

Collective Action in Burma

A study on the effects of changes in the political opportunity structure on the mobilization process of the democratic movement

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Introduction

Is Burma¹ on its way to becoming one of the most remarkable cases of turning an autocracy into a democracy? Looking at the mainstream media coverings it certainly looks that way. Even in the Netherlands a renowned newspaper, *de Volkskrant*, wrote an article with the title 'Met bier en bankieren naar Birma' (Giebels&Righton 2013:10). Translated this means 'With beer and bankers to Burma'. The article goes on about how it is the perfect timing for Dutch companies to invest in Burma. Until recently all Western influences were kept out of the country and Western companies were restricted to invest in the country. The European Union and the United States imposed sanctions on Burma since 1988 because the Burmese regime could be characterized as one of the cruellest regimes in the world (Keane 2013). These sanctions are currently being lifted because of certain positive reforms made by the Burmese military in the latest years (Keane 2013;BBC 2012).

The reforms the military have implemented are significant and seem democratic in nature. In 2011 the military government handed over power to the civilian government. Pedersen calls the transition from military government to civilian government 'the biggest political transformation in the country in fifty years' (Pedersen 2011:57). Ever since the SPDC² introduced the "Seven-Point Roadmap to Democracy", back in August 2003, it has been the starting point of change (Pedersen 2011:52). Or at least the talk of change began. 'The first step of the roadmap, the reconvening of the National Convention to finalize the principles for the new constitution, was completed in September 2007 and the third, the drafting of the new constitution, in February 2008' (Pedersen 2011:53). The election of 2010 was the fifth step (Pedersen 2011:53). The final step is the building of "'a modern, developed and democratic nation'" (Pedersen 2011:53). All these reforms could be seen as signs that Burma is on its way to become a genuine democracy.

These political changes have an effect on a lot of levels in the Burmese society. One of these things are social movements and social movement organizations. To define what a social movement is I use the definition of Jenkins. There is a distinction between social movement 'defined by broader goals and/or interests, and social movements organizations (or SMOs) defined by particular organizational structures' (Jenkins 1983:540). 'Moreover, most social movements contain multiple SMOs' (Jenkins 1983:542). Therefore, I will not only focus on a social movement in general but I will also look at social movement organizations that represent the general social movement.

I chose to focus on the democratic movement. In this complex maze were almost anything can be called a social movement it is important that I define at what social movement I am going to look. The democratic movement has a long history in the country (Oishi 1997:1). Furthermore, it is also a practical choice because most empirical evidence that could be cultivated is on the democratic movement; and because the political changes are taking place it seems logical to focus on a movement with political goals.

According to Minier a democratic movements has to satisfy three characteristics. 'First, it must be fairly large in scale, relative to the population of the country' (Minier 2001:998).

¹ Since 1989 the Burmese government changed the name Burma to Myanmar; this without the consent of the civilians of the country. In this thesis I will use the former name.

² The political party of the military government.

'Second, the people must express their desire for democracy physically' (Minier 2001:998). 'Finally, the movement must be explicitly pro-democracy' (Minier 2001:998). For this paper I also added a fourth criteria and that is that the strategy of the movement and organisations has to be strictly non-violent.

The democratic movement in Burma is best known for Aung San Suu Kyi leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD). She is the daughter of late general Aung San leader of the independence movement in 1945. She is also a renowned Nobel Prize laureate. Although technically the NLD is now an official political party I still count the NLD as most prominent pro-democracy social movement organization because it is the biggest democratic force in the country and it fulfils the four criteria mentioned above.

The research question of this thesis is: 'How have major political changes affected the mobilization process of the pro-democracy movement in Burma from 2008 till present day?'. To answer this question I am going to use the collective action theory. This theory consists of three essential components. It researches the framing process, mobilizing structures and opportunity structures of social movements (King 2007). In the literature it is often described that framing processes, mobilizing structures and opportunity structures have an interactive relationship; they all affect each other (King 2007). Since there are significant reforms happening in the country it will be interesting to see how these affect the democratic movement.

In order to answer my research question I have formulated three main sub-questions. The first sub-question I am going to answer is: How have the political changes in Burma affected the opportunity structure of the social movement? The second sub-question that I will discuss is: How have the political changes in Burma affected the framing process of the social movement? The final sub-question I am going to look at is: How have the political changes in Burma affected the mobilization structure of the social movement? However, the first part of my thesis will be dedicated to explaining the situation/past conditions wherein the current social movement came to being and had to operate in. Further, I will explain the theory/the analytic frame I am going to use to find an answers to my research question. Finally, I will briefly explain the methodology of my research. I conclude my thesis with answering the research question.

I will discuss the political opportunity structure first. This is necessary for answering my other sub-questions; my other sub-questions revolve around the question how the change in the political opportunity structure affected the framing and mobilization process.

Part 1: Situation, Theory and Methodology

1.1 Situation/Historical overview.

In this part of my thesis I will set the historical context of Burma. In order to answer my research question, it is important to know the political context to understand the rules of the game; because the political context and the rules of the game shape the choices that are made by the relevant actors (Meyer 2004:128). Although Steinberg states that the years of civilian government from 1948 till 1958 and 1960 till 1962 were by no means any freer than the following years under military regime (2010:60-61), I will start this historical overview in 1962. This is the year General Ne Win took over power. I do this because this is the beginning of the governmental system that we know today and because from then on Burma became one of the most isolated countries in the world (They Call it Myanmar 2012: ActionAid 2012; HRW 2011). I could never do justice to the complex history of the country and because I have only a certain amount of words to spare I chose to focus on three major tragedies in the history of Burma. Namely, the student uprising of 1988, the Saffron Revolution of 2007 and the nature disaster of 2008.

From 1962 till 1988 Burma was ruled by the Revolutionary Council (RC). The man who held most power was General Ne Win, commander of the armed forces (Steinberg 2010:63). The RC placed all legislative, judicial, and executive powers in the hand of Ne Win (Pedersen 2011:51). According to Steinberg the military coup under Ne Win had four goals. The first goal was to 'ensure that the union of Burma would not be dismantled through minority secession' (Steinberg 2010:62). Even today, Burma is the home of many ethnic minorities; the four biggest groups are Burman, Shan, Karan and Rahine (ActionAid 2012:4). There are around 100 national races all with their own dialect (ActionAid 2012:4). Till this day the ethnic minority issue is one of the most pressing problems the country has to face (Channel NewsAsia 2013). Thus, you can see why that would be one of the goals. The second goal was to 'free Burma from what the military regarded as incompetent and corrupt civilian rule' (Steinberg 2010:62). The third goal was to 'strengthen the socialist base of the economy' (Steinberg 2010:62). This meant that no foreign influences were allowed. The last goal was to 'provide the foundation for the perpetuation of military hegemony over the state either directly or indirectly through a civilian front government control' (Steinberg 2010:62). His goals all succeeded except for the third goal. During this period Burma, once the biggest exporter of rice and home to a lot a natural resources, became one of the poorest countries in the world; and it still is (Chowdhury 2008:5; Aictionaid 2012:4).

Although there were many protests in the country during this period, mainly by students, it took until 1988 for a nationwide protest to occur (Shock 1999:358-359). This uprising started as a protest against killings of students by the riot police, but became soon a wide spread pro- democratic and anti-regime protest (Shock 1999:358-359). This was a pro-democratic uprising (CSS 2012:1). General Ne win promised election but made it clear it was on his term and threatened that future demonstration would be met with violence. This did not stop the protester. It was after the first round of killing that Aung San Suu Kyi was asked to speak at a rally in Shwedagon and became the face of the democratisation movement (BBC This World 2012). Three weeks after the speech the military declared martial law and cleared the streets, killing 30000 people (BBC This World 2012).

After the uprising Aung San Suu Kyi had gained national recognition and founded the NLD to participate in the 1990 elections (Chowdhury 2008:5; BBC This World 2012). The NLD won with a landslide but the military annulled the elections and placed Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest (BBC This World 2012). The military imprisoned all the new elected MP's and everything went back to the way it was (BBC This World 2012).

Andrew Selth, Research Fellow at Griffith Asia Institute explains that the opposition movement fell in to two broad sides after the uprising of 1988 (Selth 2008). One became sided with the ethnic guerrillas, this is a still ongoing war in the border areas of Burma. And the other fell in the non-violent movement with the NLD of Aung San Suu Kyi.). According to Pedersen the democratic movement never gained its full strength after 1989 (Pedersen 2011:52).

After the 88 uprising the government regime tried to restore the faith of the people. They did this by changing the name from Burma to Myanmar and the capital name from Rangoon to Yangon (They Call it Myanmar 2013). The change of names supposedly represent the fact that Burma is the country of all the ethnic minorities instead of the only the Burman people (They Call it Myanmar 2013). In the documentary Burma VJ the narrator states that nothing changed after the 88 uprising (Burma VJ 2008). The military staged a consent coup so that military power could continue (Steinberg 2010:81). The RC changed its name to State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and continued to rule (Steinberg 2010:81).

From 1992 to till 2007 there were never any major uprisings like 1988 (Chowdhury 2008:5). The government put down any sign of insurgency with arrests, torture, and political executions (Chowdhury 2008:5). The citizens were also controlled by undercover agents that would arrest anybody who spoke negatively about the military (They Call it Myanmar 2013). International sanctions were placed on Burma after 1988 but they did not make any significant difference and only made Burma more isolated from the West (Chowdhury 2008:5).

Then came the nationwide uprising of 2007. This is also called the Saffron Revolution, for the colour of the gowns of the Burmese Monks (Burma VJ 2008). It started when the military stopped the subsidies for the fuel (Burma VJ 2008). But just like in 1988 it quickly became a protest against the military regime. In August hundreds of pro-democracy campaigners and NLD supporters started to march through the streets of Rangoon (Burma VJ 2008; Chowdhury 2008:6). These protesters were harassed and beaten, this lead that the Monks began to join the protest (Burma VJ 2008). The monks were attacked by pro-government militia and this lead to new waves of protest marches all around the country (Burma VJ 2008).

The government reacted to the protest just like in 1988 by mass arresting, torturing and murdering people (Chowdhury 2008:6). According to the UN Human Rights Council 31000 civilians died (Burma VJ 2008). The protest stopped eventually and everything, just like in 1988, went to the way before (Burma VJ 2008).

Shortly after the tragedy of 2007, Burma was hit by a Cyclone. Although the government stated that they issued warnings, it resulted in a disaster of devastating proportions (Steinberg 2010:140). The official estimate is that 138000 people lost their lives (Steinberg 2010:140). Burmese government downplayed it and pretend they were in full control of it and repairing everything (They Call it Myanmar 2013). Outside help was not permitted. On

Bangkok airport people full with supply were waiting ideally by but they were not allowed to enter the country (They Call it Myanmar 2013). This disaster showed that not until recently the government was still very much afraid of foreign influences (Steinberg 2010:140). Furthermore, the reaction of the government sums up the essential flaw of the regime namely the low priority it has for human rights and welfare (Steinberg 2010:140).

With this I will conclude the description of the short overview of the Burmese history. Since 2008 the situation in the country started to change rapidly mostly in the political sphere and these changes will be discussed in the next chapter of this thesis.

1.2 Theory/Analytic Frame.

The analytic frame I use to answer my research question is collective action theory. In the abundance of literature on social movement theory it is hard to find one uniform base of literature. Some scholars talk about political opportunity theory others talk about resource mobilization and some scholars talk about framing processes. I used all these different approaches and used a combination of different definitions on the concepts that these scholars use.

My research puzzle consist of several theoretical concepts. I broke down the puzzle in four theoretical components; social movement, political opportunity structure, framing and mobilization. The concept of social movement is already discussed in the introduction. The other concepts will be discussed in the respective chapters.

1.3 Methodology.

To answer my research puzzle I had to collect empirical information. First I needed information on the political changes that are happening in Burma. This includes the policy and constitution changes. I was be able to get information on these topics from the independent news website of Burma dvtv.com. I also used information of political changes from the international media for example from the BBC. I also used reports of Human Rights Watch that follow the changes in Myanmar closely on improvement on Human Rights issues. And I used a report of the International Crisis Group.

Secondly, I needed information on social movement organizations prior to 2008 and after 2008. With secondary literature I have informed myself of existing social movement organizations. I have found important organizations 88 Generation, Generation Wave and All Burma Federation Students. I used <http://uscampaignforburma.org/> and <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/> because they are in contact with Burmese social movement organizations. Moreover, I used these sites because they are in English. I also looked at the social media pages these organizations use because sometimes they posed some information in English.

Thirdly, I needed information on what the goal is of these organizations and how they frame their goals. This I can achieve by looking at the websites of the organizations. Here for I used youtube and international media websites.

Finally, I needed information on mobilization process of these social movement organizations. Again I used the information of dvtv.com, the websites of international media and the websites of social movement organizations. These websites and newspaper articles provided me with information about how the leaders mobilize collective action, what the

political goals are of the leaders, what strategy they employ to achieve their political goals, how participant are being recruited, how supporters securing the control over resources, what kind of resources are crucial to the organization, how they are raising funds, what the perceived cost and benefits are of the participation.

1.4 Research Significance.

It is relevant to do research on this subject specifically in Burma because Burma has been one of the most isolated countries in the world (HRW 2011). The fact that it is now opening up makes that social movements are now more researchable. In general it is important to use this opening in the country to do research on all kinds of academic fields in Burma, not only in the social movement field.

Part 2: Political Opportunity

In this part of my thesis I will answer my first sub question: how have the political changes affected the opportunity structure of the democratic movement in Burma? Thus the component that is crucial for answering my research puzzle is political opportunity. I will use articles of Osa, Corduneanu-Huci, Koopman and Meyer to give this chapter its theoretical basis. I will start with defining what political opportunity is according to the literature and then I move on to the empirical data that suggest that the political opportunities in Burma are affected by the political changes over the last six years. I identified three major changes that affected the political opportunities drastically; the political reforms, the change in state repression, and the change in the policy towards freedom of expression.

2.1 Theory.

Political changes have three basic criteria it needs to fulfil in order to count as an opportunity: it has to be political, it has to be outside the pro-democratic movement, and it has to create an option for action. Meyer addresses the difficulty in defining political opportunity and states that in most researches the definition of opportunity is determined by the sort of movement scholars research and what kind of question they ask (Meyer 2004:134). For this research it was the other way around. Because of the political reform, I am going to look at the effects of that on the democratic movement. To see if this gives them new opportunities for action. Furthermore, the presumption is that political opportunities have more influence on social movements than other opportunities (Koopman 1999:96).

According to Koopman 'almost anything, as long as it is outside the movement, can affect opportunities, but none of these things is an opportunity in and by itself' (1999:96). This means that changes inside the democratic movement are not counted as opportunities.

The final criteria is that opportunities refers to an option for action. These may differ under different states and regimes (Koopman 1999:96). Since the Burmese government is currently implementing changes in regime, it is interesting to see if this change the options for action of the pro-democratic campaigners. Opportunity is according to Koopmans seldom defined but does influence the group chances to mobilize and/or reach its goals (1999:96).

Other researchers have found that 'different factors that create openings for political opportunity in an authoritarian setting. Most mentioned are: elite divisions, changes in state repression, media access, and influential allies' (Osa & Corduneanu-Huci 2003:606). These form the guidelines for this thesis that define which political reforms and changes are significant and which are not. I identified in Burma changes in state repression and media access. I am going to look if these changes in policy of the Burmese government caused changes the opportunity structure of the democratic movement.

2.2 Political Reforms.

In 2010 the first general election in over 20 years was held, this created the opportunity for democratic parties to participate. However, the general elections were highly contested; the opposition parties were facing restrictions and intimidations and the NLD did not participate (Pedersen 2011:55). According to the UK Campaign for Burma the elections were a complete sham (UK report on elections). The military regime made a transition into a civil

political party named the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and won 80 percent of the seats which were up for election. 25 percent of the seats were already reserved for the military (UK report on elections). This sparked a debate between proponents of participation and contesters of participation. The proponents argued that not participating would only make things easier for the military and the contestants argued that participation lend legitimacy to a fraudulent process (Pedersen 2011:50).

Two years later by-elections were held; these elections were found fair enough that the NLD participated (Della-Giacoma 2012). The NLD won 43 seats in parliament of the 48 which were up for election (BBC 2013). It is like what Koopman states 'Opportunities also refers to an option for action these may differ under different states and regimes' (1999:96). The option to vote for a democratic party was first not available, now it is. Now people can show their discontent with the current government by voting for a different party.

However, the analysis report of the CSS states that the democratization process is firmly in control of the military government (CSS 2012:2). The CSS points out that the political events since 2008 have two major trends. The first one is to 'include opposition groups in the consultative processes of governance' (CSS 2012:2). The second one is that 'this effort [to include opposition parties in the consultative process] comes at no prejudice to the military's own political position, which remains strong' (CSS 2012:2). The democratization process thus takes place on the military's own terms.

The reasons behind the process can of course only been guest. The CSS has three factors that they count as the reason why the military is making political reforms. The first one is the economic decline (CSS 2012:1). Many people live on daily wages. Especially in the satellite state areas. Everybody is busy with surviving instead of living (They Call it Myanmar 2012). Furthermore, every person that could contribute to the economic welfare leaves the country. For example if a persons has enough money to be studying for a doctors degree he will study aboard and never come back (They Call it Myanmar 2012). The reason behind this is that the government is controlling every aspect of society.

This economic malaise is, according CSS, the cause for the second and the third reason that the military is making reforms; that is, 'heavy dependence on China (this reason is also supported by the documentary Aung San Suu Kyi: the Choice), and domestic unrest caused by high prices' (CSS 2012:1).

But so the international media describe the political reforms as positive (HRW 2011). Even some internationally imposed sanctions against Burma are being lifted (Keane 2013; DVB 2013) However, the International Crisis Group (ICG) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) caution for these early celebrations of the political changes. These organizations question whether or not these reforms will be for the better (ICG 2009). However, in 2009 the ICG wrote that the elections of 2010 will bring opportunities for change (2009). So that means that the elections are significant and even though the military is still in control.

2.3 State Repression.

Two major changes in state repression can be identified: political prisoners are being released and peaceful protest is no longer illegal. This could bring new opportunities for the pro-democratic movement.

Burma was one of the countries where human rights abuses were at the order of the day but now that is beginning to change. A Human Rights report of Human Rights Watch in 2011 states that there are no basic human rights in Burma (HRW 2011). It describes that in Burma people are arrested arbitrarily and without proper cause. Anyone who is perceived as a threat to the regime is imprisoned. It states that Burma has no independent judging system and living standards are very low (HRW 2011). The people are controlled by undercover agents, that is why people are afraid to speak their minds and trust people (They Call it Myanmar 2012).

However, the release of political prisoners started since the general elections. It all started with the release of Burma's most famous political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi in 2010. Furthermore, leaders of social movement organizations, like 88 Generation, are being released (Harvey 2012). The Burmese government also made the promise that all political prisoners would be released in the New Year. On 31st of December the *Volkskrant* reported that all the political prisoners in Burma were in fact released (ANP 2014). However, on January the 6th the Burma Campaign UK reported that approximately hundreds of prisoners would be left in prison based on political, ethnic and religious reasons (European Network Burma). The European Network Burma also made a statement that approximately 33 people are still detained (Burma Campaign UK 2014). This means that it is inconclusive if all political prisoners are really released.

Another point of change is that since the general elections non-violent protest are permitted when giving permission in advance (Harvey 2012;BBC 2011). Before the general elections any form of contention was met with hard consequences. One only has to look at the uprisings of 1988 and 2007 to see that the government reacted violently to protests (Burma VJ 2008). But also relatively harmless forms of contention like spreading of the image Aung San Suu Kyi on posters, pamphlets and stickers was not permitted (World Economic Forum 2013). Now Aung San Suu Kyi face is all over the streets of Rangoon in the form of posters, pamphlets and stickers (Della-Giacoma 2012;BBC This World 2012).

Unfortunately, this does not mean that the arrest are completely over. The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) reports that two peace activist were at risk at getting a prison sentence because they did not have permission to protest in advance (DVB 2013). Luckily, they were only fined in the end (DVB 2013). Also the DVB reported that citizens of Chin State were advised by the local authorities to boycott a rally of Aung San Suu Kyi on January the 9th (Noreen 2014).

2.4 Freedom of Expression.

In the last two years the freedom of expression in Burma has become more respected right; there are now independent newspapers, freedom to speak one's mind is allowed, and the access to internet is freer.

According to the maker of the documentary *The Road to Democracy (TRTD)*, freedom of speech is on the forefront of a democratization process (SBS Dateline 2013). Not until recently it was forbidden in Burma to have any kind of own opinion. Thinking was not an option (They Call it Myanmar 2012). Independent newspapers and other sources of information were illegal and forbidden. Independent news organisations located in Burma were unheard of (SBS Dateline 2013). If independent news would have any chance of making it to the people it had to be secretive. Reporters for the Voice of Burma had to stay

underground and news footages had to be smuggled out of the country (Burma VJ 2008). The reporters themselves had to hide every so often in Thailand because they were at risk of being imprisoned (Burma VJ 2008).

Also foreigners were not save from the iron grip the government held over its people. During the making of the documentary *They Call it Myanmar* (TCIM) in 2012 it was still not save for the maker, Robert Lieberman, to film. He was advised multiply by random strangers to put his camera away. However, it is notable that in TCIM people are less scared of video cameras then during the time in which the documentary *Burma VJ* was shot. Were people in 2008 would not speak a word in front of a camera people in 2012 are giving their moderate opinion as long as their face is not identifiable.

Human Right Watch reports that after the election of 2010 censorship on media has loosened (HRW 2011). This is also supported in the documentary TRTD from 2013. They report that, since the by-election in 2012, 13 new dailies are being published and distributed (SBS Dateline 2013). However, the Burma Partnership reported that there is still a long way to go. Every piece they publish is subjected to post-production review (Burma Partnership 2013). The Burma partnership calls it semi-censorship (Burma Partnership 2012).

Furthermore, for the first time in Burmese history a stand-up comedian show was held wherein the government was openly critics. Even with government officials in the audience (SBS Dateline 2013). Also, in 2012 the first free film festival was held. People attending the festival stated that they were not afraid to show their movie and to speak their minds (BBC This World 2012). Songs are being performed with lyrics like 'know your rights, we are all born free, no one can control our rights, no one can smash or take our rights, it starts with freedom to think, then freedom to speak, freedom to campaign, freedom to protest, let demonstrate freely' (BBC This World 2012).

Besides that, censorship on internet has loosed. 'The government started relaxing limits on content in 2011, but 2012 was the year that it officially changed its policy on media censorship. It unblocked most previously banned content, including the websites of foreign media outlets that frequently criticized the regime, and stopped requiring journalists to submit content to government censors before publication' (Greene 2013).

There is not a definitive correlation between success of uprisings and internet access, but the organisation possibilities for organisations and movements are increased and easier (Chowdhury 2008:10). This was the conclusion of a research done after the Saffron Revolution of 2007. The researched studied what the influence of the internet was on the success of the Revolution. The impact of the loosened internet access is still limited though because only 1 percent of the Burmese people can afford internet access (Greene 2013). This is also supported by an article on the Irrawaddy. This article states that the freedom of internet has increased the use of social media, and then mainly Facebook, for political activism (Snaing 2013).

To summarize, it has become clear that the political changes have affected the political opportunities for the democratic movement in Burma. Where before the changes the political opportunities were scares and with a high chance of repression, now the repression seems to have loosened and the right to freedom of expression seems to be more respected. These two things shape new opportunities for social movement organisations, like 88 Generation and the NLD. The changes and reforms could be a form self-preservation of the

Burmese military and maybe even a way to stabilize their power. However, the true motives behind the changes do not really matter, the most important thing is that it creates new opportunities that could be used by the democratic movement.

Part 3: Framing

In this part of my thesis I will answer my third sub question: how have the political changes affected the framing process of the democratic movement in Burma? In order to answer that question I researched how the political actor is framing and presenting itself and its cause to the public at large. Secondly, I researched the targets of the political actor's framing process. And finally, how state authorities respond to the political actor's frames and framing activities. However, I will start this chapter with explaining the concepts that I used to answer these questions. The crucial concept of this chapter is framing. I used articles of Benford & Snow for theory and definitions on framing processes. After the theory I will move on with describing the empirical data that suggest that the framing process is influenced by the political changes. I found no significant changes in the framing process of the democratic movement. However, the counter frames and the respond to the frames of the democratic movement do differ greatly.

3.1 *Theory.*

Social movement organizations create frames to structure the world, and frames also perform tasks. Benford and Snow wrote an article on the relation between framing processes and social movements. According to Benford and Snow 'Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action' (2000:614). Collective action frames, the ones of importance for answering my research question, are 'action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimize the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (SMO)' (2000:614). Benford and Snow speak of social movement organizations, notice the word organizations behind social movement, this can differ from social movements in general. The word organization implies that there is some kind of structure. When I discuss the frames of the overall democratic moment this could differ from the frames put forward by specific pro-democratic movement organizations. I will explicitly make clear when I mean one or the other.

Frames have according to Benford and Snow three framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational (2000:615). You can see the analogy this terminology makes with the medical field. In short diagnostic framing means: identifying who the victims are of a perceived injustice (2000:615). In other words what is the disease? Prognostic framing means what can be done about it (2000:616)? How can "we" cure this disease? Finally, motivational framing is the 'rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive (2000:617).

Another article, also written by Benford and Snow and other authors, discusses factors that can influence the success of a framing process; success meaning the ability of the framing process to mobilize people (1986:476-477). This is a fluid process wherein the different aspects constantly are influencing each other. Thus, the framing process can be changed and readjusted when political opportunities change.

3.2 *The Cause and the Goal.*

The democratic movement is presenting itself in general as a movement that wants a stable and genuine democratic system for Burma (BBC This World 2012). Democracy is a very vague concept and to shed a better light on what democracy means for the different political

actors I will look at the specific democratic organizations. I will start with the NLD and then is specifically the ideology of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Aung San Suu Kyi wants a sustainable democratic system (BBC This World 2012). In the beginning of her career as an activist Aung San Suu Kyi explains that the reason she participates in the quest for democracy is because democracy is the only ideology that promotes freedom and strengthens and promotes peace (Aung San Suu Kyi 1988). During the campaign for the by-elections she stated that if a country is so rich with natural resources but still the people are so poor it that because there is something wrong with the governmental system, and that is the reason why it needs to change (BBC This World 2012).

As head of the NLD Aung San Suu Kyi ideology is most representative for the principles and values of the NLD. According to Oishi there are three parts to ideology of Aung San Suu Kyi. 'Firstly, her struggle represents the right of individual Myanmar citizens to exercise their will to establish and maintain personal integrity in an environment which would corrode it' (Oishi 1997:20). The second aspect of the ideology of the NLD is an 'effort to realize the integrity of Myanmar society as well' (Oishi 1997:22). 'The third aspect of her struggle is its incremental, educational and conciliatory nature' (Oishi 1997:23). In other words she believes in the international declaration of human rights should be abide by and she believes that such a system should not come out of a revolution but by negotiation. Her struggle is strictly non-violent (Oishi 1997:23).

Other democratic organizations like the 88 Generation and Generation Wave frame their cause and goal along the same lines as the NLD. Firstly the 88 Generation renamed their organization from 88 Generation Student to 88 Generation Peace and Open Society (DVB 2013). The 88 Generation state on their Facebook page that their goal is to 'build peace and promote the civil society in Myanmar' (The 88 Generation Peace and Open Society Facebook).

On the Facebook page of Generation Wave it says: 'Generation Wave was founded on the 9th October, 2007 with Zayar Thaw, Aung Zay Phy, Moe Thway, and Min Yan Naing all of who were actively involved in the students demonstration in 1996 and 1998 as well as the active, young people for further action to go against the government. This was the time of September Demonstration which was in brutally restricted by the military government. Since then, there have been series of activities which our organization to alert people as a non-violent movement until now' (Generation Wave Facebook).

The "cure" for this disease is according to Aung San Suu Kyi is to establish a rule of law, nationwide reconciliation and changing the mindset of the people. 'At any given time, there is a broad range of opinions among mobilizing organizations and potentially mobilizable citizens about what issues are worth addressing' (Meyer 2004:1390). These are the issues worth addressing for the democratic movement.

The first one is a practical need. People have to feel secure and everybody must have certainty (World Economic Forum 2013). The basis for this would be the 1982 Law of Citizenship. The second step would be to see if it is in line with the international rule of law and see if it meets those standard (World Economic Forum 2013).

Reconciliation is the other essential component of the frame the NLD is presenting. At the Singapore summit in 2013 Aung San Suu Kyi even calls it the main goal (Channel NewsAsia

2013). By reconciliation she means inclusiveness, and not just in material terms. Because Burma is a country too many ethnic nationality it is very important that everyone feels included (Channel NewsAsia 2013). But also reconciliation with the military regime for the past wrong doings they have done (Channel NewsAsia 2013).

This is very hard for the people that have fought the system systematically and now have to work together with the people they fought so hard against (BBC This World 2012). Even more so because the military continues with gross human rights abuses, the use of child soldiers and kidnapping, rape as a weapon of war (BBC This World 2012). However, Aung San Suu Kyi answers they have to work together in order to stop those atrocities and to build a peaceful nation (BBC This World 2012).

How do you get reconciliation? A way to do this is by telling people that the generals are mostly from very poor families. The only thing they could do to escape the poverty is to go into the military. However, the generals have had very poor education and are very susceptible for authority and often are blindly obedient (They Call it Myanmar 2012). Aung San Suu Kyi thinks that they think they are misunderstood, and that they think they are doing the best for their country (They Call it Myanmar 2012). According to Min Zar Aung, a former political prisoner, you can achieve reconciliation through transparency and accountability (World Economic Forum 2013).

The democratic movement wants everybody to change their mindset and get a democratic mind and this thus includes the military government. That is the only way the reforms who are made today will be irreversible (World Economic Forum 2013).

Moe Thee Zun founder of a new political party called Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) states that Burma faces political problems (Bookbinder 2013). He believes the answer lies in federalism (Bookbinder 2013).

The perceived threat is now that, because the military is still in control of the reform process, that the military will reverse the democratization process (World Economic Forum 2013). This issue was addressed in the panel discussion during the World Economic Forum. That the changes the government is now implementing could be just as easily be reversed. Like for example if the military feels that they are losing power. That is why it is important to change the mindset of everybody (World Economic Forum 2013).

However, according to Moe Thee Zun the Rohingya issue³ has driven a wedge between the different political actors of the democratic movement (Bookbinder 2014). According to Moe Thee Zun it is important to stress that not the military but the members of the democratic movement themselves have divided them. It is according to Moe Zee Thun very important that they unite and work together on their issues (Bookbinder 2013).

Furthermore, according to Min Zar Aung it is important that all ethnic groups realize that it is not conflict between the Burmese people and the ethnic groups but a conflict between the ethnic groups and the military. (World Economic Forum 2013).

3.3. The Targets of the Framing Process.

³ The Rohingya is a Muslim minority in Burma who are denied any kind of rights.

The targets of the framing process of the democratic movement has not changed, it is still the military government. When a colleague of Aung San Suu Kyi asked if she believed the president U Thein Sein genuinely wanted democratization she said she believed that. However, to the question if she believed the whole government wanted change she did not respond (BBC This World 2012).

3.4 The Response of the Government and Counter Frames.

The biggest shift in the framing process comes from the government and the counter frames it present as a reaction to the frames of the democratic movement. Before the government portrayed for example Aung San Suu Kyi as a bad wife and propagated that she was a thief and a danger to the country (BBC This World 2012). In 2007 a state propaganda video showed 'oppose those who rely on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views. Oppose those trying to jeopardize stability of the State and progress of the Nation' (BBC This World 2012). This was indirectly an attempt to discredit Aung San Suu Kyi. Government was putting the frame forward they were protecting the people from outside invasions and were keeping the country peaceful (They Call it Myanmar 2013). The military officers often tried to create the image of themselves as "guardians" of the modern Burmese state (Pedersen 2011:51).

The frame put forward now by the government is that it is on a path to democracy. Moreover, the state run newspaper of the country is framing the democratization process as all-inclusive and reaffirms this by meeting with, for example, the former leaders of the 88 Generation Student group in September of 2013 (DVB 2013). President U Thein Sein is framed as the champion of democratic reform (HARDtalk 2012).

Another change is the amount of public interviews the president and his ministers give; where before they would never give an international interview now they do. The minister who gives the most international interviews is Minister Soe Thein. He is said to be the thriving source behind the political reforms (World Economic Forum 2013). Both the minister and the president state that Aung San Suu Kyi is now their colleague (HARDtalk 2012; SBS Dateline 2013). This is of course a big change compared to 2007. It seems that the president is legitimizing the process and trying to gain national and international support.

The way in which the government responded to the political actors framing process is thus very different than before. They still tries to convey the message that they are doing the best for the country, although now by other means. When asked if the changes that are made are irreversible, the minister says yes (World Economic Forum 2013). However, he still states that no one is above the law and the government is still in control of the law. The government is still in firm control of the democratization process and that means that the reforms will take place slowly. This is because the country has been this way for more than fifty years you cannot change that in a day, Minister Soe Thein explains (World Economic Forum 2013).

To summarize, the political changes have affected the framing process of the democratic campaigners. The affects are not as significant as the affects it had on the political opportunities but still it affected the framing process. The most important change is in the way the government reacts to the framing process of the democratic movement. Before the political changes the government reacted violently and aggressively on any form of support for the democratic movement. Now the government is framing its self as a democratic force.

The message they are trying to convey is that they are genuinely making the transition towards a democratic governmental system. Also, the message still is that they are doing the best for the people, trying to keep the country stable and peaceful. The way they do that, they state, is by slowly changing the system and not rushing it.

Part 4: Mobilization

In the final part of my essay I will answer the last sub-question of my thesis. This is: how have the political changes affected the mobilization structure of the democratic movement? The component that is essential for answering this sub-question is mobilization. I will use articles Oberschall, Jenkins and Meyer to define what mobilization means in this thesis. After I explain what mobilization means; I will move on to the empirical data that shows that the political changes that have caused new political opportunities have affected the mobilization process of the social movement. I identified three major changes in the mobilization process; change in the strategy pursuit by the social movement, changes in the perceived benefit, and change in the incentives the social movement is able to offer.

4.1 *Theory.*

‘Mobilization is the process by which a group secures collective control over the resources needed for collective action’ (Jenkins 1983:532). Mobilization is according to Oberschall ‘the capacity to organize: recruitments, fundraising, leadership, internal communication, and decision-making’ (Oberschall 2004:28). These are the two definitions I will use for mobilization.

‘There is, however, very little empirical work that notes how distinct political opportunity variables might affect the relative prominence of particular forms of claims-making differently, as elites or authorities can channel dissent into particularly unthreatening, and perhaps less effective, forms of activism’ (Meyer 2004:136). I identified this happening in Burma. Some former activist for example chose to use the new opportunities like participating in the general elections instead of joining the armed guerrilla groups in the border areas to challenge the government.

However, ‘unfavorable changes in policy can spur mobilization, even at such times when mobilization is unlikely to have much noticeable effect on policy’ (Meyer 2004:137). This can also be identified in Burma.

‘It is essential to trace the processes through which changes in opportunities translate into mobilization –and into subsequent changes in opportunities’ (Meyer 2004:139). That is what this part of the thesis is about.

4.2 *The Strategy.*

In part 3 of this thesis it has become clear that the goal of the democratic movement is a three fold: it wants to establish rule of law, change the mindset of people, and it wants to establish reconciliation. In order to achieve this the different democratic movement has to mobilize people. I will start with the strategy pursuit by the NLD.

To establish a rule of law conform to the western international norm the NLD has to participate in the 2015 elections. When the NLD was first founded Aung San Suu Kyi noted on multiple occasions that she herself did not want to pursue a political career (Oishi 1999:20). She stated that she worked together with non-political groups whose only aim was to bring a kind of democratic system (Oishi 1999:20). However her position changed over the years. Now the strategy is to get Aung San Suu Kyi elected as president in 2015 (World Economic Forum 2013).

To get Aung San Suu Kyi elected as president the constitution of 2008 has to be amended. The Burmese constitution is one of the most difficult constitutions in the world to amend (World Economic Forum 2013). In order to do that they need the full 75 percent of the seats in parliament and one brave soldier to stand with them and after that at a referendum has to be held (World Economic Forum 2013). Thus, according to Aung San Suu Kyi the first thing that needs to be done is make the constitution amendable. Thus, they also needs to change the mindset of the soldiers and make them see it her way. The members of the NLD are doing this by negotiation and discussion.

In order to become in a position where it is possible to negotiate with the military Aung San Suu Kyi had to become involved in politics. During the by-elections of 2012 even when there were only 48 seats to win, she ran for the seats because she explains, at a campaign rally, that only then she can make sure that the voice of the 60 million Burmese people is heard (BBC This World 2012).

The political route is also the choice of Moe Thee Zun. An interview, held by Alex Bookbinder with political activist Moe Thee Zun, he explains that he has political aspiration. Before the reforms there were no means to embrace the political system. That is why he joined the guerrilla rebels in the border areas to fight the military. But now he want to change the country by official channels, now that there is an opportunity to do that. He plans to found a political party named the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) which can participate in the 2015 elections (Bookbinder 2013). This transition of institutionalizing dissent is also identified by other social movements in other countries. 'Government responses initially encouraged additional mobilization, some of the social movement actors turned their attention to more conventional political activity, reducing their claims and moderating their tactics, effectively institutionalizing dissent' (Meyer 2004:130).

But not all the democratic forces have political aspirations, like the 88 Generations states that there strategy is the let people know about their civil rights (DVB 2013). The 88 Generation administrator Zaw Min states in an interview that they do not strive for a political party per se. The group administrator states that "'While Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is working for politics in the parliament, we are working [outside the parliament] to promote civil rights - by allowing people to get involved in the democratic transition. If required for the political transition, we are ready to fulfil any role,'" (DVB 2013). This can be seen as the strategy to change people's mindset.

They do this by organizing gatherings but also by organizing protest for perceived injustices, like land grab of the government (Nai 2013). The 88 Generation organized an open gatherings to express the need for the right to hold gatherings and meetings (The 88 Generation of Peace and Open Society Facebook). A commend on Facebook on this event was that '88 group should go and met with Thein Sein Government again, and talk about those all issues, there is no need to be come out on the streets. I think, it was political propaganda because they had loosing support from new generation and people. The other ways you must tell me, where was your fucking Reconciliation with Myanmar Government?' (Htoo Htoo Facebook). I think this comment makes clear that the message for reconciliation that the NLD put forward is strong.

These protest help increase the courage for people to participate in protests. People are taking more to the streets and organizing demonstrations for like example the increase in electricity prices (DVB 2013). What the case is here is what Meyer describes in his article: 'Protest occurs when there is a space of toleration by a polity and when claimants are neither sufficiently advantaged to obviate the need to use dramatic means to express their interests nor so completely repressed to prevent them from trying to get what they want' (2004:128).

Educational strategies are also being pursued. This is another example of institutionalizing dissident. Zin Mar Aung, a former political prisoner, is now co-founder of the Yangon School of Political Science. After the student uprising of '88 the educational system is not what is used to be. So now the education system has to be reestablished. The Yangon School of Political Science was founded in November 2011 and on the Facebook site it states that it 'envisioned The Yangon School of Political Science has twofold objective: to provide and facilitate the education of a younger, new generation of Burmese so that they will think and act democratically as citizens and scholars, and to make this educational initiative and political outreach accessible to as many communities as possible across different regions of the country.' (Yangon School of Political Science Facebook).

The strategy is thus to use education to create a grassroots level of democratic values. This is I think also what Aung San Suu Kyi means by changing the mindset of people. If people are going to believe in democratic values and think that is the best option and believe in them with whole their heart then the changes cannot be reversible (World Economic Forum 2013).

Furthermore, leaders of Generation Wave also organized a peace protest (DVB 2012). To stop the violence between the military and the ethnic minorities. This also in the name of reconciliation.

4.3 The Resources.

It is easier for the democratic movement leaders and organizations to get resources; among which are human resources and money.

A big change that happened after the general elections of 2010 is that many political activist who fled the country after the 88 Uprising or the 2007 revolution are returning back to Burma (Bookbinder 2013). And of course the release of many political prisoners (World Economic Forum 2013). This means that they can, and many do, take up their work as a democracy campaigner again, like Moe Thee Zun and Zin Mar Aung.

The government is still not funding political institutions that means that democratic organizations have to get funding elsewhere (Bookbinder 2013). Aung San Suu Kyi stated in the panel discussion during the World Economic Forum that she is taking money from individuals in Burma who have made a lot of money of the natural resources of the country but by a corrupt way (World Economic Forum 2013). She states that she rather sees they are spending their money on humanitarian issues instead of buying another jet (World Economic Forum 2013).

Moe Thee Zun also accepts money from cronies and businessman (Bookbinder 2013). He also states that activist can not live from nothing so money is essential (Bookbinder 2013). And since the government is still not giving them money to build democratic institutions this is an obligatory necessity to accept money from cronies and corrupt businessman.

'Furthermore, urbanization and the growth of the mass media reduced the cost of large-scale mobilization, making bureaucracies associations more feasible. Finally, the institutionalization of liberal democracy, especially mass electoral participation, furnished an environment well suited to movement organizations that could mobilize large numbers of supporters' (Jenkins 1983:540). Since I identified the growth of mass media and voting for a democratic party is an option, mobilize more supporters would in theory become easier for the democratic movement.

Social media, like Facebook, is increasingly used for political activism (Snaing 2013). The second most visited site in 2011 was Facebook (BBC 2013). The Facebook page of the 88 Generation has 4278 likes and Generation Wave 2987. Thus a considerable amount of followers considering that online 1 percent of the population has internet access in the country. Organizations use Facebook as a source to organize meetings and debates but also to convey their messages to the public at large.

4.4 The perception of Cost and Benefit of Participation.

Before the political reforms the cost of participation in the democratic movement was very high. Zin Mar Aung served and 11 year prison sentence because she was handing out pamphlets with a pro-democratic text on it (World Economic Forum 2013). Now that the state repression seemed to have loosened the cost of participation is decreased. However, even in 2010 opposition parties of during the general elections had a very hard time in convincing people to join their campaign (Pedersen 2011:56). The parties had few members, and no to little organization infrastructure, and almost none financial resources (Pedersen 2011:56)). So the fear is still deep.

4.5 The Incentives.

On the one hand people in the center of the country, thus those who are living in the major cities like Rangoon, the change is already tangible (World Economic Forum 2013) which could give them the incentives to achieve even more change. Like Aung San Suu Kyi said in the speech she gave when president Obama of the United States came to visit her in her house that the most difficult part is when a victory is almost in sight (Political History 2012). The younger generation who already tasted the fruit of more freedom and wants just as much freedom as they see in their neighboring countries (They Call It Myanmar 2012)

However, another consequence could be that the incentive is decreasing because change is already on its way and is feasible. Where before the democratic movement was able to offer the incentives of a democratic future and country now that process is underway so it may seem that the big work is over and they have won. However, maybe the incentives the social movement is able to offer is now greater than ever because change seems to be in reach. However, 'whereas committed activists may always be trying to mobilize on behalf of their causes, savvy ones adjust rhetoric, focus, and tactics to respond to political circumstances' (Meyer 2004:139). We have seen this happening in part 3 of this thesis. So that could be seen as a way to keep the incentives.

To summarize, the political changes brought new opportunities for the pro-democracy campaigners to mobilize. The risk for participation in activities of the social movement has declined. This is a result of the changes in state repression. In the last few years protests have become more frequent and open. The resources that are proven necessary for

mobilization has not changed significantly. Money and international supporters in still one of the most important things a social movement needs.

Conclusion

This research is based on the premises that circumstances from the outside world affect a social movement's prospect for mobilization (Meyer 2004:126). Here I will argue that the changes in the political sphere has affected the mobilization structure of the democratic movement. I will argue that it the changes have positive and negative effects on the mobilization structure of the movement.

To get an answer on my research question I have asked three main sub-questions. The first sub-question I proposed was how have the political changes in Burma affected the opportunity structure of the social movement? The answer was that the political changes have created new political opportunities. It has brought a new option for action, namely voting for a different political party. The state repression seems to have decreased and freedom of expression has become a more common good. Even though the military is still in firm control of the reform process these opportunities could be used by the democratic movement.

The second sub-question I proposed was how have the political changes in Burma affected the framing process of the social movement? The answer was the political changes have affected the framing process of the democratic movement. The goal of the democratic movement is still to create a genuine democratic system in the country. To achieve this there has to be a rule of law. Furthermore reconciliation is necessary and the mind-set of the people, including the mind-set of the military has to become democratic. A big change is the way the government reacts to the framing process of the democratic movement. The government is framing itself as a democratic force and even calls Aung San Suu Kyi their college.

The third sub-question was how have the political changes in Burma affected the mobilization structure of the social movement? The answer was the political changes brought new opportunities for the democratic campaigners to mobilize. In order to reach their goal they have to get the constitution amended. They have to teach people democratic values. The way they do this is by creating democratic institutions, like for example founding a political university. A new way to reach people is by the internet and social media now that there is less censorship.

Before I answer the research question: How have major political changes affected the mobilization process of the democratic movement in Burma from 2008 till present day? It is important to keep in mind that political reforms do not happen overnight. So 2008 is not a definitive changing point. Another important point to remember is that I only looked at democratic organisations, so ethnic based organisations have not been included. And lastly, this research covers of course only a sliver of factors that can influence a social movement. Other factors could be demographic and economic shifts (Meyer 2004:128).

The political changes created new opportunities for democratic organisations. The political reforms like holding general elections and by-elections made it possible for democratic organisations to found political parties and participate in the governmental system. This was for example the choice of Moe Thee Zun when he founded the DPNS. But also already existing parties like the NLD could now participate in the election.

The decrease in state repression, like the release of political prisoners and the legitimizing of peaceful protest, gives the democratic movement the opportunity to frame their quest for democracy to a wider public by using the dailies but also the internet. The release of political prisoners gives the opportunity for those people to resume their work as pro-democracy campaigners. Mobilizing people is also made easier not organisations can use social media like Facebook.

The end goal and cause of the democratic movement still remains the same namely creating a stable democracy. To reach this goal there is a need for a rule of law, reconciliation and change in mentality. The political reforms and decrease in state repression present new opportunities in order to achieve those three goals. The possibility to use the new political system and the opportunity to create democratic institutions. The possibility to use legitimate ways to reach goals led made present the opportunity to reach their goal by negotiation and discussion.

A possible negative effect of the political changes could be that the incentives the movement is able to offer has decreased because it could seem that the country is already democratizing. However, overall the political changes have a positive effect on the mobilization process.

Possible future research should focus on the instability caused by the ethnic tension in the county. The relation between the democratization and the increase in violence should be topic of future research. A second point of inquire should be the role the international community should/could play in the democratization process.

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