei Toe Lwin, 2014; Morrison, Hiebert, Summers, Cullison, & Angelo, 2014).

³²¹ Informal conversation # I4 (IC1410_4) with a politician, Oct. 2014.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Conceptions of justice in Myanmar are differing from the Western understanding linked to formal justice institutions. For an elaboration of these differences and their implications, see Prasse-Freeman (2015).

³²⁴ See also Steinberg (2015b).

³²⁵ Interview # 70 (FI1410_70) with a national NGO, Oct. 2014.

On the other hand, also the NLD has been drawing on the formation of the discourses in the *dispositif* of managed pacification that constitute a gradual reform process as the legitimate approach to societal change. It was in this vein that the party took part – and won – the by-elections in 2012, and during the first years of the transition the NLD followed the notions of the government evolving around incremental reforms and stability. When the NLD organised rallies in support of their propositions to change the constitution, a member of the NLD Central Executive Committee, Win Myint, was quoted with the following words in a newspaper article:

'We've consulted legal experts for the [constitution reform campaign] and are undertaking change within the legal boundaries, in a manner ensuring tranquillity and peace in the country. We are not taking crowds to the streets' (Ko Htwe, 2014).

At an earlier event, Aung San Suu Kyi has told protesters who had their land confiscated for a large copper mine to stop protesting and to accept compensation. The argument for this was striking, and led to a strong disappointment of the protesters. She has been quoted with saying that their protest is 'in vain', and that 'country needs a lot of development. If this company has to stop, our people will lose job opportunities' (Lawi Weng & Thet Swe Aye, 2013). Further, she made clear that

'You all have to ask permission from the government if you do protest, as our country has rule of law now. Those who do not respect the rule of law, they could get punished' (Lawi Weng & Thet Swe Aye, 2013).

Thus, also Aung San Suu Kyi has in large parts adopted the pragmatism embedded in the discourses of aid and peacebuilding; which constitutes an approach of incremental reform as the way 'that works', and excludes protests as a legitimate means. But playing along the rules of the 'transition', as embodied by the legal environment of the 2008 constitution, has also led to the allegation that Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD have been too quick in embracing the reform path of the government. Drawing on the formation typical for the discourse of human rights, Min Zin (2014) sees a marginalisation of civil society groups as the main implication of Aung San Suu Kyi's pragmatic stance. Especially in situations where people would have expected Aung San Suu Kyi to speak out, e.g., in the case of the renewed fighting in Kachin state, or the spread of intercommunal violence across the country,³²⁶ she remained astonishingly silent. The interpretation of that from the perspective of the human rights discourse is quite clear:

'In all of these cases, Burma's civil society groups looked to the Lady — their one-time icon and hero — for ideological, political, and strategic guidance. Unfortunately, she failed them. Perhaps naïvely, she put her trust in the ruling elites and failed to sustain her grassroots bases either at home or abroad. As a result, the partial integration of the opposition into mainstream politics has remained largely symbolic' (Min Zin, 2014).

This account reiterates the basic formations of the human rights discourse, in which an engagement with the reformist government cannot bring success or a genuine transition, and is constituted as naïve. At least in parts, Suu Kyi has joined the 'goalition' that is charged with

³²⁶ See section 4.7 above.

managing a gradual transition to 'development and peace'. In the first place, this means that she would defend her stance exactly against allegations from the human rights discourse above:

'I'm always surprised when people speak as if I've just become a politician. I've been a politician all along. I started in politics not as a human rights defender or a humanitarian worker, but as the leader of a political party. And if that's not a politician then I don't know what is' (Shubert, 2013).

In this vein, she opposed the idea of reintroducing sanctions to further pressure the government to go on with reforms. In an interview, she is quoted saying that

'I don't like going backwards. I like going forwards so I think rather than reintroducing old methods I think what would help greatly is if everybody seriously put their minds to doing whatever they can to encourage negotiations. That is the doorway to the future' (Osborne, 2014).

In other words, Aung San Suu Kyi is taking up the problematisation of the dominant coalition's discourses of aid and peacebuilding, where keeping the transition going is first priority; criticisms of the current government's actions are only levelled cautiously in order not to jeopardise the transition; and negotiations are the legitimate way forward. First priority in this problematisation is to guarantee a managed, controlled, and 'disciplined' transition; the notions of effective change thus trumps 'justice'. Illustrative of these priorities is the agenda of a historic meeting that took place in November 2014, which brought together the government, the military and the leaders of political parties. In the first meeting of this kind since 1988, there were only three points on the agenda that summarise the priorities of the discourse coalition perfectly: continuing the reform process, achieving national reconciliation and maintaining stability (Ei Ei Toe Lwin & Htoo Thant, 2014).

While Aung San Suu Kyi's participation in the reform process can be seen as pragmatic – especially as the discourse coalition has undoubtedly set the tone for the last years – it also becomes problematic due to the clearly differing priorities. In the discourse of aid and peacebuilding, amendment of the constitution is constituted as something to change along the way of the transition – but not a priority. Accordingly, Suu Kyi reiterated that the transition cannot be considered complete at the current stage of reforms, without an amendment of the constitution:

'That's a problem with the international community. They have not lost interest in Burma, they still want Burma to have a happy ending. But they think that they'll get a happy ending simply by insisting that it is a happy ending and that's not how things happen' (Osborne, 2014).

In 2015, when it was foreseeable that the constitution will not be amended, and that the agenda of the NLD would not be achievable within the limits confined by the discourse of the 'goalition', the NLD's tone markedly changed. In a newspaper article dating from April 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi was quoted saying on the government that

'[t]hey are not interested in negotiations or in amending the constitution or taking seriously the will of the people. You could hardly say they are moderates' (Aung Zaw, 2015b).

After the amendments to the constitution did not reach the necessary votes to change the constitution – because the military appointed parliamentarians voted *en bloc* against it – the human rights discourse had a comeback internationally; reiterating that it was too early to embrace the reform, and that an engagement with the government will never bring genuine reform (e.g. Nyein Nyein, 2015a; The Independent, 2015). But criticism was also levelled against the strategy of the NLD overly focused on constitutional change. Prasse-Freeman (2013, 2014a) makes an interesting point here: He argues that Aung San Suu Kyi has long served as the personification of the people against the military rulers. In the changing environment of the transition, she still equates herself with the 'will of the people'. But political agendas have diversified in the meantime, and the dualism of struggle between regime and the people is outdated. This is visible in her use of an inclusive 'we', which includes all people of Myanmar; who are constituted as sharing the same interest, and having the same struggles. The inclusive 'we' thus glosses over differences between herself and her constituency – in terms of social status, ethnicity, wealth³²⁷ – and allows to speak as if she were transcending these differences (cf. Prasse-Freeman, 2014a). Interestingly, the inclusive 'we' is equally used by the dominant discourse coalition to subjugate civil society organisations;³²⁸ and was used by the BSPP when speaking in the name of 'all' people.³²⁹

5.4.3 Making the transition work for the people

Similarly, Myanmar's civil society organisations level harsh criticisms towards the reformist government and the international community. In October 2014, 257 civil society organisations met in Yangon to review the progress of the reforms so far. The statement released after the conference reads:

'Despite the claims that steps have been taken for the transition, after reviewing and assessing the situation thematically and geographically, we have concluded that there have been very limited positive changes and in some cases situations have regressed. The current transition process has little transparency and is controlled by the government without democratic and meaningful inclusion of democratic opposition forces, ethnic forces, civil society and the people. The liberalization of the economy in the context of a broken legal framework is creating many negative social and environmental impacts as floods of money flow in from abroad. Much of the country still lives in poverty, while the benefits of the economy opening up has mainly benefitted the elite class, many of whom are crony businessmen connected to the Government and/or the Army. Thus many local communities across the country are experiencing the loss of home, land, livelihood, health, education, social security and natural resources in the name of development supposedly for the people and for poverty reduction' (Myanmar Civil Society Organizations Forum, 2014).

Although the inclusion of democratic opposition forces in the transition is also a topic, the main problematisation here is following the dominant discourse of the aid and peacebuilding coalition: it is assessing the transitions effectiveness in bringing about development for the wider population so far. The difference to the statements of the NLD analysed above are

³²⁷ Aung San Suu Kyi is part of the Burman (Bamar) majority population's elite. Due to the dominance of the majority population, this comes with a range of privileges that are often not perceived by the majority population itself (Walton, 2013).

³²⁸ See below section 5.4.5 below.

³²⁹ See section 4.3 above.

evident: Instead of exclusively emphasising the illiberal aspects of the constitution, the discourse fragment here prioritises the aspect of the close ties among an elite of cronies, the government and the army.³³⁰ Although these clientelistic networks have been an important element in structuring the societal *rapproches de force* in Myanmar for decades (e.g., Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2002), and have been entrenched during the transition (Soe Lin Aung & Campbell, 2015), they are practically omitted from the NLD's statements.

Striking is that the statement by the Myanmar Civil Society Organisations Forum undoubtedly follows important notions of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, criticizing the ineffectiveness of international agencies:

'Governments around the world have now become much more involved with Myanmar and provide political and technical support as well as support for peace and development. Although the significant increase in the presence of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) has contributed to the increase in aid and assistance to the peace process, social security, development and other sectors, benefits to the grassroots population has been minimal due to limitations in effectiveness. Furthermore, the prioritization of individual agendas over local processes by the INGOs without enough consultation has undermined the role and capacity of local organizations' (Myanmar Civil Society Organizations Forum, 2014).

With the problematisation of the transition as a process whose benefits are not reaching the people, the notions of the *dispositif* of managed pacification are turned against its major proponents. The effects of the problematisation in these discourse fragments are far reaching: It posits a failure of the international community to identify the most pressing problem in Myanmar – the clientelistic networks that concentrate economic opportunities in the hands of a few. The dominant response that is enabled in the discourses of aid and peacebuilding – namely to manage the transition gradually towards more development and peace – thus is discredited as ineffective to address this problem. To the contrary: The international engagement so far even becomes a part of the problem, instead of being a part of the solution. As a political activist puts it:

'Cronies are everywhere, you know. It is not only the businessmen, or government. Also in international NGOs, donors, paying powerful local people. Most young people, you know they have a lot of ideas to do something, but they don't have the network, they don't have the power. [...] We just have little capacity to apply for funding, to get funding. [...] Because now they say that Burma is a very popular country, international donors come to our country, but actually the local people do not have the capacity. So where is the funding going? So the money goes to their relatives, people that know each other. In all INGOs, it goes like that. We know that some people are very powerful, they have good relations with the powerful political people, and they get easily to the funding from the government. For example, from the EU countries, also the US. They open a big office, but no activities.'³³¹

Along the lines of the teleological argument – that an action's value has to be judged accordingly to their wider effects – typical for the aid and peacebuilding discourses, the international engagement is discredited as involuntarily stabilising the clientelistic networks

³³⁰ This element can also be found in the discourse of aid, although not prominently. For example, Gurung et al. (2014, p. 2) write that '[e]conomically, wealth and power remain in the hands of a few, with little opportunity for upward mobility outside of those with political connections'.

³³¹ Interview # 34 (FI1309_34) with a political activist, Sep. 2013.

that keep the country from moving forward. As in the office rent debate analysed above, the standards and criteria that enable this criticism clearly originate from the international discourses of aid and peacebuilding; but are used to discredit the aid hierarchy that they usually support. In the same vein, the discourse fragment of the Civil Society Organisations Forum quoted earlier points out the stifling effects of the aid hierarchy on local civil society organisations – which it is supposed to strengthen. It goes on:

‘We urge the international non-governmental organizations:

To continue aid and support programs and capacity building initiatives, while operating in compliance with international humanitarian and human rights principles, and to avoid activities that can lead to increased conflict

To respect and acknowledge the capacity, equal entitlement and the important role of local civil society organizations

To support processes that have emerged from consultations with local organizations and people as opposed to prearranged activities’ (Myanmar Civil Society Organizations Forum, 2014).

The recommendations in the statement of the Myanmar Civil Society Organisations Forum read like a reminder to the international community on its own standards. Criticism of the international community voiced by civil society organisation has been drawing increasingly on the standards and criteria of the aid and peacebuilding discourses. Local civil society organisations try to appropriate the power effects and the legitimisation that is attached to the ‘notions of effectiveness’, ‘building capacity’, or ‘local ownership’. This can be interpreted as a resistance strategy to the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification, or more precisely, to the aid hierarchy the latter entails and reproduces. In a discursive environment where the legitimate speaking position is reserved to those speaking along the categories and notions of the aid and peacebuilding discourses, the civil society organisations attempt to carve out more space and a more important role for themselves.

An important aspect of this criticism rests on the point that donors prefer to have their pre-formulated solutions implemented, instead of following aid’s own principle to ‘take context as a starting point’ as prescribed in the OECD principles for good engagement in fragile states (OECD, 2007). Already formulated in the recommendations to INGOs above, civil society exponent Lahpai Seng Raw voiced this concern in a recent interview:

‘Sadly, since 2011, there is less and less room for local agendas to determine eventual programming. Too often local NGOs and community-based organizations are approached by big donors to implement their own pre-formulated programs according to their own agendas and foreign policies. These practices effectively exclude the local organization and undercut local initiatives. This means a big gap arises between donor requirements and real development needs. For us, development needs are about people’s lives, and social processes—they are not about a project ‘market’ and its related administrative bureaucracy. It is ironic that now that the country has become more open and more money is flowing in, civil society is facing more challenges. I have seen that international agencies have become either very project-focused or sector-oriented, and that talk of strengthening civil society is meaningless’ (Nyein Nyein, 2015b).

But although her analysis goes straight to the heart of the matter, it is not a new or unknown phenomenon. Interestingly, these lines of argument are also easily observed within the aid and peacebuilding discourses. Accordingly, the influx of international agencies into

Myanmar after the transition was described as a 'donor invasion' (McCarty, 2012), and it was pointed out that local organisations are 'smothered with love' (Rieffel, 2012; Rieffel & Fox, 2013); practitioners acknowledged that there is an intensive headhunt for qualified staff among international agencies,³³² that leads to a 'pillaging' of local civil society organisations.³³³ Also the point raised above, the increasing reliance on pre-formulated approaches, is a common line of argument in the peacebuilding discourse. For example, in the words of a bi-lateral donor agency staff:

'We increasingly work with standardised answers. [...] It is not even consciously. It is about cost-effectiveness. If you are not using the cookie-cutter approach, it is getting more expensive. [...] My hypothesis is, that we are not doing justice to our cause with this.'³³⁴

Pointing out the rigidity of the procedures, the inflexibility of planning, and the bureaucracy that come with aid and peacebuilding are points commonly found in conversations with practitioners; usually followed by the demand for a new, adapted, and improved approach, more flexibility, or more learning.³³⁵ One could even go as far to consider the self-criticism and pointing out of perverse effects of donor or INGO behaviour as being an integral part of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. Because at the same time, this *dispositif* constantly reproduces the notions and problems its practitioners criticise. The continuous quest for better approaches, new instrument, and silver bullets always happens in the terms and notions of the discourse enabled in the neoliberal governmentality, that enables this quest in the name of more effectiveness, value-for-money, or better results. Exactly in these problematisations happens the reproduction of the power/knowledge networks that constitute the institutions, practices, and approaches of aid and peacebuilding as in charge for development and peace, and that also posit that they should be accountable to that larger goal. And it is in these discourses that a transition like the one in Myanmar can be problematised as a gradual process that has to be properly managed to be successful, at the same time marginalising other approaches to societal change that would aim for a more far-reaching societal transformation – putting in question the societal *rapports de forces* and the order of knowledge that stabilises them. It is in these discourses that the bureaucratic, technical approaches of the *dispositif* of managed pacification are enabled to be seen as an appropriate solution. And, it is the power effects of these discourses that allow constituting the different actors in Myanmar as a big coalition, all working for the common interest of achieving the MDGs.

5.4.4 Resisting peacebuilding

On the other hand, there are also other forms of criticism, which challenge the more basic notions of the discursive environment of the transition and the current order of knowledge in Myanmar. In the first place, this means not only using the notions of the aid and peacebuilding discourses, but to actively challenge the formation of this discourse and the

³³² Interview # 55 (FI1310_55) with a consultant, Oct. 2013.

³³³ Informal conversation # I6 (IC1501_6) with a researcher, Jan. 2015.

³³⁴ Interview # 62 (FI1310_62) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.

³³⁵ See section 3.7. above.

problematisations of Myanmar's transition by drawing on another discourse that used to be influential: the human rights discourse.

Primarily, this means to draw on the formation of the human rights discourse that constitutes the transition as not 'genuine', and the government as following a secret agenda with the reforms that serves their own interests. The statement of the Myanmar Civil Society Organizations Forum (2014) already quoted is an example for this:

'The peace process has stalled after the signing of preliminary ceasefire agreements in late 2011 and there has been fighting in Kachin and Northern Shan State since. There has been a continuation of different human rights violations including torture, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and rape and sexual assault. Parties continue to disagree over the proposed nationwide ceasefire agreement and the peace process. Although the process has been on-going for 12 months it is still fragile and there has been almost no participation of civil society, women and youth. Meanwhile in non-ceasefire areas, fighting has resumed. Our analysis of the fighting is that there is a connection between those clashes and investment projects' (Myanmar Civil Society Organizations Forum, 2014).

Implying that the *Tatmadaw* is following a strategy to secure access to areas of high economic value – as does the last sentence – would be merely possible in the dominant discourse of peacebuilding. In the latter discourse, which constitutes the transition as a genuine one, and where all actors are collaboratively working towards peace, the problems of continuing clashes cannot be thought in terms of differing interests: In the peacebuilding discourse, peace is firmly constituted as in everybody's interest; and other possibilities are excluded from what can be said. Accordingly, it is 'just' the question of finding the right peacebuilding tools to build peace. And, if clashes between *tatmadaw* and ethnic armed organisations happen, they are constituted as a failure to properly set up peacebuilding's instruments. As a peacebuilding practitioner involved in the ceasefire negotiation puts it:

'The clashes that we now observe between the *tatmadaw* and the ethnic armed groups are happening because the procedures of a ceasefire monitoring have not been implemented yet; and there is no code of conduct.'³³⁶

This way of problematising the current situation in Myanmar is typical for the peacebuilding discourse. It is clearly identifying the problem of clashes between the factions as a regrettable, but minor problem that happens naturally because the parameters of the ceasefire are not clear enough, and because the technical tools to deal with violations of ceasefires have not been properly implemented yet. In this order of knowledge, clashes are inevitable until properly managed, but not the expression of political – and possible non-peaceful – interests. That they might as well be interpreted as the expression of the *tatmadaw* trying to further its sphere of influence into areas formerly controlled by the armed groups is excluded from being said in the peacebuilding discourse.

On the other hand, it is common in the human rights discourse to point out that the 'objective' signs to interpret the 'true' or 'hidden' agenda of the government are non-peaceful. Lintner (2015a) with a devastating criticism of the peacebuilders' record, shortly after the signing of a draft nationwide ceasefire agreement:

³³⁶ Informal conversation # I3 (IC1410_3) with a quasi-governmental organisation, Oct. 2014.

And while the foreign peacemakers were congratulating themselves in Naypyidaw and Yangon, the reality on the ground remained depressingly familiar. Airstrikes and other attacks were continuing against Kachin and Palaung rebel forces in the north and northeast. [...] According to a March 29 statement issued by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, the armed wing of the Palaung State Liberation Front, 'Whilst the NCCT and the government's Union Peacemaking Work Committee (UPWC) were holding talks for the NCA draft, the Burma Army launched offensives in northern Shan State and fierce battles continued.' The ultimate irony is that Myanmar has seen the heaviest fighting in decades—after the present government came to power in March 2011 and opened its Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) in November 2012. Fighting peaked in late 2012 and early 2013 with a major offensive against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) followed this year by a massive air war in Kokang. Myanmar's civil war has not been this intense since the government launched offensives against ethnic Karen and communist forces in the late 1980s' (Lintner, 2015a).

Contrasting the ongoing negotiations around ceasefires with ethnic armed organisations with increased levels of violence is the 'ultimate' way of the human rights discourse to constitute the peace negotiations as a 'sham'. The basic construction is simple: if the peace process seems to move forward with at least finding common ground on some parts, but the clashes between the factions on the ground actually intensify, then the peace process is not an effective means to come to peace. At the same time, it implies that the current ceasefire negotiations follow the same strategy as the round of ceasefires in the 1990s, which allowed the *tatmadaw* to become even more influential in the areas formerly controlled by the ethnic armed organisations (e.g., cf. Joliffe, 2015; L. Jones, 2014a; L. Jones, 2014b; Su-Ann Oh, 2013). Interestingly, Lintner's (2013b, 2015a) criticism of the international actors' engagement in 'peacebuilding' also takes up elements of the problematisation of aid organisations in the aid discourse that I analysed for the UK³³⁷: He portrays the efforts of INGOs as competitors for a more influential role in the peace process, 'in pursuit of their own private agendas' aiming to secure their share of the 'millions of dollars and Euros at stake in these so far futile peace efforts' (Lintner, 2013b). Or, in a different article, Lintner (2015a) writes that peacebuilding 'has become a lucrative business in Myanmar, with little or no regard for the suffering of ordinary people in the country's warzones'. In a similar vein, director of a local think tank, Khin Zaw Win, goes even further. He is quoted with saying that '[f]ive years ago, peace became a hot item and a lucrative industry in Myanmar, and the vultures descended' (Dinmore, 2016).

In this sense, these organisations appear as purely self-interested – as opposed to interested in the larger cause, and even detrimental to the larger cause of a 'genuine' peace. By taking up the basic formations of the aid discourse, discourse fragments like these reproduce the basic problematisations that enable the practices and the institutions of the *dispositif* of managed pacification in the first place. And, they will inevitably be met with the 'solutions' that are already entrenched in the *dispositif* to respond to these criticisms: Calls for more transparency; more accountability on the use of aid money; more practices of oversight and control; and the promise to make aid and peacebuilding more efficient, effective, and geared for more impact.³³⁸ The criticism in the last discourse fragment quoted above was levelled at a

³³⁷ See section 3.1 above.

³³⁸ See section 3.3 and 3.7 above.

joint peace fund of several bi-lateral donor organisations. Predictably, the EU responded along the lines of efficiency in a statement to defend that fund. The EU is quoted saying that

'operating costs would not exceed 30 percent of total funding over its [the fund's] lifetime. [...] More than 70pc of funds will be spent on projects and dispersed in accordance with international best practice for multi-donor funds and transition financing' (Dinmore, 2016).

What is left untouched by this debate, though, are the broader lines and notions of how things are ordered in the discourse of aid and peacebuilding: the formation of discourse that constitutes 'development' as unquestionable, and that posits efficient – and hence, 'legitimate' – institutions of a (central) state as the *ultima ratio* to overcome 'fragility', or armed conflict.³³⁹ Thus, even if the criticism levelled at peacebuilding is fundamental, the discourses of aid and peacebuilding still allow to integrate that criticism in their established order of things, and to respond with 'solutions' along the well-established lines of the *dispositif* of managed pacification.

But to draw a more differentiated picture: the formation of the peacebuilding discourse clearly allows for more nuanced statements, and pointing out problems in the current peace negotiations. For instance, it is possible in more critical accounts to argue that the large business development projects enabled in the discursive environment of the 'transition' come with problems of increased land-grabbing, especially in the conflict-affected areas; and thus threaten the livelihood of the population there. What is striking though is how the peacebuilding discourse interprets this as a problematic aspect of the ceasefire negotiations, which can still be solved with the current approach – if done in the right way. For example, South (2015, p. 173) writes:

'Unless the government, EAGs, and their international partners address these issues, there is a risk that local communities may be alienated from the peace process, as was the case with the previous round of cease-fires in the 1990s.'

It is thus a question of how the current problems can be addressed within the ceasefire negotiations, or put differently, how the current process can be improved to deliver the hoped-for results. One of the aspects stressed by South (2015, p. 170) is thus the inclusion of the *tatmadaw* in the ceasefire negotiations, whose participation was rather passive in the first years. Leaving aside the most influential institution in the country meant that the ceasefire negotiations were not representing the necessary stakeholders, and thus had to be improved. It is not a question of fundamentally questioning the good intentions of one side, or the general approach to build peace with the current technical process – as it would be the case in the human rights discourse. Despite its manifold problems are pointed out, the current process still

'remains the best opportunity in decades to address political, social, economic, and cultural issues that have driven conflict between the government and ethnic groups since independence' (South, 2015, p. 159).

³³⁹ See section 3.9 above.

The main question South (2015) thus asks concerns the 'how' of making the peace process better, and to turn it from an endeavour of 'peacemaking' – understood as stopping violence via a truce – to an endeavour of 'peacebuilding'; which entails a deeper transformation of the country towards a 'positive' peace.

Civil society groups from the ethnic minority areas can more fundamentally challenge the overall peace process. This is epitomised by the statement of a civil society representative I used to introduce my analysis in the introduction: 'People used to be afraid of the *tatmadaw*, now they are afraid of development.'³⁴⁰

It is a simple statement, but entails a range of consequences from a discourse analytical point of view. Firstly, it shows the contingency of the dominant discourses of aid and peacebuilding, which constitute development as the overall goal that is in the interest of all groups, and which is also the overall goal of the 'coalition of development partners'. Simply by stating that people can be afraid of development breaks with this formation of discourse, where development *per se* is constructed as not objectionable, and where debate is restricted to debating of how 'doing development better' (cf. also Ferguson, 1990). Secondly, the statement becomes even more powerful by likening this fear to the fear formerly instilled by the soldiers of the *tatmadaw*, who were mainly perceived as the agents of a predatory state and associated with a range of human rights violations (e.g., cf. Callahan, 2003, 2007; South & Joliffe, 2015). The discourse fragment above refers to the increasing likelihood for the communities in the areas of armed conflict to be subjected to land confiscation that comes with the calmer situation in the ceasefire areas (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013). The calmer situation means that these areas are now more easily accessible for the agents of the central state, and larger infrastructure development projects start to take place (Fink, 2015; South, 2015, p. 173 ff.). Further, the current situation in the conflict-affected areas offers opportunities for both the commanders of the *tatmadaw* and the ethnic armed organisations to further pursue agendas serving their personal interests; and an increased prevalence of drug abuse has been noted by local communities (South, 2015, p. 175). 'Development' for these communities thus comes with a connotation that it potentially destroys their livelihood; or threatens their community. And, it also implies that these communities have been better off before 'development' came.

Thirdly, this discourse fragment also puts into question another overall goal that is constituted by the *dispositif* of managed pacification as non-objectionable: peace. This statement implies that for some communities, who have been off-limits for the reach of the central state³⁴¹ before the ceasefires, peace may not be of intrinsic value. This challenges one of the fundamental aspects of the formation of the peacebuilding discourse, which posits the problems that arise with the ceasefires for these communities as side-effects – to be addressed by 'better', 'more inclusive', or more 'sustainable' peacebuilding.

³⁴⁰ Informal conversation # I2 (IC1410_2) with a national NGO, Oct. 2014.

³⁴¹ For an analysis of the different ethnic minorities and their history with regards to the reach of the central state, see Scott (2009).

That a nationwide peace is not necessarily of intrinsic value for these communities is also illustrated by the findings of a survey on the risks of landmines conducted in 2014.³⁴² The formation of the aid and peacebuilding discourses on the topic of landmines is straightforward: They are a particularly dire consequence of armed conflict, banned internationally by a range of countries, and to be removed as soon as possible to decrease the risks of landmines and unexploded ordnance for local communities. But a certain percentage of the communities in the survey opposed the future clearing of landmines. They argued that that these mines protect their communities from being easily reached by armed actors. As long as the land is mined, it is in danger of being confiscated, and the community does not enter into competition for the resources stemming from these lands with outside actors. Thus, these communities are challenging the aid and peacebuilding discourses directly by taking a position on landmines that is usually reserved to armed actors. Clearly, the narrative of local communities that are the passive victims of armed conflict here that is typical for the *dispositif* of managed pacification (cf. Malseed, 2009) is challenged in this instance. And at the same time, this puts into question the roles that this *dispositif* foresees for the different actors: While the institutions of the government and the international community are constituted as in charge to bring about development, and to bring about peace in negotiation with the ethnic armed organisations, none of the discourses that are part of these networks of power/knowledge foresees an active role for local communities that would go beyond 'being consulted'.

On the other hand, while this example shows that discourses cannot be understood as determining everything, and that there is still margins for individual actions or resistance for all different actors, it also shows how the peacebuilding discourse then marginalises these instances of resistance: The communities using landmines for their protection are mentioned as a noteworthy anecdote in a briefing, but do not trigger a broader reflection on the specific understanding of the role of land mines in these communities perceptions of security, on the international community's overall approach to land mines, or on the broader strategy of 'building' peace. Rather, it is mentioned as an issue that will have to be addressed along the way of the transition; something to be integrated into the new programming strategies around protection; or to be integrated into the inevitable next round of consultations of local communities.

This example also shows how the discourses of the *dispositif* of managed pacification narrows down what can be said and thought on the image of the state in Myanmar. When international actors engage in 'statebuilding' to increase the legitimacy of the (central) state's institutions',³⁴³ it becomes evident that such an endeavour in a country like Myanmar is highly political, and far from the technical exercise as which it is constituted by the *dispositif* of managed pacification. Establishing the 'Weberian' model of a state³⁴⁴ may be in line with the political agenda of the *tatmadaw*, and with the 'solutions' for Myanmar's armed conflict that originate from its problematisation of the country as a Union on the brink of 'dis-

³⁴² The report is not publicly available; its findings cited in the following have been mentioned by an aid practitioner (informal conversation # I5 (IC1410_5) with an international NGO, Oct. 2014).

³⁴³ See sections 3.9 and 5.2.3 above.

³⁴⁴ On this notion, see section 3.9 above.

integrating'. A central entity with a legitimate monopoly of violence could indeed be seen as what the *tatmadaw* has been fighting for over decades. But although it neatly fits the notions of an effective– and hence, 'legitimate' – state with institutions capable of efficient service delivery – notions embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification – this image of the state is diametrically opposed to the image from the vantage point of the ethnic armed organisations. As noted above,³⁴⁵ some of the areas of the ethnic minority have more functioned like independent state entities than like an integral part of the central state for decades (Callahan, 2007; Joliffe, 2014; M. Smith, 1999, 2007; South, 2008; Taylor, 2008). As South (2014) points out, the ethnic armed organisations see themselves as 'revolutionaries' who want to radically change the structure of the state in Myanmar; and they clearly reject to view the central state's institutions as the centre of 'legitimate politics'. The de-politicising power effects of the 'goalition' embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification thus become evident: In the formation of discourses of aid and peacebuilding, the armed actors are subjugated to a 'coalition of development partners' in which political conflict is glossed over by a posited shared interest in achieving development, and building peace. But that statebuilding along these lines is far from uncontested becomes clear from the position that armed groups take on this issue. A representative of an ethnic armed group puts this in a nutshell: 'Even if the internationals think so, we are not fighting for better service delivery'.³⁴⁶

But although this discourse fragment clearly contests the problematisation of Myanmar's state as having first and foremost a problem with inefficient service delivery to the borderlands, the power effects of international discourses of aid and peacebuilding exclude these questions from being asked. As 'revolutions' are unspeakable, these contradicting accounts are subjugated to the framework of the 'Weberian' state as the boundaries in which discussion can take place. Concretely, this is achieved by the formation of discourse that posits 'governance reform' as the solution to the ethnic minorities' strife: the ubiquitous call for federalism, which is commonly used by all actors, ranging from civil society activists (e.g., Seng Raw, 2016) to the *tatmadaw* (e.g., May Kha, 2013) is instrumental to fence societal change to forms of change that can be planned, controlled, and managed. In short: reform, instead of revolution. While these actors have differing understandings of what federalism actually means, the notion is effective in glossing over these political differences – at least in the short term.

5.4.5 Resisting the 'goalition'

Another point of contention in the dominant discourses of aid and peacebuilding goes straight to the basic structures of these discourses; namely by putting into question of how these discourses constitute the relationships between the different actors in Myanmar. As a reminder, the dominant discourses constitute the international actors, the government, and local civil society organisations as a 'big coalition of development partners'; a 'goalition' whose members all work collaboratively for the same goal. This glosses over possible

³⁴⁵ See section 5.2.3 above.

³⁴⁶ Informal conversation # I8 (IC1511_8) with an ethnic armed organisation, Nov. 2015.

political differences, and even makes the relationships appear as 'untouched' by power hierarchies.

In everyday conversations, the use of what could be called an 'inclusive we' is illustrative for this. As an example, an aid practitioner of an international agency asks in a meeting: 'How can we make sure that the ethnic minority population in the conflict-affected areas gets access to basic services?' ³⁴⁷ The 'we' he refers to encompasses the different actors of the aid hierarchy, namely the donors, INGOs, local civil society organisations (in that order), and the government of Myanmar. It is inclusive in the sense that it constitutes these actors as being in charge of bringing about development – or more specifically, access to basic services – and at the same time, reproduces the aid hierarchy that is structuring the relationships among the members of the 'goalition in doing this. Equally, this means that it imposes this order on behalf of the different actors, including them in a coalition of development partners that is virtually non-objectionable, as it relies on the formation of discourses that constitute this hierarchy as the 'normal' – which is deployed in any given country context.

But while the 'inclusive we' is a standard element of international practitioners to order things in their daily language, conversations with practitioners of local civil society organisations show that this construction is not uncontested. Civil society organizations in Myanmar show reservations to be uncritically embedded in the partnership with international actors and government authorities. Considering the decades of repression by the regime, and not least the experience of the military's crackdown on the democracy uprising in summer 1988, these reservations are more than understandable. But it also points to a discourse 'at work', meaning that the discourses of aid and peacebuilding are actively upholding the order of knowledge they construct for Myanmar, subjugating a more political understanding of the processes around the 'transition'. The problematisation of Myanmar along the lines of a fragile state – as conveyed also in international frameworks like the New Deal – is strictly technical, and it excludes the historical and political dimensions of conflict. Hence, it assumes that with capacity building support for all actors and improve their practice alone, it is possible to overcome differences among actors, and to directly move on to develop a common vision for the future. While this is not impossible, it is a strong assumption in highly politically contested environments where differing perspectives are present *per definitionem*.³⁴⁸

It is exactly on this more political understanding of the relationships among actors in Myanmar that civil society actors are drawing to challenge the aid discourse. As a staff of a local civil society organisation puts it:

'We cannot change the international's regulations, or their mandate. The will come gradually with their mandate, whatever we are going to say. The only thing we can get [in place] for our defence, is that we need to coordinate among ourselves. We need to be prepared.'³⁴⁹

Noteworthy in this statement by a practitioner of a local NGO is the choice of words, which is clearly confrontational. To 'be prepared' for 'our defence' against 'the

³⁴⁷ Informal conversation # I5 (IC1410_5) with an international NGO, Oct. 2014.

³⁴⁸ See section 3.9 above.

³⁴⁹ Interview # 11 (FI1301_11) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.

internationals' relies on a construction of a 'self' and 'other' that is directly opposing the legitimacy of the 'internationals' to speak on behalf of everybody. It is also challenging the dominant discourse that constitutes Myanmar's transition as a process where everybody is working for the same, uncontested, greater goal. In short: it contests the depoliticised 'goalition'. In the following, I will analyse more closely how local civil society organisation distinguish themselves from the international actors; whose formation of discourse subjugates them to the 'inclusive we' of the aid hierarchy. And, I will show how this entails resistance against the neoliberal governmentality and its understanding of public policy that is embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification.

Mainly, this happens along four main points: by challenging the legitimate speaking position of the technical 'development expert'; by a different understanding of political work; by a long-term perspective on societal change; and by practices aiming to remain independent from the aid hierarchy.

The account of the civil society organisation staff just quoted above goes on:

'I don't want just to listen to everything international organizations say with PowerPoint, and frameworks, or whatever. [...] We, as local organizations, because we understand the local situation better than them, we also need to have our mandate.'³⁵⁰

This is illustrative of a strategy of local organizations I observed in several interviews: This account is questioning the kind of expertise or knowledge that is needed to work in the context of Myanmar. Local actors thus construct themselves as experts of the local context, with an in-depth understanding of the complex local political realities that are difficult to grasp for outsiders. The barriers for internationals to an in-depth understanding of the local context (e.g., language, limited time, etc.) are helpful in this. By positioning themselves as local experts, they enlarge the legitimate speaking position that in the aid and peacebuilding discourses is typically reserved to technical expert knowledge, and which relies on standard frameworks that are deployed in every country. A statement by political activist Stella Naw (2015) makes this clear:

'Our experience of dealing with the military dates back six decades. Therefore, our expertise should not be dismissed or looked down upon'.

The position of the local expert that is constructed by local civil society organisations is characterised by the ability to use in-depth context knowledge to tailor approaches to the local needs. An account of the manager for the humanitarian aid programme of a local civil society organisation illustrates this by opposing the international standard and the local needs:

'[A]t the beginning of the shelter construction process, when we first constructed shelter, [...] the size was not really as prescribed by the UNHCR standard. Because, we know the family situation of the IDPs. So we cannot just construct the shelter units with the UNHCR standard, which is 11x18 feet. It is very big already, for a family with maybe 2 or 3 persons. But in each situation, we know how big is the space for the shelter construction, how big or how small is the family. So we started with 9 feet, and then UNHCR came in with [...] 'if you want to receive the fund from us, you have to have this standard'. There is no other option for us than to follow.

³⁵⁰ Interview # 11 (FI1301_11) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.

And also, small, small things like [Non-Food Items] NFI. Under NFI, we have so many different items, like soup powder, or toothbrushes. In terms of procurement, they already have their own procurement and all the prizes written. That means that you have to follow their items, you have to have these items in the package, in the kit. But then, we are the ones who really know the situation of the IDPs, what they really need. Maybe the things that they include in the NFI kits may not really be important for the IDPs. Maybe we want to include, or replace something else. But then, 'NO! These are the items that you have to have in one kit'.³⁵¹

The international standard that is demanded by international organisations, and which relies on the technical expert knowledge stemming from many different contexts of humanitarian interventions, is here constructed as less efficient than the tailored approach drawing on intimate local knowledge. At the same time, this discourse fragment shows that the international standard is still imposed by the donor organisation, even if it is less efficient. The discourse fragment above thus uses the notions proper to the aid discourse to create a legitimate speaking position that is not relying on technical expert knowledge, but on local expertise.

In a similar vein, local expertise is also brought to bear when it comes to distinguishing the approaches of local organisations from the aid hierarchy in terms of navigating the complex political environment of Myanmar. Given that many civil society organisations have already operated under the previous regime, they can draw on extensive experience in navigating the spaces for action. As Duffield (2008) points out, the uncertainty of what is allowed and what is not was one of the main characteristics of the rule of the former military regime; which used arbitrary decisions as a means to control the population. Over the years, civil society organisations have learned to navigate these uncertain waters (cf. Prasse-Freeman, 2012). In the first place, this means to cautiously explore the space for action, and base decisions on further actions on good knowledge of the authorities and their possible reactions. Also, it means to dose political aspects of a program very carefully. As an example, the director of a civil society organisation puts it as follows when describing a project to improve farming:

'It is very much adult education, very much experiential-based learning. They went to the field every day. The purpose of it is... Government sees this as a technology-transfer, expansion [of] service program. But what we see is: On the one hand, farmers' farming technology needs to be improved. But on the other hand, we see the issue of power. Who makes decisions? And how can good decisions be reached? It's also very important. Especially to look at the culture of democracy. How we can overcome disagreement. How we can make consensual decision-making, or effective decision-making. So on the one hand, at the forefront, you see the technology transfer. But at the back of this, is that they formed up groups, they had elections within the groups, they have meetings, negotiations, making decisions together. All these processes are there. How to organize their villages, how to form up committees, and how to convene a meeting, village meetings.'³⁵²

To have clearly political aspects in projects that are framed and officially 'sold' as technical endeavours is a common way of civil society organisations working at the grassroots level. Local organisations actually use the technicality and the de-politicising power effects of the international aid and peacebuilding discourses as a resource. The de-politicised

³⁵¹ Interview # 2 (FI1301_2) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.

³⁵² Interview # 48 (FI1310_48) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

understanding of their projects that they use in their official communication is only enabled in the formation of the aid discourse; which constitutes 'development' or 'service-delivery' as a-political, technical endeavours. That from the perspective of international actors, the political undertones of this approach are easily overlooked is illustrated by the account of a donor staff talking about the work of one of these organisations:

'Very patient models of quite serious mobilisation of farmers and other people out in the country side. Mostly political prisoners, or people who have suffered in one way, from the '96, '98 protesters generation. So they are very cautious and careful, how they go about for themselves and the people they work with. Lots of stuff with farmers and rural population. On paper: the dullest piece work. [...] how they operate, it is very clever. Without being deliberately at hand with fostering some... I don't know whether there is even that intention. But they know about the political aspects of just getting together.'³⁵³

This approach clearly sets the work of civil society organisations apart from the practices that are enabled in the aid and peacebuilding discourses on the one hand, but also from the human rights discourse on the other. Put bluntly, the formation of these discourses enables either a full engagement with the reformist government in case of the former, or a complete mistrust towards the 'regime' for the latter. On the other hand, the approach just sketched out relies on a more analytical stance towards the government. The director of the civil society organisation quoted above, now on the transition:

'This is a process. If the government is thinking that it is comfortable for them, that they can control the situation, they will let go a bit. And when they are threatened, they try to control it again. Unless we have a strong government, a consolidated democracy, which might take - who knows - one decade, two decades? [...] Until then, you will see this expansion and restriction again and again. Like what we are seeing in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam. Even sometimes in Thailand.'³⁵⁴

It is an approach of small steps; that envisages changes over a long time horizon. Interesting for my analysis here is the comparison with the formation of discourse with the aid and peacebuilding discourse. Longer time horizons are also an element that is present; for example, in the framework of the New Deal (OECD, 2011c, p. 1) positing that '[b]asic governance transformations may take 20-40 years'. But while this horizon for societal change processes is acknowledged at least in wording, the practices that are enabled in the neoliberal governmentality of the aid and peace *dispositif* are pointing in a different direction. By constituting societal change processes as amenable to project cycle management, changes have to be achieved in the typical timespan of a project: three to five years – if not less. And although it is acknowledged in theory that larger changes – especially in the political domain – may take longer to materialise, the accountability in terms of delivering first results is restricted to the timespan of the project.

The basic structuration of the *dispositif* of managed pacification along the project frame thus gives rise to a system-wide myopia when assessing and planning change processes. The focus on – ideally tangible and clearly measurable – results reinforces a tendency to prioritise quick fixes over long term strategies. This is especially visible in the emphasis that

³⁵³ Interview # 61 (FI1310_61) with an international NGO, Oct. 2013.

³⁵⁴ Interview # 48 (FI1310_48) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

international actors put on capacity building and trainings.³⁵⁵ A political activist thus chastises the quick-fix nature of trainings that are currently popular:

'A lot of training from the NGOs... they give a training on civic education and then history. An attendance training, just a half day. And then after this training, they [the participants] go to the community to give the training. Actually, how many get knowledge from that? In the project view, this is more effective: many people are reached by this information. [...] some trainings are like a brainwash. 'this is good, this is bad', or 'NLD is good, USDP is bad' or something. We see this a lot.'³⁵⁶

To counter these quick fix solutions, civil society organisations usually emphasise the importance of reforming the formal education system in Myanmar. Important to note here is the long-term perspective that such a change process takes, and civil society organisations also explicitly point that out. An example from an interview with a staff of another local organisation:

'Capacity means human capacity. And for human capacity, you need to do studies, or explore or experience. You need to develop. [...] That means that we are not only learning from internationals and whatever. We also started with more opportunities that are here, in our country, that we need to develop and encourage. Especially to encourage youth, to have more that kind of capacity or capabilities to manage their society, or organizations. And related to the government; education policy is also a major critical thing to be shaped. Everything is related with each other. [...] Of course, we have immediate responses, or immediate action that we can learn from internationals, or locally. But for the long term, we have to shape our policy, especially the educational policy.'³⁵⁷

In sum, what these civil society organisations envision for Myanmar's society is a long-term transformation, based on solid formal education. The time horizon of such a transformation is going way beyond the timeframe that is typical fare in the aid discourses and its project cycles. Striking here is that this strategy is also presented as a way to avoid a long-standing dependence on the international community. The same person goes on:

'[M]y personal view is that we still need to depend to some extent, through a certain period, on the international society. Because there are a lot of things that we need to review, or restructure, lots of things to do. That cannot be an effort of ourselves only. Somehow, we have to depend on the international society. But [...] that is the immediate collaboration with the international society. But when the economy is stronger, and the educational system is becoming a proper [one], gradually... Since we also have resources in our country, and when the human resources and the capacity become more developed, only at that time we can start to mitigate the dependence.'³⁵⁸

This points to a paradox of the *dispositif* of managed pacification: On the one hand, its formation of discourse is based on dynamic and change, societal transformation, and transition. And, as I have shown in the chapter on the international discourses,³⁵⁹ the aid discourse also encompasses elements that constitute aid as temporary; making its interventions' highest goal to become obsolete in the long run. On the other hand, the project

³⁵⁵ See section 5.3.2 above.

³⁵⁶ Interview # 34 (FI1309_34) with a political activist, Sep. 2013.

³⁵⁷ Interview # 11 (FI1301_11) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ See chapter 4.

cycle structures aid along the three to five years' time horizon, and prevents aid organisations from developing a longer-term strategy that would envision a phase out at some point. Although introduced with the rationale to make aid more efficient, the project cycle also stabilises the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification: It favours the emergence of a sequencing of quick fix solutions taking place within the project cycle timeframe – which are marginalising longer term approaches. In short, the deployment of the *dispositif* of managed pacification is building power/knowledge networks that are here to stay; and not to make themselves obsolete and replaced by a new order that would be independent of international aid.

Typically, it is also the organisations that are following a strategy for a longer-term transformation of the country that are critical of the aid hierarchy, and particularly vocal about its effects. A political activist on the de-politicising effects of aid, and the implications of the project framework:

'INGOs or donor organizations, they never go beyond their mandate. For example [name of INGO], they only focus on HIV-AIDS. So they train some people, to do HIV-work in the area. But the thing is, in a country like this, some people might not agree. These are social issues. And that Myanmar is poor is not the only reason. The [other] reason is the ill political system. But INGOs do not have any mandate to do a context analysis of the country. So they just say: 'you find the HIV-AIDS patients, and then just support them'. So they become just a service delivery organization, without knowing what is happening with this political system. This is how our local organizations become a-political organizations. [...] When they see the issue, they don't see this as a political issue. They don't see this as a social issue. They only see the project. 'Oh, this is a problem, we should write a proposal to [donor organisations name].'³⁶⁰

It is the dissection of problems into projects that this activist also criticises in the following statement, speaking about a consultation with an INGO:

'They said that they want to know what is happening with the rule of law things. [...] But they already determined what the project should be: We will train the judge. We will train the police. We will train the parliamentarians. We said that this is not enough. In the local levels, the people stay powerless to engage with their local village head leader. But that isn't a rule of law thing. So I can start the training here very peacefully in Yangon. But when I go out to the township, it is a bit difficult to organize it. Without having influential people out there. The police will be staying, and listening, and then asking questions. This is still happening. So [promoting] rule of law is not necessarily training the judge; they should also understand the political structure.'³⁶¹

Accordingly, this organisation is not accepting project-specific funding from international actors, fearing that such funding will come with the expectation that they have to follow the specific agendas of donors, and become 'donor-driven'.³⁶²

In sum, these accounts draw a picture of aid and peacebuilding that sharply contrasts with the self-representations embedded in the discourses of these fields. Instead of a coalition of 'development partners', these fields appear as battlefields of struggles for legitimacy, where subjugation and resistance go hand in hand. On the other hand, these examples also show that

³⁶⁰ Interview # 28 (FI1308_28) with a political activist, Aug. 2013.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

discourses and their power effects cannot be understood as deterministic concepts. Using elements of international discourses to strengthen their own positions, local civil society organizations are successfully claiming spaces and legitimacy for their proper role to counter the subjugating effects of the *dispositif* of managed pacification. And in the end, it is exactly in these kinds of struggles where the structure of (future) discourses is constructed.

6

conclusion: the limits of managed pacification

On August 12th, 2015, armed policemen burst into the party headquarters of the currently ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). They swiftly collected mobile phones and computers from those who were present inside, and then stood by as President Thein Sein's supporters met to implement his order: to replace the current chairman of the USDP, Shwe Mann. Although the latter was not in the building, the enforced lockdown of the headquarters by armed policemen ensured that the president's supporters would not be interrupted in retaking control of the party (Hnin Yadana Zaw & Webb, 2015).

The immediate background of the event is not unusual for politics: It is mainly seen as a rivalry between President Thein Sein, and the chairman of the USDP Shwe Mann who had ambitions to become President himself (Hnin Yadana Zaw & Slodkowski, 2015). Noteworthy though is the use of the police to ensure Thein Sein's allies' retaking of the party, which was broadly seen as echoing the purges of Myanmar's histories under military regimes (Hammond, 2015; Hnin Yadana Zaw & Webb, 2015). Accordingly, international actors like the United States have showed themselves concerned over the use of security forces to resolve such a dispute, and Aung San Suu Kyi announced that these events are not what one expects in a democracy (Hnin Yadana Zaw & Slodkowski, 2015).

When looking back on the formations of different discourses in Myanmar I have outlined earlier, it becomes clear that also the interpretation of this event and the statements of different actors were following the basic formation of the respective discourses I analysed above. For the proponents of the human rights discourse, this event was another proof showing the current government's 'true colours'; and Aung San Suu Kyi declared that it 'is now clear who is the enemy and who is the ally' (Hnin Yadana Zaw & Slodkowski, 2015).

In the formation of the aid and peacebuilding discourses, these events will be given a different standing. In attempting to uphold their internal coherence, these discourses have to rework these events to make them fit the narrative of a genuine transition. What appears as a major incident in the human rights discourse thus becomes a 'hiccup' in the aid and peacebuilding discourses, it becomes a 'teething trouble' of a young democracy in an otherwise successful transition.

But the ‘hiccups’ have become numerous over the last year(s): It became clear that the constitution would not be amended (Aung Zaw, 2015b; Kyaw Kha, 2014), a journalist was killed by the military (Htet Naing Zaw, 2014), and new armed clashes broke out in the North of the country (Kyaw Kha, 2015; Lintner, 2015a).³⁶³ Also in the area the international community was specifically addressing with large programs, recent events have cast doubt on the progress: The European Union has invested considerable effort into training the country’s police force, especially in the areas of rule of law and crowd management (Wai Yan Hpone, 2015). Earlier this year, this police force has made it to the headlines with a brutal crackdown on student protesters (Mratt Kyaw Thu, 2015). Also, there have been reports that groups of thugs have been hired by the government to disperse the protests by force, another strategy reminiscent of the days of the military regime (Aung Zaw, 2015a; Shwe Aung, 2015). Media has argued that the training of the police force ‘is the wrong prescription for a systemic ill’ (Wai Yan Hpone, 2015), thus drawing attention to the structural factors of the problem that cannot be addressed with capacity building alone.

But arguably the largest crack in the success story of the transition is the inter-communal violence, which has begun in June 2012 in Rakhine state and since spread into other areas, accompanied by organised groups promoting hatred against other religions, and widespread hate speech (Schissler et al., 2015; Walton & Hayward, 2014). While the human rights discourse condemned the events in strong terms, even invoking the term of a ‘slow-burning genocide’ (Maung Zarni & Cowley, 2014), and the ensuing refugee boat crisis made international headlines (e.g., see McKirdy & Mohsin, 2015), the aid and peacebuilding discourses mostly treated this situation as a problem of secondary importance. It was problematised as a side effect of the transition, which exposes the population to more liberties and rights than they are used to, or not ready for (e.g., see Gurung et al., 2014). In this sense, the legitimate strategy to address the topic then becomes to act upon the population to make them ready, to educate, and to build capacities – but not to reconsider the basic strategy of engaging with the transition, and considering this engagement as a supposedly conflict-free coalition of ‘development partners’ – a ‘goalition’. At the same time, the formation of the discourses of the *dispositif* of managed pacification excludes addressing the structural dimensions that give rise to inter-communal violence.

In this sense, these examples shed light on the main traits of the *dispositif* of managed pacification: it puts a coalition of ‘development partners’ in charge of reaching the MDGs, ending poverty³⁶⁴, and building peace – but at the same time constitutes a path of gradual, incremental reform as the only legitimate path forward. This glosses over different interests, and political conflicts of the actors subjugated to this ‘goalition’. The basic solution to virtually every problem this *dispositif* identifies, integrates, and is deployed to address relies on building capacity, to allow people, organisations, or states making better choices, projects, or policies. It is the very basic, fundamental principle that structures the power grid of neoliberal governmentality: that people lack the necessary capacities, information, or knowledge. In response to that, they have to be educated and will then be capable of making

³⁶³ In relation to that, there have been reports that the military tried to influence media coverage of the fighting (Sithu Aung Myint, 2015).

³⁶⁴ See section 3.5 above.

the ‘right’ choices. In this sense, neoliberal governmentality produces self-reliant, self-optimising people, organisations, and states – as subjects that are supposed to act accordingly. Structural dimensions of problems – that do not have their origins in the lack of people’s, organisations’, or states’ capacities – are omitted by this order of knowledge.

Broadly speaking, this leads to a constantly renewed call for more policies and interventions that strengthen capacities and supposedly enable subjects to be self-reliant – or in the newer terminology, ‘resilient’, and de-legitimise policies that would address the structural dimension of these problems. Examples for such policies addressing structural dimensions would be (re-)distributive policies that accept that not all inequalities are the result of lacking capacities, but that social problems are the result of specific historic processes that cannot simply be ignored. But (re-)distribution is a red rag in the global order of neoliberal governmentality, and is immediately problematised in terms of creating dependency, as being too costly and inefficient, and as setting the wrong incentives.³⁶⁵ In this understanding, the broader strategy of the international actors to engage with the government on the path of gradual reform and building capacities to bring about development was essentially right. And to counter the problems that have emerged around this transition, it is actually more of this strategy that is seen as the solution – and not a reconsideration or revision of the strategy.

Given that this order of knowledge is deeply entrenched and presented as without alternative, and is profoundly shaping the discursive environment of Myanmar, it remains to be asked what kind of societal change the *dispositif* of managed pacification is able to achieve in Myanmar – and whether this change is deemed worthwhile by the different actors and the broader population.

Evidently, the set of practices and problematisations that are embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification allowed de-politicising certain questions, and to engage with the government under the rationale of pragmatic engagement; and in the framework of a big coalition of development partners. The overall goal of reaching the MDGs has proven instrumental in de-politicising and technicising the debate around societal change: debate may take place on different ways of how to get to the overall goal more effectively or efficiently, but reaching the MDGs – or more broadly, ‘development’ – is not objectionable, and construed as being without alternative.

In this sense, the discourses of international actors and the current government were easily compatible; and the official statements of the Thein Sein administration quickly took up the necessary elements to pass along the fundamental structure of international discourses of aid and peacebuilding. But the main compatibility between the government’s discourse and the discourses of aid and peacebuilding did not so much lie in their commonalities in sketching out the future for Myanmar they envision: It rather lies in their shared understanding of societal change; and of how the latter can be fostered. Both orders of knowledge prioritise incremental over abrupt change; control and planning over emerging and dynamic change;

³⁶⁵ Ferguson (2015) comes to a similar conclusion when reflecting on the fundamental ideas underpinning international policies to ‘develop’ African countries. Duffield (2005), on the other hand, goes one step further and argues that the distinction between ‘insured’ populations in the West, and populations that are constituted as ‘self-reliant’ in the Global South and East forms the foundation of current international policies and interventions – and testifies to global networks of power.

and stability over what they understand as ‘chaos’. Both orders of knowledge constitute an entity that is in charge of managing the process of societal change, namely the coalition of ‘development partners’. This ‘goalition’ encompasses the state institutions, international donors and organisations, international and local civil society organisations; and is acting on what is constituted as everybody’s greater interest: development.

Both entities deploy specific means to fence societal change processes and to keep them within the limits they confine; and to control and discipline, but also influence the conduct of the actors that might have different understandings, agendas, or that are pushing for a more profound societal transformation. In this sense, what the constitution is to the government, the logframe is to the bi-lateral donor and the INGO. In both discourses, these means serve to constitute specific pathways along which change is ‘legitimate’: For the constitution, it is within the means foreseen in the parliamentary political system, which precludes any changes that go beyond the control of the government – and the powerful military institutions who enjoy a *de facto* veto right when it comes to change that order. ‘Taking the people to the streets’ in the discourse of the government is associated with chaos, and is brandished as being outside of the rule of law, thus illegitimate. For the international actors, these means of controlling societal change processes may seem less obvious, as their discourses invoke notions like partnership, local ownership, participation, or empowerment of different actors. But as I have shown above,³⁶⁶ this does not mean that the relationships among the organisations ordered by the *dispositif* of managed pacification are untouched by power. They rely on a neoliberal governmentality whose primary technologies and practices weave a net of different forms of control, discipline, or conduct of conduct. Audits, evaluations, planning processes, best practices, and specific tools like the logframe tie societal change processes to a gradual, controlled form. This does not mean that the organisations embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification would directly oppose, hamper or sabotage other forms of societal change – for instance mass movements, or protests. But with the constitution of the coalition of ‘development partners’, who are charged with the ‘technical’ endeavour of societal change towards more development, the means by which societal change can be ‘legitimately’ achieved are narrowed down. They are narrowed down to the gradual, incremental, way of changing things, which leaves the societal *rappports de forces* mostly untouched. Other, more transformative or even ‘revolutionary’ processes of societal change are excluded, marginalised, and crowded out in the name of stability, or in the name of stabilising the current transition. In short: pacification, instead of transformation.

This is also visible in the country’s economic ‘transition’: Initially announced as the way to offer opportunities and benefits from the ‘transition’ to everybody, it now becomes clear that the economic opening of the country has mainly benefitted the small circle of influential crony networks that dominated the economy already before the transition. If anything has changed at all in this regard, it is not that these networks have marvellously dissolved by the transition to give way to ‘equitable’ development. Rather, these networks have used the opportunities offered by the transition to entrench their control of Myanmar’s economy (Soe Lin Aung & Campbell, 2015). But in the name of preserving stability and promoting

³⁶⁶ See sections 5.3.2 and 5.4.5.

incremental change, these networks have been allowed to do so, and have been excluded from being perceived as an important problem for the ‘transition’.

Noteworthy is that this overall effect of the *dispositif* of managed pacification stands clearly at odds with the self-understanding of the practitioners and organisations this *dispositif* embeds. This professional field is full of people who devote their life to changing the world for the better, fighting inequality, or building peace; and certainly have an emancipatory agenda of transformation. But my analysis has shown the manifold mechanisms by which the visions for broader societal change are subjugated to the plan of the coalition of ‘development partners’; and are excluded from taking part in the debate around Myanmar’s future. At best, the organisations or actors that are not part of the coalition of development partners are consulted on details of a plan mainly developed by an elite.

On a more abstract level, and paradoxically, the neoliberal governmentality that is inherent to the *dispositif* of managed pacification thus marginalises exactly the self-organising and self-regulating societal forces that neoliberalism tasks with solving societal problems – and even posits as more effective as compared to planned state action, or public policy. Neoliberal governmentality – as already observed by Foucault (2004) – does not mean to govern less. It means that governing takes new forms, and gives rise to a complex network of different institutions, practices, and technologies that govern.

On the other hand, this does not entail that the power/knowledge networks that discourses in Myanmar stabilise and crystallise over time are impenetrable or carved in stone. My research into the acts of resistance, reinterpretations and struggles for legitimacy among the different actors in Myanmar has shown that indeed these structures are malleable – especially where they are capillary. For different actors, they are the tactical blocs in an arena where struggles for legitimacy take place, where they try to problematise along their accounts, make their solutions appear as appropriate, or even without alternative, and subjugate and delegitimise other accounts. Accordingly, actors use elements from other (international) discourses to criticise the *dispositif* of manage pacification, are pointing out its unwanted effects, and are even turning its own notions like effectiveness or efficiency against it. In some instances, as exemplified in the office rent debate, these accounts can also go beyond the confined spaces of professional debates and reach a larger public. This debate, but also other related accounts I found when digging deeper into the discourse fragments that are typically marginalised by the dominant discourses of aid and peacebuilding, have shown that there are visions for the future of Myanmar that are clearly differing from what is planned by the coalition of ‘development partners’. And, there are also clearly differing understandings of what appropriate solutions would be to get there. In this sense, the more far-reaching transformation of Myanmar’s society, and the dismantling of the current elites that is currently obstructed by the *dispositif* of managed pacification in the name of stability is present – and the priority on stability and on quick wins in the form of more ‘development’ as proposed by the *dispositif* is not uncontested. And although it is clearly not a levelled playing field, actors are always capable of carving out spaces to do things differently, to criticise and reinterpret specific aspects of the powerful *dispositif* of managed pacification. While this may not directly change the larger arteria of the global order of knowledge of neoliberal

governmentality that underpins this *dispositif*, and which it also reproduces in specific countries, it may change the capillaries of this order. In the end, it is in the small struggles for legitimacy that the structure of future discourses is forged; and the near future will show whose visions will prevail shaping the discourses in Myanmar.

The specific methodological and theoretical position I chose for my research provided fertile ground to critically examine the deployment of specific technologies, the processes of how legitimacy for certain policies is constructed, and how power/knowledge also permeates the professional fields of aid and peacebuilding. It thus allowed looking underneath the ‘cloak of rational planning’ (Mosse, 2004, p. 641) that hides the political nature of both aid and peacebuilding, and which constitutes them as technical, de-politicised endeavours (e.g., cf. Escobar, 1984; Ferguson, 1990; Goetschel & Hagmann, 2009). But while the academic literature so far has mainly noted the existence of these processes of de-politicisation, or networks of governmentality in aid or peacebuilding (e.g. cf. Duffield, 2001b), my analysis enabled me to dig deeper into these processes to dissect their inner workings and to get to a more fine-grained understanding.

Pivotal for this was the combination of discourse analysis specifically examining a broader *dispositif*, with ethnographic methods to examine the latter’s practices and institutions: It allowed delving into the microphysics of power, and closely observing how different practices and technologies like a logframe or an evaluation realise the power effects of broader discourses. Then, it allowed linking that back to the broader, conceptual lines of how it becomes possible that these technologies and practices are seen as appropriate ‘solutions’. In this sense, the methodology guided my analytical gaze towards what is usually marginalised, and subjugated by the dominant perspectives.

This resulted in an analysis of the power effects of specific concepts, practices, or notions that are embedded in the *dispositif* of managed pacification, but which are often taken for granted by the actors in the fields of aid or peacebuilding. My analysis’ perspective thus fundamentally differs from those of practitioners, or policymakers, for whom many of the examined concepts – and the networks of power/knowledge they entail – are ‘normal’. Problematising the notions of effectiveness, impact, or accountability – and the overall fields of aid and peacebuilding – in terms of power relations thus should contribute to a certain awareness for the implications of these concepts and the way they are deployed. For the fields of aid and peacebuilding, whose lofty goals comprise societal transformations, democratisation, empowerment and equal development – all in a participatory and ‘locally owned fashion’ – such an awareness would be the least to live up to their self-declared purposes of ‘bringing development’, or ‘building peace’. This concerns not only the actors that put in the more influential positions in the structure of the *dispositif* of managed pacification: It has also to be read as an incitement to those that are placed at the bottom of these hierarchies – as an incitement to challenge the dominant views, to re-interpret common practices, and to re-politicise what is presented as technicalities or ‘best practice’.

In a broader perspective, my analysis can also be seen as a specific case of a broader phenomenon. Although my analysis focused on aid and peacebuilding, and on Myanmar as a geographical context, it can also be understood as a case for a larger topic that is not only

restricted to the fields of aid and peacebuilding; but which is applying to all sorts of public policy, which have seen a gradual, but steadily increasing technocratisation and bureaucratisation over the last few decades (cf. Hibou, 2015). As my analyses of the international discourses of aid and peacebuilding have shown earlier, the specific ways that these practices are understood, the way that they are enabled by specific problematisations, and the technologies they deploy are not specific to these professional fields. They have their origins in specific historical processes that took place in the West over the last decades, and would not be possible without the rise of an increasingly globalised order of neoliberal governmentality. Similar trends, debates, and struggles take place in virtually all fields of public policy; and the perspective of how specific technologies and practices structure how practitioners think and act can be meaningfully applied to any professional field. In this sense, it offers not only a contribution to the scholarship on aid or peacebuilding, but also more generally to critical policy studies, which devote more attention to how certain policies become possible in the first place – as opposed to examining the different interests of different actors, and their rational decisions and choices; or to evaluate a policy's 'success'. The approach I followed here can also be used for other fields of public policy to take on a critical perspective, to challenge what we usually take for granted, to re-politicise what has been technicised, and to object to what is presented as 'without alternative'.

But also in the fields that I have been in my focus here, my analysis has been far from exhaustive: A future research agenda could include a wider range of actors that also are constituted as part of the 'goalition', but which I have mainly left aside; namely the private sector, or the ethnic armed organisations. While for the former an analysis along the lines of how business actors relate to the overall goals of aid and peacebuilding to create legitimacy for their engagement would merit attention, so would an analysis for the latter of how they construct their legitimacy towards their (perceived) constituencies in relation to the notions of effective institutions. Also in terms of specific institutional settings and practices, and their implications for the networks of power/knowledge, Myanmar offers prospects for more research: immediately to mind come the different multi-donor trust funds that have operated in the country for a while, or the wide-spread use of small grant funds to strengthen local civil society organisations, which contradict different notions of efficiency and upwards accountability that are typical for aid and peacebuilding.

Overall, the specific case of Myanmar epitomises that knowledge, or truth, are always spatially and historically specific. In the months since I wrote my analysis, the country has seen several events that further illustrate how discourses constitute their objects in specific ways, and how the *dispositif* of managed pacification narrows down what can be said and thought about Myanmar's transition, or how actors can legitimately act upon and during this 'transition'. At the same time, these events also illustrate the contingency of the dominant formations of discourse: they simultaneously show contradicting traits of extending freedom and increasing control, of building peace and waging war.

In the last months, the NLD has won the general elections in November 2015 in another landslide victory and has seized a majority of the seats in parliament. But despite that victory, the NLD's leader Aung San Suu Kyi remains barred from assuming the presidency by a

clause in the constitution introduced by the former military regime. Unable to change the 2008 constitution that also guarantees 25 percent of the seats in parliament to the military, the NLD opted to make a close ally of Aung San Suu Kyi president, and she publicly announced that she will be ‘above the president’ already shortly before the elections (Weymouth, 2015). The *tatmadaw* retains control over three key ministries and the right to declare martial law in a system the military keeps referring to as ‘discipline-flourishing democracy’ (Steinberg, 2016). Shortly before the general elections, the government signed a nation-wide ceasefire agreement – but only eight of the ethnic armed organisations signed as well. Other groups abstained from signing at the time, as the government did not allow all ethnic armed organisations in the so- called nation-wide ceasefire agreement (Keenan, 2016). Shortly afterwards, the *tatmadaw* has launched new offensives against the non-signatories (Brang Hkangda, 2015), and there have been reports of armed clashes among ethnic armed organisations that have signed and those that have not – opening a new rift among the armed actors in Myanmar (Keenan, 2016).

One way to make sense of these disparate realities in Myanmar is the *dispositif* of managed pacification, whose discourses, practices, and institutions continuously work to hold these contradicting elements and realities together and incessantly work to make them fit an at least minimally coherent order of knowledge – which posits that there is a transition, and that it is in the greater interest of everybody. This *dispositif* has permitted to ‘develop’ on the one hand, to disenfranchise on the other, to build peace while waging war, and to democratise albeit concentrating political influence in the hands of a few – in short, to confine complex, contradicting societal change processes to a model of planned, gradual, and controlled transition. In this sense, Myanmar eludes – maybe even a little more than other places – an objective ‘truth’. Rather, it is an ever-changing patchwork of different perspectives, realities, knowledges, ‘truths’, and societal *rappports de forces* that make up the entity called Myanmar – or Burma, depending on your perspective.

7

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8

Appendix

8.1 List of interview partners

8.1.1 Formal interviews

- Interview # 1 (FI1301_1) with a diplomat, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 2 (FI1301_2) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 3 (FI1301_3) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 4 (FI1301_4) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 5 (FI1301_5) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 6 (FI1301_6) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 7 (FI1301_7) with an international NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 8 (FI1301_8) with a multi-lateral organisation, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 9 (FI1301_9) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 10 (FI1301_10) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 11 (FI1301_11) with a national NGO, Jan. 2013.
- Interview # 12 (FI1308_12) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 13 (FI1308_13) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 14 (FI1308_14) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 15 (FI1308_15) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 16 (FI1308_16) with a multi-lateral organisation, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 17 (FI1308_17) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 18 (FI1308_18) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 19 (FI1308_19) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 20 (FI1308_20) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 21 (FI1308_21) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 22 (FI1308_22) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 23 (FI1308_23) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 24 (FI1308_24) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.
- Interview # 25 (FI1308_25) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.

Interview # 26 (FI1308_26) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.

Interview # 27 (FI1308_27) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.

Interview # 28 (FI1308_28) with a political activist, Aug. 2013.

Interview # 29 (FI1308_29) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.

Interview # 30 (FI1308_30) with a consultant, Aug. 2013.

Interview # 31 (FI1308_31) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.

Interview # 32 (FI1308_32) with an international NGO, Aug. 2013.

Interview # 33 (FI1309_33) with an international NGO, Sep. 2013.

Interview # 34 (FI1309_34) with a political activist, Sep. 2013.

Interview # 35 (FI1309_35) with a consultant, Sep. 2013.

Interview # 36 (FI1309_36) with an international NGO, Sep. 2013.

Interview # 37 (FI1309_37) with an international NGO, Sep. 2013.

Interview # 38 (FI1309_38) with a consultant, Sep. 2013.

Interview # 39 (FI1309_39) with a national NGO, Sep. 2013.

Interview # 40 (FI1309_40) with an international NGO, Sep. 2013.

Interview # 41 (FI1310_41) with a multi-lateral organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 42 (FI1310_42) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 43 (FI1310_43) with a diplomat, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 44 (FI1310_44) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 45 (FI1310_45) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 46 (FI1310_46) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 47 (FI1310_47) with a multi-lateral organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 48 (FI1310_48) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 49 (FI1310_49) with a multi-lateral organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 50 (FI1310_50) with a consultant, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 51 (FI1310_51) with a multi-lateral organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 52 (FI1310_52) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 53 (FI1310_53) with a multi-lateral organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 54 (FI1310_54) with an international NGO, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 55 (FI1310_55) with a consultant, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 56 (FI1310_56) with an international NGO, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 57 (FI1310_57) with a consultant, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 58 (FI1310_58) with a quasi-governmental organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 59 (FI1310_59) with a national NGO, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 60 (FI1310_60) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 61 (FI1310_61) with an international NGO, Oct. 2013.

Interview # 62 (FI1310_62) with a bi-lateral donor organisation, Oct. 2013.
Interview # 63 (FI1410_63) with a consultant, Jan. 2014.
Interview # 64 (FI1410_64) with a consultant, Oct. 2014.
Interview # 65 (FI1410_65) with a researcher, Oct. 2014.
Interview # 66 (FI1410_66) with a quasi-governmental organisation, Oct. 2014.
Interview # 67 (FI1410_67) with a quasi-governmental organisation, Oct. 2014.
Interview # 68 (FI1410_68) with a multi-lateral organisation, Oct. 2014.
Interview # 69 (FI1410_69) with an international NGO, Oct. 2014.
Interview # 70 (FI1410_70) with a national NGO, Oct. 2014.
Interview # 71 (FI1410_71) with a consultant, Oct. 2014.

8.1.2 Informal conversations

Informal conversation # I1 (IC1310_1) with a government representative, Oct. 2013.
Informal conversation # I2 (IC1410_2) with a national NGO, Oct. 2014.
Informal conversation # I3 (IC1410_3) with a quasi-governmental organisation, Oct. 2014.
Informal conversation # I4 (IC1410_4) with a politician, Oct. 2014.
Informal conversation # I5 (IC1410_5) with an international NGO, Oct. 2014.
Informal conversation # I6 (IC1501_6) with a researcher, Jan. 2015.
Informal conversation # I7 (IC1501_7) with a multi-lateral organisation, Jan. 2015.
Informal conversation # I8 (IC1511_8) with an ethnic armed organisation, Nov. 2015.