

Introduction

Alexander Horstmann

This panel will include scholars working in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia who will examine the present administrative limits of southern Thailand as having an imagined state border and present their research on communities in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia which trace roots and links to each other. More particular, the panel focuses on the borderland, an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialisation which shapes the border identity of the hybridised subject in the contemporary world, eschewing essentialised versions of the nation-state= a people= a culture as a natural set and reconsidering the center/ periphery scope by national center sights (cf. Gupta and Ferguson).

The authors in this volume are interested in the cultural complexity of the border region as well as on the transformation of minority-majority relations in time and space. Underlining the cultural diversity of the border region, the patterns of settlement on the Malaysian peninsula and the cultural influences from China, Indonesia, India and the Middle East come to the fore. The panel takes interest in the imagining, unmaking and deconstruction of the nation at the juncture of the border. The local border culture may well illustrate one of the fundamental paradoxes of modernity. While the border is a symbolic expression of the state, it is our view that practices of border-crossings and transnationalization question essentialised concepts of national identity and national culture. Developing the cultural landscapes of the Thailand-Malaysian borderland in ethnographic detail, the authors in this volume show how identities are made and unmade in border-crossing networks, detail the migrant circuits and religious networks, operating on both sides of the state border.

As a result of academic specialisation, scholars working on either Thailand or Malaysia helped to reproduce the centre sights. We are used to present our papers in the framework of international conferences on Malay/ Thai Studies. We propose to overcome the national borders in our heads and to show in empirical detail how border-crossing actors operate in the Thailand-Malaysian borderland, shape spaces which transcend political borders and, as a result of continuing transnationalisation of space, may change the relationship between the two countries.

Cultural Landscapes of Buddhists and Muslims

Many scholars have been preoccupied with social space in Southern Thailand, focusing on the cultural landscapes of Buddhists and Muslims in Southern Thailand and on their way of coexistence (Nishii, Chaiwat). Scholars show that religious Buddhist and Islamic grassroot movements are now taking root in Southeast Asia as a whole, encompassing local communities in neighbouring countries, criss-crossing political boundaries and forming new communities. Muslim spaces in Pattani extend to Malaysia, Egypt and Saudi-Arabia (Horstmann 1999, Farouk, Stauth)

Open and Closed Borders

Roughly, we can distinguish between main border periods. We contend that the nineteenth century was characterised by an open border in which ethnic identities have been fluid. People did not need to care about visas. Only after the border has been fixed in response to colonial pressure, did people enter into a closed border period.

Ethnic Minorities and Border-Crossing Networks

As shown above, a lion share of the panel is due to ethnic minorities and to their border-crossing practices. Looking into the differential incorporation of ethnic minorities into the space of the nation-state, the contributors show how ethnic minorities in the border region in multiple ways transcend the political border and outflank the disciplinary mechanism of the nation-state.

Ethnic minorities have become minorities in the formation of the modern nation-state in the first place. Cut off from their motherland, bound up with the mighty nation-state, and subject of suspicion or even persecution, ethnic minorities are trapped minorities (Rabinowitz, Horstmann 2002). Ethnic minorities have been in the region for hundred of years, maintain kinship relations and share basic cultural attributes with their neighbour- religion and language. Border-crossing is not a new social phenomenon. Mobility across the border was the normal affair. The session aims to explore the networks and circuits which emerge as a result of intensifying border-crossing as well as the spaces of everyday life. Practices of border-crossing are not a nonlinear movement from one society to the other, but represent movements which encompass local, national and global spaces. The Chinese in Thailand and Malaysia, the Thai minority in Northern Malaysia, the Malay minority in Southern Thailand, and the Moken (Chaw Lae) are minorities who share established ties across the border. The Chinese Diasporas had business networks which transcended the political borders of the nation-state. More recently, Hamilton observed a revival of Chinese identity in Southern Thailand, with Chinese festivals attracting Chinese tourists not only from Malaysia, but as far as Singapore. During the Chinese New Year, the Chinese use the religious urban space of Hatyai to celebrate their Chinese identity. Malays migrants from Thailand are fishing in Malaysian waters, working on the rice fields or plantations, as labourers on the big vessels, in the restaurants and factories.

Borderlanders

The result of papers drawing on everyday life in the border area may result in a typology of border people, sketching detailed biographies situated in the border framework. One of the main questions asks: How do border people organize their everyday life in the context of border-crossing? It would be a mistake to assume that the minorities are a priori victimised by a powerful state. Rather, our question is interested in borderlanders as agents of change. Exploring the routes which border people pursue, the traces they leave and the strategies which they develop, we discover the creativity in which communities at the border transform the border area.

Social Space

The panel aims to bring local border cultures onto the stage and relates them to national and global spaces, thereby centering the margin. Contributors focus on the complex interaction between border communities- small traders, sea gypsies, fisher folk, religious movements, etc. and the state. As Walker has stressed, the activities of local communities (migrants and traders) should not be just analyzed in a David-Goliath perspective. It is crucial to recognise that movement, articulation and resistance of local communities occur within the dominant institutional rules and dominant discourse which has been set up by the nation-state. Globalization is about mobility (or human flow, Miyazaki 1998). We propose to study the transcendence of borders (by practices of crossing them) as well as the formation of new borders. Border communities become subjects to immigration policy of the state. It is no exception to hear about Thai immigrants in Malaysia or Burmese immigrants in Thailand to be beaten up in police stations or held in prisons.

Routes of Theravada Buddhist monks from Bangkok to Singapore via Songkla and Kuala Lumpur encompass a rural Wat in the Kelantan plains, forming a cultural landscape, imagined community which criss-crosses political boundaries (e.g. Johnson, own data). Buddhist monks become travellers, establishing pluri-local spaces, weaving together Buddhist agents across substantial spatial distances. While Buddhist monks have been in touch at the turn of the century in the era of Rama IV, they did not fly in airplanes, did not communicate on the internet and did not enjoy the financial support of the Malaysian Chinese. Islamic grassroots movements extend from Pattani in Southern Thailand to Minangkabau society in West Sumatra. Religious leaders are the most important agents of transnational religious spaces.

Not least because of the economic differences between Thailand and Malaysia and the relative impoverishment of Malay fisher folk in Southern Thailand or Thai peasants in Malaysia, whole villages are migrating to the economic centres of Malaysia and Singapore. Although figures are very uncertain (not least because the state does not fully control the movement), there are well over 100 000 (Malay) Thai citizen working in Malaysia at a time. We have to study the movements between home and other locations in Thailand, Malaysia and beyond, and to sketch the networks and circuits which emerge as a result of border crossings as a way of life. Locality has to be re-conceptualised in the context of border crossing movement.

The implications of movement and travelling for the concept of culture have been emphasised (Clifford, Eickelman). Intensifying cultural contact and cultural globalization has not resulted in tolerance. Instead, we observe dramatic polarization in the border area. This brings me to the most important topic of border identities: the construction of narratives of the self and the other.

Border identities

Border seems to be tautological, as every nation-state involves borders. In the present spiral of narratives of the self and the other and powerful essentialisms in the context of cultural globalisation in both Thailand and Malaysia (Horstmann 2000, Horstmann/Schlee 2001), ethnic minorities and migrants are confronted with humiliating stereotypes, discrimination and state violence. Human rights violation, humiliating practices and stereotypes against ethnic minorities are not new, the Muslims had to endure the role of the other (khaek) for a long time. Thongchai is even arguing that narratives of the other are inscribed into the formation of the (Thai) nation-state. The Thai Buddhist in Malaysia are confronted by Islamisation zeal and increasing isolation. Images of the bogey man are emerging around illegal migrants in Malaysia (Karim). The Bumiputra Malays are distinguishing themselves from the Muslims Thais, although they share most of the culture, language, religion and even kinship relations with them. In the context of their regular border-crossings to Malaysia, Muslims from Southern Thailand are called Orang Siam. Likewise, Muslim brides from Thailand are looked at with suspicion and distrust as Muslim women from Thailand are seen to give in to male domination and to threaten spaces of Malay women. Malay women are not solidarising with Thai women (Carsten 1999, Horstmann 2002).

The Wall, Smuggling and Sex-tourism

A wall has been erected to protect Malaysia from cultural pollution , originating from Thailand. In this symbolizing, illegal migrants from Thailand are perceived as criminals and carriers of disease, bringing in rampant problems of smuggling, theft and drug addiction. Thai

women are seen as inducing Malaysian men of being unfaithful, breaking up the Muslim family. In short, Thailand is seen as the origin of illegal border-trade and sex-tourism.

Smuggling would not have been possible without the tacit cooperation of senior border officials. As Walker shows, traders establish intimate relationships with border officials in order to negotiate tax (Walker). The traders make a profit from smuggling from Malaysia into Thailand and the border officials raise huge incomes through their strategic position at the international border. Cross-border trade at Thailand's borders with Burma and Cambodia raises huge profits, with the Thai-Malaysian border being no exception. Brand-new electronic goods find their way from Singapore to Thailand, and are on sale on markets in Haadyai, attracting tourist shoppers from Bangkok. Haadyai has become a heaven for consumers, looking for entertainment, shopping, eating, and sex. Malaysians are queuing up in Satun every weekend to spend a day or two in bustling Haadyai.

Like smuggling, sex-tourism on the Thai side of the border is a phenomenon because of the border, generating huge incomes for a mafia which is closely cooperating with the police and the local government, business as usual. Nothing does prevent Malaysian tourists to book on travel tours and to benefit from cheap sex which is available in Thai border towns. In the weekend, the hotels in Betong are fully booked by Malaysian sextourists. While the Malaysian government is debating cultural pollution, it cannot hinder Malay people in the border area from watching Thai television.

Immigration policy

The physical border does not only consist of symbols, permanent police raids in the border towns and arrest of migrants add to the fact that the Malay government is tightening its belts. Violence is sometimes used to prevent migrants from seeking illegal re-entry in Malaysia.

Workers from Thailand join Bangladeshi, Indonesian and Burmese workers, monopolising jobs in certain sectors like domestic work, plantation, construction work and contract cleaning, massively contributing to Malaysia's wealth. Malaysia, heading towards a fully-employed society, seems to follow a highly ambiguous immigration policy which is either cracking down on illegal immigrants or turning a blind eye on the borderlanders whose labour power is needed on dire straits. Horstmann describes how Thai-Malaysians who have obtained citizenship much earlier, resume the role of a broker exploiting the labour power of loosely related kin by mediating with Malay authorities on their behalf. The point which is underlined is that kinship relations, while they are still alive, now resume a changing and- in the case just described- exploitative function, a configuration which mirrors the growing gap between Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia.

The New Face of Citizenship

Citizenship has become a precious resource for national minorities, defining legal rights, for some and an instrument of social closure for others.

Thus, the networks of border people are changing the meaning of cultural as well as political citizenship. In the discourses of the state, double identity card holders are called trouble makers whose practices of participating in more than one national polity are criminalised. The inability of the state to purge the practice of holding multiple passports show that post-national belonging has become a new reality. Yusoff shows that Buddhism is central to the reproduction of Thai identity in Kelantan. These studies are important, because they show that national minorities are

using the cultural space for distinct cultural and religious practices. Yusoff shows that the Buddhist sangha in Kelantan depends on the Malaysian-Chinese and on the Thai Buddhist sangha for its survival and reproduction. In more recent research, Yusoff and Johnson found that the relationships of Buddhist monks in Thailand and Malaysia have intensified. The presence of religious officials and high-ranking Buddhist monks from Thailand in a funeral ceremony in Kelantan changes the character of the local ritual, integrating it in the Thai national system. Cultural life is now combining elements from locals in two or more countries in the everyday border-crossing, producing new bricolages and creolised identity (Hannerz).

Gendering of Border-crossing Practices

Border-crossing practices are gendered and the gendering of border-crossings is one of the most interesting dimensions of the new reality at the border. The Thailand-Malaysian border is known to be a big brothel for Malaysian tourists. Border towns on the Thai side of the border at Sungai Golok or Betong specialise in prostitution. Another aspect is the migration of unmarried and married women from Thailand to Malaysia. In Pulau Langkawi alone, there are 2400 official marriages of Malaysian men and Muslim women from Thailand (own data).