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The Production of Space in Northern Tanintharyi, Myanmar

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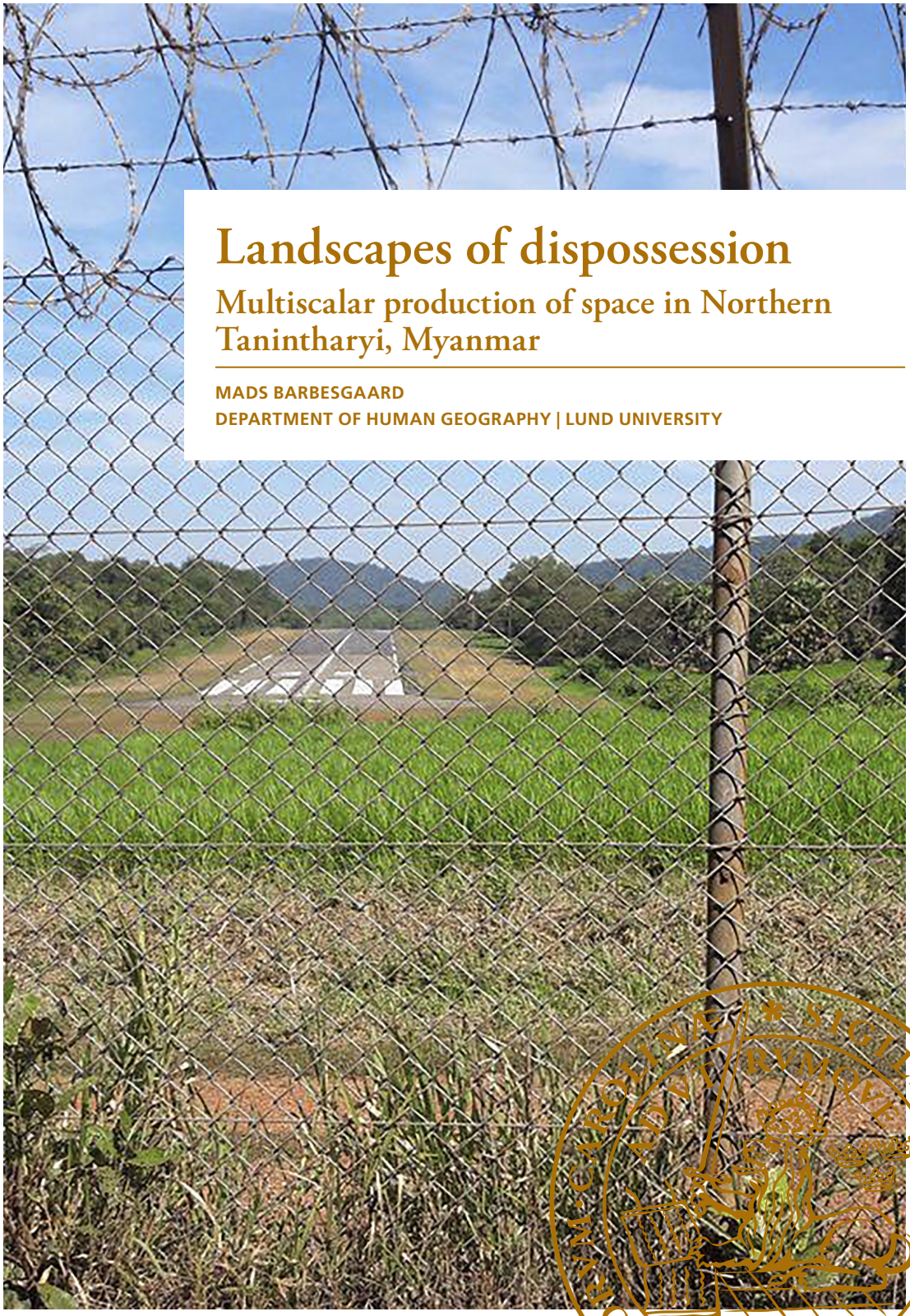
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Landscapes of dispossession

Multiscalar production of space in Northern Tanintharyi, Myanmar

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Landscapes of dispossession



In the context of a resurgent global resource rush, this dissertation grapples with the politics of geography in Myanmar's contemporary so-called democratic transition. The politics of geography, as formulated by the late Neil Smith, concerns who gets what, where, and why and who loses where? As the dissertation argues, these questions are particularly pertinent across rural Myanmar today, as the currently pursued extractive development model is leading to what I call landscapes of dispossession.

The analysis has political implications for struggles against resource grabs in that it points to the common underlying dynamics and drivers of what may otherwise appear as separate and distinct phenomena. Uncovering the cumulative and interactive nature of various interventions into the same landscape and how particular landscapes within Myanmar, across the region and globally, are tied to each other through capitalist development, highlights the necessity of strategies that go beyond the "local" scale and can mobilise and organise rural working peoples broadly.

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Landscapes of dispossession

Multiscalar production of space in Northern Tanintharyi, Myanmar

Mads Barbesgaard



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Landscapes of dispossession: Multiscalar production of space in Northern Tanintharyi, Myanmar

Abstract

Since 2007, rural areas, particularly across the global south, have been ravaged by what has been dubbed a "global resource rush". On the heels of this rush, a new wave of dispossession studies across the fields of agrarian political economy, human geography and political ecology is emerging. A decade into this wave, a series of conceptual challenges in the literature are identifiable, namely 1) the need to develop a deep historical and processual analysis that understands grabbing as enmeshed within broader struggles over the shape and structure of the political economy; 2) the need to bring together dynamics from across sectors covering multiple resources in a given landscape; 3) the importance of examining how multiple actors across time and space are implicated; and 4) understanding how these dynamics across scales cumulatively intersect and interact in specific places.

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to these debates conceptually, empirically and politically. *Conceptually*, the dissertation advances a framework to address resource grabs by bringing together Lefebvre's idea of production of space with a multiscalar class analysis. The ensuing analysis thereby embeds particular instances of dispossession by enclosure ("grabs") within a much broader analysis of the underlying political economic processes that constitute such phenomena. In this view, the momentarily striking occurrences of dispossession by enclosure have to be grasped in relation to the more mundane, but no less crucial, processes of dispossession by differentiation that characterise capitalist development in the countryside.

Empirically, the dissertation contributes a grounded analysis of resource grabbing processes as they play out in three villages in Yephyu township in the Northern part of Myanmar's Tanintharyi division. Following from the conceptual framework, explaining grabs in these villages requires an analysis of the production of the Northern Tanintharyi landscape – what is here called a landscape of dispossession. Empirical accounts of the production of such landscapes in rural areas of mixed ethnicities, such as Northern Tanintharyi, remain limited. With 65% of the population categorized as "rural" and many of them living in minority-ethnic areas, gaining a clearer understanding of their realities is crucial.

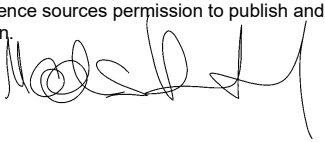
The analysis has *political* implications for struggles against resource grabs in that it points to the common underlying dynamics and drivers of what may otherwise appear as separate and distinct phenomena. Uncovering the cumulative and interactive nature of various interventions into the same landscape and how particular landscapes within Myanmar, across the region and globally, are tied to each other through capitalist development, highlights the necessity of strategies that go beyond the "local" scale and can mobilise and organise rural working peoples broadly.

Key words Dispossession; Production of space; Myanmar; land grab; geopolitics: geoeconomics; Landscape; class differentiation; political economy; political ecology

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Landscapes of Dispossession

Multiscalar production of space in Northern Tanintharyi, Myanmar

Mads Barbesgaard



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In the final days ahead of this manuscript going to print, the yearly monsoon rains led to environmental disaster across Southern Myanmar. Floods and landslides have cut thousands off from food and water and thousands more have been displaced. This is just the latest reminder of the urgency of a more socially and environmentally just form of development in the country. For the little it's worth, this book is dedicated to all those brave people engaged in that struggle. As Gandalf puts it in his debate with the dwarf Balin concerning how to tackle the dragon Smaug: *"Yes, it is difficult. But not impossibly difficult. ... I would say absurdly difficult."*

(Tolkien 1980, 333)

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List of Acronyms

ABSDF	All Burma Students Democratic Front
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
BIA	Burma Independence Army
BDA	Burma Defence Army
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CI	Conservation International
CF	Community Forestry
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma
DDA	Dawei Development Association
DoF	Department of Fisheries
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ERI	Earth Rights International
FAB	Farmland Administrative Body
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KMT	Kuomintang
KNU	Karen National Union
LIB	Light Infrantry Battaltion
LNG	Liquified Natural Gas
LUC	Land Use Certificate
MEHL	Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited
MFF	Myanmar Fisheries Federation
MOGE	Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise

MONREC	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NC	National Convention
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLD	National League for Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party
PA	Protected Area
PTTEP	PTT Exploration and Production
RC	Revolutionary Council
SAMB	State Agricultural Marketing Board
STB	State Timer Marketing Board
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SLRD	Settlement and Land Records Department
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SRIR	Systematic and Reflexing Interviewing and Reporting
TNI	Transnational Institute
TNR	Tanintharyi Nature Reserve
TNRP	Tanintharyi Nature Reserve Project
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
VFV-Law	Virgin, Fallow and Vacant Land Law
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WFFP	World Forum of Fisher Peoples
WB	World Bank
WRI	World Resources Institute
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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There are of course many more to thank, but this is already getting too long - I'll be sure to thank you in person.

Preface: Entering the field

> According to the WDR [World Development Report], the principal task of governments in the 'transforming countries', a category that includes most of Asia, is to manage the transitions out of agriculture for rural populations whose labour is surplus to the requirements of a more efficient agricultural sector. It recommends that rural smallholders unable to compete in higher value production should exit agriculture. … But where will these people go, and what will they do? (Li 2011, 293-294, emphasis added)

> At a high level of abstraction, the current period of globalization is defined by a trilogy of ideal typical economies: super-industrial (coastal East Asia), financial/tertiary (North-Atlantic), and hyper-urbanizing/extractive (West Africa). "Jobless growth" is incipient in the first, chronic in the second, and virtually absolute in the third. We might add a fourth ideal-type of disintegrating societies, caught in a vice of war and climate change, whose chief trend is the export of refugees and migrant labour. (Davis 2018, 7)

Since the 2007/8 financial crises, activists, academics, NGOs, governments and international institutions have been discussing whether and how a new wave of land grabbing has been taking place. The central dispute in this debate is the implications for social and economic development in the Global South. Institutions like the World Bank, cited above by Tania Li, argue that what they call "Large-Scale Land Acquisitions" help facilitate development. Through supposedly much-needed injections of capital and redistribution of otherwise inefficiently used scarce resources, they argue, the famed transition "from farm to factory" of capital and labour could be facilitated (Li 2011, 281). Yet, in countries across the Global South, where this promised transition had only played out in a truncated manner – if at all – such benefits proved elusive for rural villagers on the ground. Particularly elusive that is, in Davis' third and fourth ideal-type economies in contemporary globalization, where there remain few opportunities for people to pursue, once the resources they live off and with have been allocated more efficiently, as the World Bank would have it. Consequently, the global peasant movement, La Via Campesina, and NGO allies from 2008 onwards launched vocal campaigns in opposition to "global

land grabbing" with reference to the detrimental effects this was having on rural populations' material circumstances.

This dissertation engages with the subsequent surge of literature in the fields of agrarian studies, human geography and political ecology that grapples with what was termed a resurgent "global resource rush". I first encountered this literature and the ensuing debates not as an academic, but as an activist in the Danish social justice group Global Aktion in 2010. With many others, I focused on questions concerning the implications of neoliberal globalization across the Global South, working together with different social movements struggling for a more just form of development. In this way, I became engaged with the work of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples. They, I came to learn, were frustrated by the lack of academic and political focus on how similar "grabs" to those playing out over land were unfolding in ocean and coastal spaces.

Eventually, I got in touch with the Transnational Institute (TNI). TNI's Agrarian and Environmental Justice Program had recently published a primer on land grabbing. At a meeting in Cologne, Germany, addressing the sorry state of pan-European trade campaigns at the time, I spoke with Pietje Vervest from TNI about the need to look into dynamics around ocean resources. From this initial meeting, there evolved a two year process, in which a collective of people from TNI, Global Aktion and members of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples developed a primer on what we termed a Global Ocean Grab (WFFP et al. 2014). As I discuss below in Chapter 2, the frame was picked up in a now widely cited academic paper (Bennett et al. 2015), but – we all thought – not in the manner we had hoped.

In tune with the work of agrarian political economists on land grabbing, we saw contemporary ocean grabbing as a corollary of capitalist development. It didn't come down to this or that particular policy and hence any solutions to the contemporary rampant grabbing highlighted by social movements were also much more complicated than simple policy changes. Any solutions were further complicated by the fact that, as movements that work on the ground are acutely aware, grabs do not impact uniformly on homogenous "communities". Rather, they intersect and interact with ongoing processes of rural class differentiation. To adequately understand how ocean grabbing plays out, we thought, it was crucial to see individual grabs as part of broader political economic shifts. Furthermore, through participating and facilitating a process of what has subsequently been dubbed a "convergence" between diverse movements working on land, water and oceans, we became increasingly aware of the conceptual and political limits of focusing on individual resources and

sectors (Tramel 2018). The struggle for control of and access to resources in the contemporary moment of neoliberal capitalist globalisation, required a more holistic analysis. Rather than narrowly examining this or that particular resource, as Lefebvre (1991, 324) has put it, today "questions of underground and above-ground resources – of the space of the entire planet – [are] continually growing in importance."

It was from this point of departure that I started my PhD-position. Through my Bachelor and Master studies, I had gained some familiarity with particularly Marxist geography's concern with, "how space was produced under capitalism and entered as part of an historical-geographical process into the perpetual transformation of capitalism" (Swyngedouw 2000, 44). This, it seemed to me, was an especially useful lens through which to grapple with not just ocean grabbing, but the broader re-workings of control of and access to diverse resources that contemporary grabbing processes involved. As I became more familiar with the vast bodies of literature within agrarian studies, human geography and political ecology that I review below, I found that the hunches in our writing collective were well-founded. Scholars working particularly on land grabbing have argued for the importance of developing a historical and processual analysis that examines individual grabs as enmeshed within broader struggles over the shape and structure of the political economy (Edelman et al. 2013). This entails uncovering how multiple actors – from the state to villagers – are variously implicated in such struggles over time (Schoenberger et al. 2017). Furthermore, rather than a narrow focus on individual resources or isolated cases, the importance of interrogating how grabbing and exploitation of different resources cumulatively intersect in landscapes has been stressed (Baird & Barney 2017; Hunsberger et al. 2017; Thaler et al. 2019).

Myanmar is – tragically – a particularly well-suited place to study the ramifications of such processes and their implications for social and economic development. Today, in Myanmar, local civil society organisations strategically deploy the grabbing narrative to frame their struggles against dispossession through what they call a giant land grab – with the state at the helm of the process. Here it is not simply industrial agriculture, but a wide array of activities spanning mining, conservation, Special Economic Zones, tourism and different energy projects that are leading to significant shifts in control of and access to resources that rural villagers depend on. This dissertation examines the case of Northern Tanintharyi in Southern Myanmar, zooming in on three particular villages in the Yephyu township. Here, rounds of dispossession of villagers from ocean, land and forest resources have taken place since the early 1990s.

Conceptually, the dissertation advances a framework to address resource grabs by bringing together Lefebvre's idea of production of space with a multiscalar class analysis. Drawing on contemporary debates on ongoing primitive accumulation, land is conceptualized as a social relation – rather than a thing. In this view, any particular place is relationally constituted and embedded in broader sets of scaled social relations to other places. This approach aims to yield insights into how historical and current grabs in Northern Tanintharyi have been constituted by and constitutive of Myanmar's state-mediated capitalist transition and regional geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts emanating from the close of the Cold War. The dissertation highlights the importance of analytically foregrounding struggles over rent – particularly to understand the role of the state in resource-rich countries. Rather than emphasizing particular policies or discourses, this firmly embeds grabs within broader structures of capitalist development. Finally, multiscalar class analysis unpacks how grabs differentially impact on people and intersect with existing differentiation processes, in turn, entrenching rural class formation.

Although Southeast Asia has been a key focus in the grabbing literature, as of yet Myanmar has not received much attention. *Empirically*, the dissertation contributes with a grounded analysis of resource grabbing processes as they play out in three villages in Yephyu township in the Northern part of Myanmar's Tanintharyi division. Explaining the grabs in these villages, however, implicates an entire landscape, empirically and analytically requiring a lens not limited by focus on households, a village, a single resource or a clearly defined spatial boundary. Instead, I develop an analysis of the production of the Northern Tanintharyi landscape – what I call a landscape of dispossession. The empirical analysis gradually unpacks the scaled nature of this production – from geopolitical shifts across Southeast Asia, to the influx of Foreign Direct Investment bolstering the military-regime and the intervention of transnational Environmental NGOs, to intricate processes of rural class differentiation in the three particular villages. In this way, the analysis undercuts the prevalent yet obscuring categories of "local community" and "local people" in much of the literature on grabs, with an elucidation of petty commodity production across the fishing, farming and agro-forestry sectors in minority-ethnic areas. Beyond the conceptual contributions, due to the very recent signing of a ceasefire agreement with the main Ethnic Armed Organisation active in Northern Tanintharyi, empirical accounts of all of the above processes are still limited in rural areas of mixed ethnicities. With 65% of the population categorized as "rural" and many of them living in minority-

ethnic areas, gaining a clearer understanding of their realities in the contemporary moment in Myanmar, is, I believe, a key contribution.

Finally, the conceptual framework and the empirical insights have important *political* implications within Myanmar and beyond. The landscape approach deployed here uncovers the cumulative and interactive nature of different interventions into the same landscape. This clarifies the importance of CSOs moving beyond a sectoral division of labour in order to collectively grapple with how the relations and dynamics surrounding multiple sectors and resources spanning e.g. mining, conservation, agricultural production, fisheries and energy intersect in particular landscapes. Moreover, the dissertation's interrogation of the multiscalar production of space, i.e. how particular landscapes within Myanmar, across the region and globally are tied to each other through capitalist development, sheds light on the necessity of developing alliances beyond the "local" scale. Finally, it undercuts notions of a homogenous rural countryside that will act in unison against outside grabbers, namely the state and/or corporate actors. In the Northern Tanintharyi landscape of dispossession, villagers are differentially troubled not just by the violent and eventful grabs, but also the slower and mundane processes of rural differentiation and class formation. The implication is to rigorously think through the spatial dynamics of the political economy of capitalist development in Myanmar today and develop strategies accordingly.

The dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the politics of geography in Southern Myanmar and the research questions that the dissertation seeks to grapple with. Chapter 2 examines the evolution of the literature of the latest wave of dispossession studies framed in terms of a global resource rush. It focuses on a series of conceptual challenges and tensions that have emerged concerning ongoing primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession and studying multiple resources. Responding to these challenges and tensions, the chapter builds up in a more abstract manner the framework employed in the dissertation through an enquiry into production of space, modern landed property, state space and class dynamics under capitalist development.

Chapter 3 elucidates my strategy for responding to the research questions. The chapter provides further ontological and conceptual clarifications – particularly concerning my approach to studying the landscape – as well as considerations around the operationalization of the framework built up in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 turns to the question of what Lefebvre calls the formation of state space in Myanmar. The chapter delves into the persistent struggles with

achieving centralized control over the territory currently known as Myanmar – from the colonial period and up until today. The chapter pays particular attention to the period since 1988, examining Myanmar's state-mediated capitalist transition.

Chapters 5 to 7 are the empirical part of the dissertation, examining how the Northern Tanintharyi landscape was constituted by and constitutive of Myanmar's state-mediated capitalist transition and regional geopolitical shifts. The chapters track the ensuing rounds of grabs that played out on the ground. While focusing on the later period since 1988, each chapter has a wider temporal and spatial gaze. The chapters start out by tracing dynamics around a particular sector (respectively, fisheries, agriculture and forestry) from the colonial period onwards. As the chapters temporally progress forward to the post-1988 transition, they spatially zoom in on Northern Tanintharyi – all the way down to three particular villages. Through detailed analyses of shifts in social relations of production in each of the villages, the chapters close with reflections on the contemporary challenges facing differentiated villagers – from new infrastructure related to a Liquified Natural Gas power plant to policy changes. For purposes of exposition the three villages and the different sectors are presented separately, but I hope readers – following the arguments laid out in chapter two and three – are mindful of the importance of seeing them in relation to each other and not as stand alone separate stories.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by picking up on the title I have chosen: landscapes of dispossession. Here I seek to more explicitly integrate the analysis from the three villages, revisiting the conceptual challenges laid out in chapter two and arguing for the relevance of the analytical approach developed here for addressing these challenges.

Finally, the epilogue briefly raises what I see as the political implications of the analysis in Myanmar and elsewhere.

1. Introduction: Grappling with the politics of geography in Southern Myanmar

> We are like fish in a fish grill, squeezed between mining, the military and the [gas] companies grabbing our land! (Villager in Northern Tanintharyi, November 2017)

Sitting in the wooden two-story house of U Naing Myint and his wife, we discuss how their lives and livelihoods have changed over the past decades. In the early 1990s, the Myanmar military descended upon their village. Until then, they rarely saw soldiers in their village; and when they occasionally did, it was not from the military regime, but from either of the ethnic armed organisations active in the region, the New Mon State Party or the Karen National Union.

Unbeknownst to the villagers, however, in Yangon the military regime had signed agreements with the Thai state and two transnational gas companies, Total and Unocal (now Chevron), for a gas pipeline to be routed through their village. The pipeline was to link an offshore gas concession with a town on the other side of the Thai border and would eventually be routed on to Bangkok to fuel the booming Thai economy that was thriving from an influx of investment from Japan. To secure the pipeline, the military arrived with guns blazing – literally. While launching offensives against the two ethnic armed groups, the military simultaneously began building bases on villagers' land – using the villagers as slave labour. U Naing Myint and other villagers recounted the tragic irony in that they themselves were forced to build up the fences that enclosed the land that used to be theirs. Once the pipeline route had been secured, came the pipeline itself along with Total's operation center. This further enclosed village land. In contrast to the military, however, Total initiated a compensation process. The tenure system in place at the time was a mix of property regimes, meaning that most of the land was not individual

property. This mix of property regimes reflected the predominance of shifting cultivation, with villagers producing a mix of food for themselves and whatever cash crops they could manage to sell locally or get across to Thailand through the illegal border trade controlled by the ethnic armed organisations. With the enclosure and compensation process, this all changed. Only those able to successfully demonstrate ownership of the land that had been expropriated by the military on behalf of the gas companies would be compensated.

Having heard that U Naing Myint and his wife managed to receive compensation, my interpreter and I were expecting that they today, some twenty years down the line, would have a more positive view of the process than other villagers that had not received anything. We were mistaken. Prior to the pipeline arriving, they had passed on a plot they had been practicing shifting cultivation on to one of their neighbours – as was common at the time. As a result, they did not receive any compensation from Total, while their neighbor did. The compensation they did receive was thus not from the first, but from the second and third pipelines that were also routed through the village later in the 1990s and then finally in the late 2000s. As they emphasized though, while they had received a good compensation for the two plots of land that were subsequently enclosed, this did not reflect the importance that the land played in their lives and livelihoods – and in any case, today "the money is over". In addition to the military base camps and the gas companies, they mention the privatization of a tin and tungsten mining site that had initially been started by the British in the 1920s. Until it was seized by a "crony" during the 1990s, they and other villagers used to practice small-scale mining – providing their main source of income through the black market that was thriving across the country in the late 1980s. With the privatization of the mining site, the scale of extraction expanded, and so too did pollution. The little land that they had left was destroyed by the mining company.

Throughout the interview, U Naing Myint's wife is rocking one of their grandchildren in a sling hanging from the ceiling. A *sha sho* my interpreter says to me and nods towards the baby. Sha sho is what they call the many babies whose parents have left for Thailand in pursuit of work opportunities that are seemingly no longer present in Yephyu today. I ask if they think things have gotten better or will get better with Aung San Suu Kyi as State Counsellor. U Naing Myint laughs and shaking his head says, "after the democratic government, nothing has gotten better."

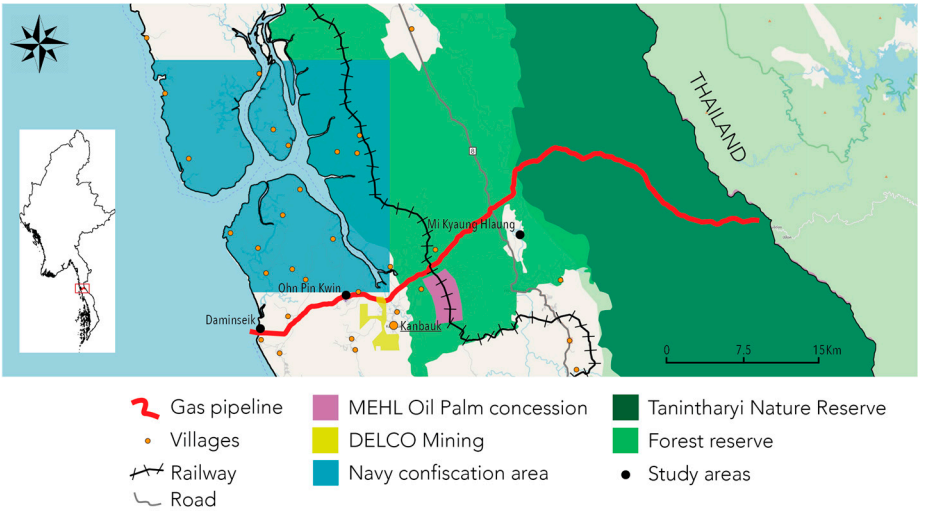


Figure 1
The Northern Tanintharyi landscape through which the three pipelines slice. The three villages in which fieldwork for the dissertation was conducted marked as study areas. These villages are administratively located in Yephyu township, in the Tanintharyi division. Source: Author with information from anonymised CSO regarding villages, land categorisations and the size of the navy confiscation area

In January 2019, a little over a year after this interview in Yephyu, Aung San Suu Kyi, "the lady", as the State Counsellor is ironically referred to amongst activists, addressed the Invest Myanmar Summit in Yangon. Here she confidently proclaims:

> Those who know this country will know that this country offers a possibility of immense returns to investors who are both patient and innovative … As Southeast Asia's final frontier market – final and best – we offer a world of opportunities. Investment opportunities are everywhere in Myanmar; some are there to see, and others are waiting to be found. (Quoted in Reed 2019)

Apparently, Total counts as being both innovative and patient. Together with Siemens, the company was awarded the project to build one of four Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) power plants and the associated port infrastructure. Attesting to U Naing Myint's pessimistic view on the new government, this project is to unfold in the very same landscape pummelled for decades already by war and extractivist gas projects. The joint Total and Siemens project was announced in Yangon as part of Aung San Suu Kyi's attempt to solve the country's endemic electricity shortages ahead of the 2020-elections. The power plant in Yephyu is set to be the biggest and the first to come online –

preferably ahead of the upcoming elections. As earlier, these grand plans for remaking the landscape were entirely unbeknownst to the villagers until Total showed up for what was announced as consultation in December 2017. As noted by an activist who took part in the meeting, it was a "one way talk show" and had little to do with consultation (Personal communication, 31.01.2018). The following month, plans for the LNG power plant were announced in Yangon.

As these introductory vignettes seek to portray, struggles around what the late Neil Smith (2003, 15) termed the politics of geography – "who gets what, where, and why and who loses where?" – are today at the forefront in Myanmar. These questions have in many ways only become more prescient following the transition to a civilian administration in 2011 and the election of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2015. Through this transition, a torrent of new laws have been passed that seek to prise open up the territory for investments, thereby aiding in turning Myanmar into the "world of opportunities" proclaimed by the State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. Hopes for investment opportunities were further emboldened with the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement towards the end of 2015, shortly before Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD-party took over in February 2016. Despite the ensuing pomp and circumstance over "resolving the longest running conflict in Southeast Asia" (Lintner 2019), the years since then have seen an escalation in war and conflict. The most infamous case is the military's purge of the Rohingya in the Northwestern Rakhine state, but a similar strategy has been waged more or less continuously toward many of the other ethnic groups that have historically controlled the resource-rich areas that the state now aims to make more accessible for extraction by foreign and local capital. In this context, and with the gradual improvement of civil and political liberties, an emboldened civil society has begun openly mobilizing against what they call "land grabs" across the country. As elsewhere, local activists strategically deploy the narrative around a "global resource rush" following the 2007/8 convergence of crises (finance, food, energy, climate) to frame their politics of geography. As noted by the Land In our Hands Network (formed in 2014) in their first report from 2015: "People from our network say land grabbing in Myanmar is 'destroying our past' and 'haunting our future'" (2015, 33).

Enclosures and dispossession of rural populations and their role in transitions to capitalism have been fiercely debated for more than a century (Byres 1991; Bernstein 2010). These debates intensified in the 1950s and 1960s, centered on the significance of the European enclosures, but eventually spread to studies of agrarian transitions beyond Europe. Although scholars

acknowledged that the paths to capitalism varied, enclosures and dispossession were largely seen as an historical stage in the development of capitalism. From the 1980s and 1990s, however, processes of enclosure and dispossession became understood more and more to be a persistent feature of capitalist development as political movements and scholars alike addressed what was dubbed "development-induced displacement" across the Global South. Particularly with the emergence of political ecology, attention shifted from "conflicts in the factory and the field" to "conflict around forests and rivers" (Baviskar 1995, 40).

Since the mid-2000s another "wave of dispossession studies" (Fairbairn et al. 2014, 654) has emerged grappling with the apparent resurgence of dispossession through what has been termed a "global resource grab".[1] The ensuing debate across the fields of agrarian studies, human geography and political ecology has become "the most influential one on rural dispossession over the last decade" (Vorbrugg 2019, 1). This has led to a revival of interest amongst researchers in Marx's (1990) concept of primitive accumulation and David Harvey's (2003) reformulation of it as an ongoing process through accumulation by dispossession.

A decade into this latest wave of studies, recent calls in the literature have argued for the importance of developing historical and processual analyses that examine individual grabs as enmeshed within broader struggles over the shape and structure of the political economy. This entails uncovering how multiple actors become variously implicated in struggles over dispossession across time and space. Furthermore, as this literature has developed empirically beyond a narrow focus on individual resources or isolated cases, scholars have stressed the importance of conceptualising how grabbing and exploitation of different resources cumulatively intersect in specific landscapes over time and across scales (inter alia Baird & Barney 2017; Hunsberger et al. 2017; Thaler et al. 2019).

Drawing on a case from the Tanintharyi division in Southern Myanmar, this dissertation aims to intervene in these debates. While local activists are prolific in their documenting of what they call resource grabs across the country, academic research examining contemporary processes of dispossession in Myanmar remains quite limited, due to restricted access for academic researchers (local and foreign) to do fieldwork in the country until recently. A

[1] For accessible introductions to debates on global land, water and ocean grabbing, see publications from the Transnational Institute's Agrarian and Environmental Justice Program: www.tni.org/en/agrarianenvironmental-justice

valuable exception in this regard, is Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung's (2003; 2004) impressive elucidation of military-era agrarian policies and their impacts on state-society relations based on fieldwork in a number of villages in the Irrawaddy Delta located in the central part of the country. With Myanmar's opening up, a surge of research in the Delta is in the making (e.g. Pritchard et al. 2019; Belton & Filipski 2019). By contrast, research on dispossession and agrarian-environmental transformations in Myanmar's peripheral areas – like Tanintharyi – has been limited to an early seminal piece by Kevin Woods (2011) in the Northern part of Myanmar, which he has recently followed up with work in the South (Woods 2019). Woods' analyses have clarified the centrality of struggles around land and other natural resources for what he terms Myanmar's contemporary "ceasefire capitalism". Building on these studies, along with examinations of state-building (Callahan 2003; Bryant 1997), the political economy of industrialization attempts during the colonial and postcolonial periods (Brown 2013; Tin 2005), ethnic politics (Smith 1991; Kramer 2009) and more recently on the political economy of Myanmar's state-mediated capitalist transition since 1988 (Jones 2014a; 2014b; Stokke et al. 2018; Woods 2011), the present work attempts to bring this contextual literature into conversation with broader debates on contemporary land and resource grabs.

In response to the calls put forward within land grab studies, the dissertation conceptually mobilizes Lefebvre's production of space in combination with a multiscalar class analysis. As the opening vignettes suggest, a series of violent "eventful 'grabs'" (Vorbrugg 2019, 2) have taken place in Northern Tanintharyi and more seem to be in the making in the near future. Fully understanding the ramifications of these at village scale requires an appreciation of the different temporalities of dispossession from the immediate and violent to the more mundane and ongoing processes of rural differentiation. The latter processes, which are typically not the focus of land grabbing research, are "gradual, complex and sometimes even elusive, rather than spectacular and eventful" (Vorbrugg 2019, 7). The longer temporal scale notwithstanding, the issue of dispossession by differentiation remains urgent for rural populations in Myanmar and elsewhere (Borras & Franco 2013). Deploying Lefebvre's production of space combined with class analysis opens up for an appreciation of the complexity of the actors involved across temporal and spatial scales – from the state to the village. At the village scale, this eschews assumptions of undifferentiated homogenous villages that are "dispossessed" in a straightforward manner. Instead, it seeks a more nuanced understanding of the social relations of production, herein the (former)

landholder, but also the wage labourer, the self-exploiting, and the gendered aspects of all of this. In other words, how these differentiated rural people partake in the production of space. This can help elucidate the "often slow and trickling pace and silent ways in which certain forms of dispossession unfold" (Vorbrugg 2019, 16).

Developing this more nuanced analysis is a key task today in Myanmar's contemporary capitalist transition. While there are certainly plenty of eventful land grabs to focus on across the country, as many brave activists are valiantly doing, the slow and trickling dispossession is also playing out – often in combination with the more eventful ones. Understanding how both the slow and trickling and the eventful are part of broader struggles over the production of space across scales is important for any attempts at developing effective political strategies to challenge Myanmar's current development model, which civil society across the country roundly deems as failing. This is particularly prescient for the rural population, which still accounts for 65% of Myanmar's total population. With Northern Tanintharyi as a case, the present work therefore seeks to study a particular landscape of dispossession.

Though the recent wave of dispossession studies rarely integrates the disparate cases of diverse resource grabs into more encompassing analyses of the production of space, the proliferation of individual cases nonetheless suggests that this form of landscape is becoming increasingly prevalent. This is particularly so in Mike Davis's (2018) third and fourth ideal-typical economies under contemporary globalization mentioned in the preface. Arguably, Myanmar's mode of capitalist development, is somewhere in between these two ideal-typical types characterized by both the expansion of extractive industries and war with a resultant continued significant "export", as Davis puts it, of refugees and migrant labour. As such, the dissertation hopes to contribute conceptually and empirically to this wider literature on the nature of dispossession and processes of agrarian and environmental transformations under contemporary capitalist development.

With this purpose in mind, the dissertation aims to address the following overall research question: *What are the relations between the production of Northern Tanintharyi and Myanmar's contemporary political economic transition?* As alluded in the above, the theoretical framework I develop and operationalize, in chapters 2 and 3 respectively, employs a multiscalar approach to the production of space. This entails examining the capitalist production of space within and between scales from the global to the local and across time. I have therefore broken this more overall question down into two sub questions interrogating firstly, *how have forces of primitive accumulation*

and state spatial strategies come together in Northern Tanintharyi since 1988? In pursuit of this question, chapter 4 provides crucial background to understand how and why state backed primitive accumulation played out as it has in Northern Tanintharyi following 1988. It does so, by providing a detailed discussion of the evolution of state spatial strategies from the British colonial period up until today. The chapter uncovers the persistent struggles at producing state space in the territory that was cudgelled together by the British and currently known as Myanmar. This lays the basis for approaching the second sub question: *are processes of rural class differentiation unfolding at village scale across Northern Tanintharyi, and if so, how?* The three empirical chapters (5 through 7), address both sub questions by zooming in on a particular resource and a particular village in Northern Tanintharyi. They consecutively reveal how state-facilitated processes of primitive accumulation played out across the Northern Tanintharyi landscape. In pursuit of the overall research question, chapter 8 sums up the findings, and ties the preceding chapters together showing how the production of a landscape of dispossession in Northern Tanintharyi was constitutive of and constituted by Myanmar's political economic transition.

2. Conceptual challenges in the current wave of dispossession studies

The ramifications of what has been called the convergence of crises (finance, food, energy, climate) from 2007 and an ensuing resource rush are still being felt across the globe (Borras et al. 2012; McMichael 2012). In the years since then, a veritable "literature rush" has developed that sought to make sense of these issues (Oya 2013). This was initially driven by NGOs and other allies of global peasant movements proclaiming vast land grabs driven especially by predatory food insecure Gulf States that were grabbing up vast areas of the African continent for food production (e.g. GRAIN 2008).

Following on the heels from this initial activist literature, however, scholars have intervened in an attempt to nuance and qualify the rather polemical debates. Sorting out and clarifying drivers, means and ends in these grabs was important, of course, because while it may have been cast in polemical terms, the debate around land grabbing began sparking responses in terms of how to govern the increased flows of capital into extractive activities across the global south. The different calls for how to politically respond varied greatly depending on the interpretation of the nature and extent of the global resource rush, spanning positions from regulate to facilitate, regulate to mitigate and regulate to roll back and oppose (Borras et al. 2013). Hence, from both an academic and a political perspective, scholars were committed to move beyond the first round of debates on land grabbing that have been rebuked for being largely based on "media or NGO fact-finding and agit-prop reports" (Edelman et al. 2013, 1519). After what Edelman and colleagues call the making sense-phase, interventions from around 2012 onwards have sought to "reorient, broaden, deepen and nuance" the analysis of land grabbing (Schoenberger et al. 2017, 701). This also entailed attempts to "define, refine and stabilize" the concepts that were being mobilized, particularly the very term land grabbing (ibid).

Emerging liberalist takes on land grabs from the likes of the World Bank sought to differentiate between "good" and "bad" land grabs; that is, transactions that happened transparently and openly through the market according to purported principles of willing-buyer and willing-seller were good, no matter the socio-ecological implications, while the "bad" were those that happened non-transparently and not on market terms (e.g. Deininger 2011; Deininger et al. 2011). Borras and colleagues (2012, 850), on the other hand, proposed a definition of land grabbing as "essentially 'control-grabbing', grabbing the power to control land and other associated resources such as water in order to derive benefit from such control of resources". Furthermore, they argued for bringing capital back into the unit of analysis and hence the "need to embed land grabs within our analysis of contemporary global capitalist development" (Borras et al. 2012, 846). In this manner, individual land grabs should be seen less as individual objects of study than part and parcel of broader ongoing agrarian and environmental transformations (Schoenberger et al. 2017). The body of literature that has since developed, draws on decades of analyses, particularly within the fields of critical agrarian studies, human geography and political ecology. This, in turn, facilitated researchers to link processes of contemporary land grabbing to broader themes of "colonialism, tendencies towards enclosure and consolidation in agrarian capitalism, primitive accumulation, and accumulation by dispossession" (Schoenberger et al. 2017, 702).

With this broadening, other resources than land and other purposes than shifts toward industrial-agricultural uses and an appreciation of the diversity of actors involved also came into the purview of the literature. A body of literature around water grabbing emerged following interventions showing how water was often targeted specifically, with adjacent lands just being a means to attain access to and control over water resources (e.g. Mehta et al. 2012, Franco et al. 2013). Simultaneously, work on green grabbing sought to shine light on how a crucial part of the resource rush was happening through the "appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends" (Fairhead et al. 2012, 238). A few years down the line, the grabbing frame was picked up by the global fisher peoples' movement, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, and allies in a publication on the Global Ocean Grab (WFFP et al. 2014). Mirroring the process around land grabbing, where academic interventions caught up with more activist publications, a research agenda focusing on oceans has subsequently begun to emerge (Bennett et al. 2015; Foley & Mather 2018; Barbesgaard 2018), although the conceptual and methodological considerations around the phenomenon of ocean grabbing has been criticized

for lagging far behind that of land grabbing (for critical interventions, see Barbesgaard 2019; Mallin 2018; Mallin et al. 2019). In terms of different actors, some work has sought to engage more systematically with the role of the state (Wolford et al. 2013) as well as the role of smallholders, noting how, "[s]ometimes smallholders may be agents of or complicit with land grabbers, and they even eagerly join the crop booms that are driving land grabbing in their vicinity" (Edelman et al. 2013, 1522).

Many have, however, voiced criticism against the latest emerging wave of dispossession studies framed in terms of a global land grab. On conceptual grounds, the literature has been criticized for inconsistencies in understanding core political economic processes, for example that of primitive accumulation (Hall 2013) or what Bernstein (2014, 1036) calls the "theoretical busyness" around David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession that has provided a frame for much, if not most, of the work on grabbing. With a particularly strong current from scholars working in Southeast Asia, challenges have been levelled against an overly-structural understanding of the drivers of land grabs and/or overemphasizing a temporal break around the convergence of crises in 2007/8. As noted by Lund and Peluso (2011, 669), "there is no one grand land grab, but a series of changing contexts, emergent processes and forces, and contestations." Work from Laos and Cambodia, shows how agrarian transformations fit well within the processes highlighted by grabbing literature, yet the grabs in question "began too early" to fit the convergence of crises frame (Schoenberger et al. 2017). Furthermore, very significant historical grabs, those of state territorialisation processes, have not been considered in the literature – as part of a more general neglect of the role of the state (though see below). These critiques link back to calls for "historical, processual analysis", yet, as Edelman and colleagues insist, this does not inherently "deny or minimize the reality of the 'renewed global land rush'" (2013, 1521). Challenging particularly a tendency toward what is considered overly-structural explanations, others have argued there is a need to understand the "often contingent, messy and contradictory aims" of the actors involved in grabs (Schoenberger 2017, 702). Furthermore, with the ballooning of empirical studies, the actors involved have proven to be diverse, spanning states, Environmental NGOs, (eco)tourism and mining companies and the military (Fairhead et al. 2012).

These criticisms have led to a series of challenges and productive tensions in the literature, which are of relevance to my project of understanding contemporary agrarian-environmental transformations in Southern Myanmar. The following section discuss these tensions as part of a consideration of the

broader literature that has emerged around primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession – not strictly limited to post 2007/8 literature framed in terms of grabbing and occasionally bringing in references to work in Southeast Asia. As noted by Hall (2013, 1599), this literature challenges the existing work, as it highlights "'grabs' that are too small, from the wrong period, for the wrong purposes, carried out by the wrong actors, or only tenuously connected to 'multiple crises'". The subsequent section, discusses the most recent work that pushes the grabbing literature to move beyond studies of individual resources. After highlighting these challenges and tensions of particular relevance for my project, I proceed to build up an analytical apparatus that aims to grapple with them.

Primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession

> The dispossession of the peasantry in England was but one, interlinked, moment in the transformation of global class relations which ushered in generalized commodity production. Attention needs to be paid to geographically uneven and politically unequal processes of primitive accumulation, which to some considerable degree shape contemporary geographies of capitalist expansion. (Campling et al. 2016, 1754)

Since 2000, in the context of what Hall (2012, 1189) calls a moment of significant "state-backed expansion of markets", scholars have revisited debates surrounding Marx's concept of primitive accumulation (inter alia de Angelis 2001, Hart 2006, Harvey 2003, Perelman 2000). In different ways, the interventions argued that what Marx had initially described as a historical process of primitive accumulation in the early stages of capitalism, was in fact an ongoing one.

The implications and ramifications are discussed more in detail below, but, in short, this process for Marx entailed the divorcing of direct producers from their means of production through a monopolization of these means by a subset of hereafter capitalists, who the now propertyless have to sell their labour to in order to survive. When Marx (1990) discusses this "original accumulation", capital is conceptualized as a social relation emerging from a process of enclosure that took both legal and illegal forms and was achieved violently by force – or "extra-economic means". Consequently, as Marx famously put it, the history of this expropriation "is written in the annals of human history in the letters of blood and fire" (Marx 1990, 875), because "capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (ibid, 926).

Despite the brutality of this process – that Marx evocatively described from England to the colonies – he understood primitive accumulation as an essentially progressive force. Progressive, because the heretofore distribution of the means of production did not allow for their concentration and consequently, "excludes co-operation, division of labour within each separate process of production, the social control and regulation of the forces of nature, and the free development of the productive forces of society. It is compatible only with a system of production and a society moving within narrow limits which are of natural origin" (ibid, 927-928). Only after a fuller development of the productive forces of society could a fuller human development ensue. Later in his life, Marx in an exchange of letters with Russian Narodniks pushed back against how such formulations and other scattered remarks about the peasantry (e.g. in the 18th Brumaire) were being taken out of their historical context and applied in a universal manner arguing for a teleological process of capitalist development and the inherently reactionary nature of rural populations (Shanin 2018). These qualifications by Marx himself notwithstanding, such formulations have in subsequent years provided canon-fodder for some Marxist agrarian political economists "whose orthodox 'stagist' assumptions had turned [them] into the B-team for modernization theory" (Levien et al. 2018, 856).

By contrast, the reinvigorated focus on primitive accumulation and the argument that this was an ongoing process, (re)focused attention towards the specificities of capitalist development and its impacts on rural populations in the global south in postcolonial contexts. As pointed out by Glassman (2006, 612), this follows up on earlier arguments of what he calls neo-Marxists (referencing the work of Andre Gunnar Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin) that since "capitalism had not 'fully' developed in most of the global periphery, it was necessary to examine the interaction of numerous complex class groupings in order to understand both how capitalism functioned in the global periphery and how social change might be achieved there."

Yet, the ensuing "busyness" around the concepts of primitive accumulation and Harvey's accumulation by dispossession is not a forte of the literature: "busy in the elasticity of its definitions, its expanding range of applications and the claims made for it" (Bernstein 2014, 1036). Similarly, Andreucci and colleagues (2017, 33) have argued that both concepts are "largely used to describe and record, rather than analyse, a mesmerizing empirical diversity of enclosure processes." Noting a broader trend in research anchored in different bodies of literature according to use of words, spanning enclosures,

commodification, accumulation by dispossession, the double movement, privatization and neoliberalisation, Derek Hall (2012, 1191) points out that much work is characterized by "loose or absent definitions of core terms, and by their use as synonyms". He identifies a range of issues within the global resource rush literature, of which I in the following highlight three: (1) primitive accumulation's role in the development of capitalism, (2) the agents involved in processes of primitive accumulation and (3) the institutional relations that follow from primitive accumulation process (Hall 2012; 2013). I draw on these three points to structure the following review and in the close of the section, I draw conclusions about the key conceptual gaps.

Firstly, concerning the understanding of capitalism and primitive accumulation, a number of different approaches are at play. A classical Marxist approach emphasizing the creation of two classes. A second approach following Ellen Meiksins Wood (2002; 2009) that (drawing on Robert Brenner) emphasizes market dependent social relations as central to capitalism, hence arguing that capitalism can develop in agrarian contexts where proletarianization is not generalized. Thus, in this view, also smallholding agricultural producers that have not been dispossessed can be under the boot of capitalist imperatives through the market, e.g. when producers are dependent on the market "in order to obtain basic necessities they [are] unable to produce" (Wood 2002, 55; and see Hall 2012, 1192). Furthermore, Hall distinguishes David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession as a third approach. However, following Levien (2011; 2012), Hall critiques Harvey for not giving a clear definition that distinguishes it from primitive accumulation, aside from updating and framing its contemporary relevance in terms of solving crises of overaccumulation in the neoliberal era and hence taking place not just in the global south but also the north.[2]

While these distinctions may seem pedantic, they have ramifications for analyses, particularly of rural change. Depending on the understanding of primitive accumulation and its role within capitalism, for significant parts of Southeast Asia, processes of primitive accumulation unfolded 200 years ago, 100 years ago, or is yet to unfold. For in Southeast Asia, land was "'primitively accumulated' in the late nineteenth century by a definition focused on market dependence but in the late twentieth century by one that prioritizes

[2] Indeed, in Harvey's original formulation, no definition was discernible, beyond long lists of the mechanisms involved. In a later book, he essentially equated it with rent seeking, when he noted "Rent seeking is nothing more than a polite and rather neutral-sounding way referring to what I call 'accumulation by dispossession'" (Harvey 2014, 133).

proletarianization, [and] an insistence on effective, state-backed private property rights as fundamental to capitalism might imply that primitive accumulation has yet to take place" (Hall 2012, 1203).

Secondly, is the question of who are the agents of primitive accumulation – and in the land grabbing literature, who is doing the grabbing and how. Hall (2013, 1597) criticizes parts of the land grabbing literature for assuming that places currently ravaged by land grabbing were previously outside capitalism, "assuming that people dispossessed live in communities that are internally homogenous, and/or that they have been 'in place' since time immemorial" (see also Vorbrugg 2019). While not suggesting that such places no longer exist anywhere, he points to the importance of recognizing that it is far from always the case. Furthermore, claims of such transitions from pre-capitalist social relations to capitalist ones, must be based on detailed empirical examinations (see Baird 2014 for an example of this). Challenging the notion of pre-capitalist homogenous villagers run over by state and transnational companies from above, Li's (2014) work in Indonesia shows how smallholders partaking in regional crop booms (notably cocoa) were the driving force of land enclosures and an increasingly commodity-oriented production of cash crops in response to prices in the world market. This, she terms, an "enclosure from below" (see also Hall et al. 2011). This reflects a more general stream of work on what Park and White (2017) call agro-commodity booms (or crop booms) detailing processes of capitalist expansion in rural Southeast Asia, herein the gendered and generational dynamics around processes of agrarian transformation unfolding through such booms. All this work suggests, following a more Woodsian conception emphasizing market dependence, that smallholder producers cannot be placed "outside" of capitalism, as ahistorical populist narratives tend to, and more generally that the (still) lacking attention to the role of smallholders in processes of land grabbing is a "striking omission" (Hall 2013, 1590). Important first steps in remedying this have been taken through examinations of the diverse political reactions from below – that is, how people respond differentially when faced with land grabs spanning acts of resistance, acquiescence and/or struggles for incorporation (Borras & Franco 2013; Hall et al. 2015).

As the role of smallholders has been neglected, so too the role of the state has still received only scant attention in the literature mobilizing primitive accumulation to understand the contemporary resource rush. So far, only one special issue has attempted to put the role of the state into focus – and, it should be noted, although the contributors do focus on shifts in uses beyond

agriculture, the focus remains narrowly on land (Wolford et al. 2013).[3] In their summarizing of the different interventions, Wolford and colleagues bring together an eclectic framework "derived primarily from Marx, Gramsci and Foucault" (Wolford et al. 2013, 199). While this is a definite improvement from the early literature picturing the state as an almost caricatured homogenous actor, some analyses following in the footsteps of Wolford et al.'s intervention have taken a more Foucauldian turn. These interventions tend to emphasize practices of bureaucrats and planners and resulting "governmentality" (e.g. Baka 2013) resonating with earlier interventions on the land grab that explicitly distance themselves from a production of space perspective (see Peluso & Lund 2011, 196). As noted by Bernstein (2014, 1038) this "is a common Foucauldian syndrome, in which forms of 'governmentality' generated by different historical experiences of capitalism are treated as detached from it, as are the beliefs and practices of bureaucrats and planners who exercise 'the rule of experts'". In this manner, scholars have tended to give explanatory priority to the role of discourses rather than material political economic shifts.[4]

Finally, analyses of the institutional relations following from primitive accumulation in the land grabbing literature remain truncated. Hall (2012, 1202) reminds us of the two necessary aspects of capitalist property, namely the de facto assertion of ownership and the "de jure recording of ownership rights presumably by the state". While there has been a lot of focus on the dispossession side, there has been less which follows the second process of

[3] A special issue of Globalizations edited and introduced by Margulis et al. (2013) also discusses the role of the state, but only at the global scale, discussing different mechanisms and struggles around the global governance of land.

[4] This ultimately stems from different ontological positions between idealism and materialism. As explained further below in Chapter 2, my own project is ontologically based in a dialectical historical-geographical materialism. As Marx and Engels note in their critique of the Young Hegelians in the German Ideology, there are clear implications of these different ontological positions: "Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men (just as the Old Hegelians declared them the true bonds of human society) it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against the illusions of consciousness. Since, according to their fantasy, the relationships of men, all their doing, their fetters and their limitations are products of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical or egoistic consciousness, and thus of removing their limitations. This demand to change the consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret reality in another way, i.e. to recognize it by means of another interpretation." (Marx & Engels 1998, 35-36)

instituting and enforcing capitalist social relations. Particularly in the Southeast Asian context, though, important interventions have been made through analyses of state territorialisation[5] processes. This work focuses on the role of state enforced property relations as they relate to either smallholder expansion, forest conservation initiatives (Vandergeest & Peluso 1995; Peluso & Vandergeest 2001; Peluso & Vandergeest 2011) or in the more contemporary large-scale boom crop plantations. Work on Laos, by the likes of Dwyer (2013; 2014), Kenney-Lazar (2018) and Baird (2014) all emphasize the role of dispossession and subsequent state enforced private property rights over land as tools for state territorialisation projects. Dwyer's (2014, 382; 400) work is particularly commendable here, highlighting "the importance of looking specifically to histories of Cold War proxy conflict to understand how primitive accumulation is actually playing out today" as well as for showing the importance of grounding global and regional accumulation processes in "concrete landscapes". Similarly, Kevin Woods (2011; 2019) highlights the Myanmar state's strategic use of agricultural concessions in bolstering its own "territoriality" in the North and what he calls "green territoriality" through expansion of protected areas – aided by Environmental NGOs – in the Southern part of the country.

These are important interventions that rebalance the focus away purely from processes of global capital accumulation, emphasizing instead "territorial strategies of the host state" (Schoenberger et al. 2017, 710). Nonetheless, the increasingly predominant Foucauldian lens (e.g. Woods 2019) does not do much to *explain* why these territorial strategies are pursued, beyond references to inherently engrained logics around domination through population management and control. An important exception here is Michael Levien's work (2011; 2012; 2013) on the political economy of dispossession in India. Interrogating different "regimes of dispossession" enforced by the Indian state, he reconstructs David Harvey's accumulation by dispossession concept around the pivotal role of the use of extra-economic means (in contrast to Harvey's focus on the economic), characterizing the Indian state as a land broker. Simultaneously, he details the role of former smallholders and their subsequent "differentiation by speculation", as they become implicated in the newly state-created land markets. More recently, analysing the gendered nature of land

[5] Vandergeest & Peluso (1995, 387-388) employ Sack's definition of territoriality as the "attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area." Subsequent work up until today follows their approach (see e.g. collection on frontiers and territorialization edited by Rasmussen & Lund (2018)).

dispossession from early capitalist England to contemporary special economic zones in peri-urban India, Levien (2017, 1112) conceptualizes land grabbing as "instances where states make people relinquish their land involuntarily (whether or not they receive compensation)".

As Hall (2012, 1204) concludes, regarding the uneasy nature of the use of primitive accumulation concept in the resource rush literature and more generally, "[i]n Southeast Asia, in particular, we must struggle with complex dynamics of frontier migration, smallholder commodity production, enclosure from below, and overlapping and ambiguous institutions for governing property rights." In other words, a key challenge in the literature drawing on this framework remains, how to situate and embed individual grabs within broader processes of multiscalar capitalist development that implicate a diversity of actors from the state to villagers. Eschewing assumptions of coherent and idyllic "communities" outside of capitalism that are homogenously impacted by such grabs is key, but, following Gillian Hart (2004, 97), "sorting out capitalist from non-capitalist elements … become[s] far less interesting than the question of how multiple forces come together to produce particular dynamics or trajectories, as well as possible alternatives."

Multiple resources in a single landscape

Despite the noted attempts at bringing in a focus on other resources than land, "the dispossession of land arguably represents the most prominent, and the most widely studied and theorized form of rural dispossession" (Vorbrugg 2019, 1). This goes for the more recent work on the resource rush as well as the long-running debates on agrarian change and capitalist transitions framed in terms of the agrarian question (for review of these debates, see Akram-Lodhi & Kay 2010a; 2010b). Insights from the most recent work on resource grabs have, however, attempted to decenter the land grab (as Schoenberger and colleagues (2017) call these interventions) by more systematically bringing in other resources than land. This work levels critique against both the land grabbing literature (Hunsberger et al 2017) and work on resource frontiers (Thaler et al. 2019) for too narrow a focus on individual resources. To adequately unpack resource grabs, they argue, it is necessary to move beyond a focus on single resources and understand how dynamics from across sectors cumulatively interact in specific places – or landscapes. This follows up on earlier calls to understand the different drivers, means and ends of grabs.

Hunsberger and colleagues (2017) lament how work on land grabs have so far not sufficiently linked up to work on the impacts of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, but rather investigates these separately –

with the aforementioned work on green grabbing making a significant contribution towards more work in that vein (see also Borras & Franco 2019). At the same time, there is a tendency to focus narrowly on "discrete areas, such as particular landholdings in which dispossession or competing claims occur" (Hunsberger et al. 2017, 307). As a result, much of the existing work misses out on the "cumulative and interactive effects of multiple projects within the same landscape or region" (ibid).

Similarly, criticism of work on resource frontiers, which could also be put to above noted work on crop booms, notes that "[r]esource frontier theory has difficulty capturing how exploitation of different resources in the same landscape is articulated systematically" (Thaler et al. 2019, 62). In their analysis of the socio-ecological impacts of large-scale plantations of boom crops and hydropower dams in Laos and Cambodia, Baird & Barney (2017) further clarify the importance of cross-sectoral dynamics for understanding the political, economic and ecological relations between land and water systems – and, hence, the cascading effects on lives and livelihoods as these systems are altered. As they note, interrogating multiple projects over time is important to understand how "[t]he impacts from different projects intersect through affecting the same people and communities and are interactive because of how villagers' livelihood strategies and resource management practices change over time in response to successive displacements" (Baird & Barney 2017, 770).

In a related effort to move beyond single resource focused studies, Campling & Colás (2018) have recently clarified the importance of understanding land-sea relations for capitalist transitions and dynamics in coastal states. Indeed, especially for scholars interested in enclosure dynamics, ocean space is remarkably understudied in light of the fact that "the largest single enclosure in history" (Campling & Havice 2014, 713) took place at sea – not on land – through the creation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). These 200 nautical miles from the shoreline subsequently became state property through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Following up on earlier pivotal work on geographies of ocean space (notably Steinberg 2001, Mansfield 2004), Campling and Colás more systematically seek to relate land-sea dynamics to each other, arguing that EEZs are "born from the desire to reconcile the private appropriation of nature under and through the sea with the reinforcement of the public authority of state sovereignty on land" (Campling & Colás 2018, 781). Furthermore, linking back to the points made above concerning primitive accumulation, the role of the state and institutional regimes, "the exploitation of marine resources [is] reliant on land-side

infrastructure and property regimes" (ibid, 783) and as a result the processes of securing capital accumulation at sea is "deeply enmeshed in political power relations" (ibid).

From this review of discussions related to the global resource rush, four key challenges in how to understand grabbing have emerged. Firstly, the need to develop a deep historical and processual analysis that understands grabbing as enmeshed within broader struggles over the shape and structure of the political economy. Secondly, the need to bring together dynamics from across sectors covering multiple resources in a given landscape. Thirdly, the importance of examining how multiple actors across time and space are implicated. Finally, understanding how all of these dynamics across scales cumulatively intersect and interact in specific places.

In their initial foray into understanding intersections and cumulative impacts involving multiple resources in what they call "modern landscapes", Baird & Barney (2017, 789) note that "[g]eographers who combine political ecology with agrarian studies frameworks are well positioned to undertake such research". This reflects a broader convergence taking place in the resource rush literature, where work across the fields of political ecology, human geography and agrarian studies have been put in conversation with each other. This has in turn led to calls for more systematic attempts at integrating insights from across the three fields (e.g. Wolford & Edelman 2017). The next part of this chapter presents a framework that tries to do exactly that and, in the process, attempts to deal with the four challenges that have been raised in the above review.

The multiscalar production of space

The social is spatial

Aside from a few cursory references (e.g. Araghi 2009; Levien 2012), the insights of Henri Lefebvre in understanding sociospatial transformations have not been considered in research on the resource rush. This is curious, because the four points noted above echo proposals already made by Lefebvre in his work on the production of space and on the state (Lefebvre 1991; 2009; Brenner & Elden 2009), and in the radical geography literature developed alongside and partly following his work. Here, land and other natural resources are not understood as things, but as social relations. Hence, land, "this means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge, or from the social

division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and the superstructures of society" (Lefebvre 1991, 85). When this approach is taken seriously, it would precisely involve a relational, historicized and processual approach to the role of land – as a social relation – that the literature is calling for. As such, it would seem that geography with an attentiveness to the wide range of social actors involved in sociospatial transformations as well as to integrating temporal and spatial dimensions has something to offer in the understanding of the rural transformations that are the focus of grabbing inquiries.

Since the early 1970s, a body of work developed by geographers has drawn on Marx's centering of the process of production as the basis of all social life and history, as argued in the Grundrisse (Marx 1993, 81-111). Production should be understood in the broadest sense: "human beings not only produce the immediate nature of their existence, but produce the entire societal nature of their existence" (Smith 2010, 65).[6] Drawing on Marx's materialist ontology, Lefebvre (1991), Harvey (2006a), Smith (2010) and other geographers have tried to integrate and elaborate Marx's analysis by delving into the spatiality of capitalism, based on the understanding that social relations are simultaneously spatial relations and vice-versa (see e.g. Gregory & Urry 1985). From this perspective, capitalism's spatiality is not just a reflection of social relations: social relations take a spatial expression, which in turn structure and solidify social relations. Moreover, at a more intuitive level, over time the ever-increasing spatial integration of discrete places into the circulation of capital becomes a strict necessity for capital accumulation to continuously expand (Harvey 2006a, Smith 2010). Capitalism is thus an inherently spatial process and the point of interrogation for this brand of geography therefore became "how space was produced under capitalism and entered as part of an historical-geographical process into the perpetual transformation of capitalism" (Swyngedouw 2000, 44).

In this view, understanding anything in our society involves interrogating how it came to be, how it developed and how it is related to and is part of the larger context or system – that is, a dialectical mode of thinking (Ollman 2003; Harvey 1996). Dialectics "restructures our way of thinking about reality by

[6] Or as Marx (1990, 283) puts it elsewhere in discussing labour as "a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature."

replacing the common-sense notion of 'thing' (as something that has a history and has external connections with other things) with notions of 'process' (which contains its history and possible futures) and 'relations' (which contains as part of what it is its ties with other relations)" (Ollman 2003, 13). A geographical analysis of a sociospatial formation then involves an historicized approach and understanding to how any particular place is relationally produced and embedded in broader sets of scaled social relations to other places.

As clarified by Neil Smith (2010), scales (e.g. national, regional) should not be taken for granted. Rather, territorially constituted entities, such as the state, are a product of the dynamics and contradictions of capital accumulation, which actively produce certain scales from nation states to regional associations (e.g. ASEAN) to global institutions (e.g. WTO). Thinking with Hart (2004, 98), "[a] processual and relational understanding refuses to take as given discrete objects, identities, places and events; instead it attends to *how* they are produced and changed in practice in relation to one another." Such an historical-geographical materialist approach (for more on this see Chapter 2), is attentive to how grabs are part and parcel of ongoing struggles over the shape and structure of the political economy. Moreover, it pays particular attention to the spatiality of these struggles through the production of space.

Beyond a siloed approach to resources

Taking this perspective of the production of space seriously has implications for how we view and understand natural resources and their role in capitalist societies. Rather than setting up silos between different sectors relating to specific resources, e.g. land, water, forests, etc., this pushes us toward a non-sectoral reading, where dynamics around individual resources are set in relation to each other and with processes of capitalist development. Of course, land, water, seas etc. have particular bio-physical properties that have implications for how their extraction and exploitation can be organized (see e.g. Campling 2012), but crucially such a multi-sectoral approach would aid a move away from the limits identified in much contemporary work by Thaler and colleagues and help us understand "how exploitation of different resources in the same landscape is articulated systematically" (Thaler et al. 2019, 62). By approaching dynamics around any particular resource as implicating a "portion of the globe", as Marx puts it in Volume 3 of *Capital* (1991, 909), we become attentive to socio-ecological spillovers across space and time, implicating "a mixture of land uses, resources and institutions at any given moment" (Hunsberger et al. 2017, 314). More profoundly, however, is how the above

suggested historical, processual analysis and focus on production of space moves beyond the idea of a landscape just being a container. The implication is to understand any portion of the globe (hereinafter land) under capitalism not as a thing but as a process that gives spatial form to social relations that are actively produced and struggled over.[7] This, indeed, follows up on decades of work within sociospatial theory, which has argued that "[s]patial structure is now seen not merely as an arena in which social life unfolds, but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced" (Gregory & Urry 1985, 3).

With the development of the capitalist mode of production, some land has been subjected to particular types of monopoly control. In the classic form of primitive accumulation in England, this involved divorcing mainly self-employed peasant proprietors from their land through enclosures and the introduction of state enforced private property rights in favour of a land-owning class. The former peasant proprietors were then "free" to sell their now commodified labour and the landowners would subsequently oversee (but not necessarily take part in) the development of an agricultural production on a capitalist basis – that is, involving the exploitation of wage-labour and oriented towards commodity-production. Primitive accumulation is thus a process whereby a portion of the earth is transformed from a means of subsistence and production into capital, as the former producers on this land are turned into wage-labourers (Marx 1990).

For the new land owners, having gained a monopoly on certain portions of the earth, "it is a question of developing the economic value of this monopoly, i.e. valorizing it, on the basis of capitalist production" (Marx 1991, 752-753). As clarified by Capps (2016), however, this first separation of the producers from their means of subsistence, is only a prerequisite for the unfolding of the capitalist mode of production. As this develops a further separation takes place. Whereas "under feudalism, agrarian production was directly controlled by the landowner, under capitalism the functions of 'production' and 'ownership' are assigned to the (capitalist) farmer and to the (modern) landlord respectively" (Capps 2016, 459; also Harvey 2006a, 343). The land owners, "modern landed property" in Marx's terms, subsequently assume an antagonistic class-relation towards the capitalists, based on the extraction of ground-rent from the

[7] This conception is also inspired by Don Mitchell's (2003; 2008; 2012) work on what he calls the "landscape", yet as my entry point to the discussion here has come through land-grabbing, I simply use the word land to encompass this understanding. In Chapter 2, I explicitly bring in Mitchell's landscape-perspective.

capitalist's profits. As Marx (1991, 908) puts it, the land owners who "by virtue of title to a portion of the globe ha[ve] become the proprietor[s] of these natural objects can wrest this surplus profit from functioning capital in the form of rent". Through the processes of primitive accumulation and subsequent capitalist development, the differentiation of people according to their relations to land create the constitutive yet contradictory relations in capitalist society between capitalists, landowners and wage labourers.

Through these contradictory relations, struggles over land become key in the development of societies across the world.[8] When land is understood following the above, it is integral to the development of capitalist production that by its very nature takes place on a "constantly extending scale" (Marx 1990, 874). Already when Marx was writing, this implicated social formations across the world, but subsequently – as the aforementioned global resource rush alludes to – ever more so. Indeed, Lefebvre criticizes Marx (and his contemporary Marxists) for not taking the role of land seriously enough. Lefebvre (1991, 324) notes, "[o]n a world scale, landed property showed no signs of disappearing … What was more, questions of underground and above-ground resources – of the space of the entire planet – were continually growing in importance."

As Neil Smith (2010) has elaborated in his work on uneven development, the spatiality of this constant expansion has played out differently over time. Up until the colonialist partitioning of Africa in the 1880s, capitalism's constantly extending scale took the form of physical expansions in "absolute space" – that is integrating portions of the globe that as of yet were not subject to the circulation of capital and the associated exploitative social relations. Over time, with capitalism's gradual territorial expansion facilitated by colonial interventions, it came to dominate the entire world. As a result, with no further territorial expansions possible, the spatiality shifted increasingly towards a process of internal differentiation of the discrete absolute spaces. In this manner, "[t]he last hundred years of capitalist development have involved the production of space at an unprecedented level. But it has been accomplished not through absolute expansion in a given space but through the internal differentiation of global space, that is through the production of differentiated absolute spaces within the large context of relative space" (Smith

[8] Though, of course, across different socio-spatial formations from the global north to the global south these relations can display "endless variations and gradations in [their] appearances, as the result of innumerable different empirical circumstances" (Marx 1991, 927), which require empirical analysis.

2010, 120). The subsequent emerging space economy of capitalism leads to different spatial strategies of the manifold implicated actors.

When the global resource rush is seen through this prism, it becomes just another moment in the continuous process of capitalist production of space, albeit one where land (understood broadly) has perhaps re-"gain[ed] in strength as a specific element or function" in this production (Lefebvre 1991, 325). It implicates a myriad of social actors, including nation states, with crucial implications for "politics and political strategy" in ongoing struggles over the production of space (ibid). But what role do these actors play and what are the relations between them and land?

Modern landed property and state space

The above mentioned processes of primitive accumulation and the resultant class-relations, in turn, give rise to a particular role for the state: "divorcing the producer from the means of production and the creation of the two historically opposed classes is also a process of capitalist state formation" (Parenti 2013, 838). While the role assumed by the state in struggles around land are obviously historically and contextually specific, a number of scholars have tried to formulate broader claims about the relation between the state and contemporary land dynamics, particularly as they play out in postcolonial contexts across the global South (e.g. Andreucci et al. 2017; Campling & Havice 2014; Campling & Colás 2018; Capps 2016, 2018; Coronil 1997; Parenti 2013; Vergara-Camus & Kay 2017).[9] Conceptually, they in different ways follow Harvey's call to bring rent "into the forefront of the analysis" (Harvey 2010, 183) by focusing specifically on the question of control of land under capitalist development.

Capps (2016; 2018) has contributed with a theorization of the emergence of modern landed property in transitions to capitalism generally and current struggles around land relations in the African countryside in particular (drawing on earlier formulations, particularly Neocosmos (1986)). Capps argues that following Marx's method involves a crucial analytical distinction

[9] There is a vast discussion of the particularities of state-formation in postcolonial contexts. As argued by Hamza Alavi (1972), for example, the postcolonial state in Pakistan and India did not arise organically through internal class relations, but rather the nascent national bourgeoisie at independence inherited an "overdeveloped state", which in turn became an instrument for class formation and differentiation. I do not delve into this or the following debates in the present work, but as emphasized throughout this chapter and in the empirical analysis below, the variety of capitalist forms across formerly colonized territories of course need to be identified, explained and their implications discussed.

between the essential relations (value, surplus value, landed property) and phenomenal forms (wage, price, the state, classes) of capitalism. This means that the essential relation in capitalism of modern landed property, can take many different phenomenal forms to that initially presented by Marx (individual land-owners) – meaning that the class function of mediating productive capital's access to means of production ('land') and appropriating rent could be performed by a whole host of different actors.

This approach is particularly well suited in postcolonial contexts, as it allows for an appreciation of the great variety of capitalist forms contingent on the histories of particular sociospatial formations and their insertion into capitalism.[10] Capps uses this argumentation to theorise chieftancies in South Africa as assuming the role of modern landed property in relation to mining companies (Capps 2016). Likewise, with the formation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) over significant portions of ocean space, Campling & Havice (2014) have argued that the state assumes the class function of modern landed property as it from then on mediates capital's access to resources within EEZs. Through EEZ's at least, the state attains the juridical basis of modern landed property, formalizing its rights to extract a portion of surplus value in the form of rent from capital active in ocean space. As a result, coastal and island states, "sit at the nexus of rent appropriation and other distributional struggles around surplus value, (perceived) 'national interest', geopolitics, resource management and industry regulation in EEZs" (Campling & Havice 2014, 715, see also Campling & Colás 2018).

In his seminal analysis of state formation in Venezuela, Coronil (1997) employs an explicitly Lefebvrian take on land, and argues that this is central for understanding states across the global south that partly as a result of colonial histories are tied to the world market through the export of one or a few primary products. Building on Lefebvre's critique of his contemporary Marxists for not taking the role of land seriously as a continuing force in societal development, Coronil similarly criticizes Marxist state theories (e.g. Jessop 1990) for an exclusion of nature more broadly – in his case, referencing the role of oil. Typically, Coronil argues, Marxists approach the analysis of the state form from the perspective of understanding the specific nature of

[10] As Capps (2016, 458) puts it, wielding Marxist conceptual tools in this way can help us to analyse the "complex range of lived relations and institutional permutations that variously combine different aspects of the whole in novel, dynamics and unpredictable ways, which in turn 'opens up the possibility of the existence of a variety of capitalist forms which can be accounted in ways other than as simple derivations from an ideal capitalism' (Neocosmos 1986, 10)."

capitalist accumulation in particular sociospatial formations, and focus on the structural connection between state and society in order to understand the degree of "relative autonomy" of the state (as per the Miliband-Poulantzas debates). While Coronil largely concurs with the overall approach, he contends that the capital-labour relation has taken priority over that of the land-relation and the role of modern landed property. By extension, this overprioritizes the role of capital and profits for capitalist states, while neglecting "land and its rents" (Coronil 1997, 64). Instead, as he argues, land should be "brought to the center of analysis in the multiple forms which it assumes in the contemporary world – not just as a class that represents a declining mode of production, but as an active social force in the reproduction of modern relations" (ibid, 62) Through this lens, "if the state, as a general representative of a capitalist society, is an abstract capitalist, as the sovereign authority over a national territory it plays the role of an abstract landlord" (ibid, 64). This is particularly the case when the state manages to assume the role of modern landed property in sociospatial formations across the global south, where control of natural resources – and hence the rent that the state can appropriate – are a major means of foreign exchange. In fact, in such cases, "domestic capitalists may come to depend on the resource-rich state for their revenues through multiple forms of state protection" (ibid, 65).

Along similar lines to Coronil's critique of Marxists overlooking the role of nature, Parenti has put forward a twist on Poulantzas' famous line about understanding the state as a social relation[11], noting that "the modern capitalist state does not *have* a relationship with nature, it *is* a relationship with nature" (2013, 830 emphasis in original). Parenti argues that the historical process of primitive accumulation is simultaneously a formative moment for capitalism and the capitalist state. Starting with processes of primitive accumulation, the state and capital come to work in tandem, where the state delivers or secures non-human use-values for the purpose of securing the accumulation of capital. This happens through property-regimes, the production of infrastructure as well as scientific and intellectual practices through which bio-physical reality is made legible to capital. Depending on the historical and contextual situation, this can be done with varying degrees of force. Crucially though, as the relation develops and strengthens, the state becomes "[t]he ultimate 'landlord'"

[11] "The (capitalist) State should not be regarded as an intrinsic entity: like 'capital', it is rather a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as this is expressed within the State in a necessarily specific form." (Poulantzas 2014, 128-129)

(Parenti 2013, 836). In sociospatial formations, where this is the case, the rent-based social relation regarding the struggle over ownership, access, use and distribution of benefits thus become central. Indeed, as Andreucci and colleagues (2017, 32) argue, in cases where the state does act as a de facto landlord, it "becomes the main terrain of class struggles over the rent it accrues".

These recent interventions enliven Lefebvre's thinking of the state and its territorial strategies in relation to production of space under capitalist development. In so doing, they distance themselves from the above noted turn towards more Foucauldian-inspired readings of the state, which reduce state practice to questions of a vague modernity and domination as an end in and of itself. Instead, Lefebvre's approach to the state and its state space was precisely aimed at elucidating how "states have come to play a key role in the management and maintenance of capitalist growth" (Brenner & Elden 2009, 369). In this pursuit, the territorial strategies of the state necessarily concern themselves with promoting spaces as sites for capital accumulation (see also Brenner et al. 2003). As also alluded by Parenti, such processes involve varying degrees of violence and require thinking of the state as a relation with nature – as Lefebvre (1991, 280) evocatively clarifies in a passage in *The Production of Space*,

> [E]very state is born of violence and […] state power endures only by virtue of violence directed towards a space. This violence originated in nature, as much with respect to the sources mobilized as with respect to the stakes – namely, wealth and land. At the same time it aggressed all of nature, imposing laws upon it and carving it up administratively according to criteria quite alien to the initial characteristics of either the land or its inhabitants. At the same time too, violence enthroned a specific rationality, that of accumulation, that of the bureaucracy and the army – a unitary, logistical, operational and quantifying rationality which would make economic growth possible and draw strength from that growth for its own expansion to the point where it would take possession of the whole planet.

To interrogate this continuing yet historically and geographically differentiated process, Lefebvre elsewhere presents the analytical tool of the "state mode of production" (Lefebvre 2009, 223-226). This concept can be mobilized for an analysis of the state's production of space – that is the state's role in facilitating historically and geographically specific regimes of capitalist growth through the political domination of space. This domination of space by the state covers the territory that it manages to subsume in its state space, extending "itself to

under the ground and to airspace, forests, and water sources, rivers, coasts and maritime territories and to recently extended territorial waters" (Lefebvre 2009, 275). Importantly, and in line with the above conceptualization of land that Lefebvre lays out, the resultant produced state space emerges "from a historically specific, mutually transformative articulation between the state, the continually contested processes within it, and the land or soil that it inhabits, owns, controls and exploits" (Brenner & Elden 2009, 362) As such, the state mode of production provides a tool to concretely analyse the role of the state in the production of space.

This, however, requires an understanding of the different spatialities of states and capital and the ensuing dialectic between them. Where capital operates "more in continuous (relative and relational) space and time", territorially defined and circumscribed entities, such as states, are necessarily "more grounded in absolute territorial space" (Harvey 2006b, 107). The state's role as "an active agent in capital circulation and accumulation" (ibid, 106) then leads to distinct geopolitics of capitalism, as this role plays out across and within different scales – including inter-state relations. The relational approach argued for here, thereby entails a move beyond the "territorial trap" of international relations theory noted by Agnew (1994) by eschewing the existing territorial division of the state as a given, as well as seeing dynamics at this scale in isolation from other scales. Rather, the existence of states needs to be historicized and set in relation to dynamics of capital accumulation across scales (Smith 2000; 2010). Elaborating on Smith's earlier work referenced above, Deborah Cowen and Neil Smith (2009) have conceptualised the historical development of the spatiality of capitalism in terms of geopolitical territorial logics characterizing the colonial physical expansions and geoeconomic market logics characterizing the contemporary era. Under this geoeconomic market logic, direct territorial control is no longer necessary for the purpose of securing capital accumulation. As they put it, "[w]here geopolitics can be understood as a means of acquiring territory towards a goal of accumulating wealth, geoeconomics reverses the procedure, aiming directly at the accumulation of wealth through market control. The acquisition or control of territory is not at all irrelevant but it is a tactical option rather than a strategic necessity" (Cowen & Smith 2009, 42). As they qualify, geoeconomics never supplants geopolitics, but the two need to be seen in dialectical relation to each other in order to uncover the role of the state in producing space under contemporary globalized capitalism.

Rural differentiation, class formation and variation

> Class is arguably the single most crucial axis on which human life turns in the modern world, yet is at the same time one of the most difficult social facts to grasp. (Walker 1985, 164)

> The clarity of older categories of property and class has been compromised, and it is no longer the case that one finds capitalists hungry for cheap labour tearing peasants away from the fabric of rural life. Today a fragmented proletariat confronts informal labour markets and sub-contracting. Individuals and households combine farming with off-farm labour, while others float between rural and urban areas, or between different rural areas. Old linear sequences are destabilized as workers may move from industry back to small-scale farming, and families retreat – or are driven – from urban areas to the countryside. (O'Laughlin 2009, 199)

Moving toward a greater level of conceptual specification, the production of space, in the end, implicates people. This section follows up on the need to examine the different actors involved in grabbing processes, as well as the need to think about such dynamics across scales. Where the former section, interrogated the role of the state and hence the national scale, this section turns to what Smith (2010, 293) termed the local scale that is "the lower end of the spectrum of geographic space", which "includes the rural production of space".

The following lays out the conceptualization of class and rural class differentiation that will be followed and argues for the importance of a multiscalar analysis of class. As emphasized by Campling and his colleagues (2016, 1748), "the antagonistic relations through which capital and labour shape and resist processes of accumulation and exploitation" play out across scales. As a result, "classes are formed, interact and are reproduced *through relations with each other* on global, national, regional and local scales" (ibid, emphasis in original). The point then, is to take class analysis all the way down, so to speak, from regional geoeconomic and geopolitical processes to – in countries like Myanmar – the village scale. Particularly in the grabbing literature, there is a need to unpack the notion of "community", which is often used as a shorthand for in fact highly differentiated rural realities across lines of class, which can then be further segmented along other social divides e.g. gender, ethnicity, etc. (Borras & Franco 2013). Class analysis at this scale can then help to challenge what Oya calls "the myth of homogenous peasantries" (2004, 289), which is particularly pervasive in Myanmar (Bello 2018). Fortunately, there is a rich and rigorous scholarship analyzing how differentiation unfolds in rural contexts across the global south under the rubric of the agrarian question, influenced varyingly by the work of Marx, Kautsky,

Lenin, Chayanov, Kritsman and many others (for review see Akram-Lodhi & Kay 2010a; 2010b).

Differentiation in this tradition and as formulated in this thesis, is understood basically as the emergence or compounding of differences within the rural population. As has been emphasized by many writing in this tradition,[12] processes of differentiation do not follow an ideal abstract model but manifest themselves in particular concrete and context specific circumstances, which are necessarily shaped by and shaping the spatio-temporal unfolding of capitalism. Across different empirical contexts, the nature and extent of rural differentiation therefore varies greatly.

Following White (1989, 20), differentiation is a dynamic process that is essentially more qualitative and immaterial than quantitative and material – although it has quantitative and material implications: "It is not about whether some peasants become richer than others but about the changing kinds of relations between them (or between peasants and nonpeasants, including extrarural groups) in the context of the development of commodity relations in rural economy". Crucially, and in line with the above focus on production, the differences of interest here are how different groups gain "access to the products of their own or others' labour, based on their differential control over production resources" (White 1989, 20). Where the grabbing literature with its basis in discussions around primitive accumulation typically focuses on forceful and violent – or extra-economic – means through which such differential control over, especially, land emerges, it is important to not lose sight of how accumulation and dispossession unfold at "close quarters" through "'everyday' processes, mundane and piecemeal, that do not grab headlines" (Hall et al. 2011, 145). That is, the "silent compulsion of economic relations" that Marx (1990, 899) himself emphasized in his analysis of primitive accumulation as that which "sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker." From this perspective, defining texts in the grabbing literature that explicitly exclude dispossession by differentiation (see e.g. Borras et al. 2012) from its purview miss a crucial part of actually existing processes of differentiation and class formation as they play out on the ground across rural contexts (calls for correctives include Edelman et al. 2013; Oya 2013).

[12] Stretching back to the pioneers of the agrarian question, e.g. Lenin's formulation that "[t]he main trends of peasant differentiation are one thing: the forms it assumes, depending on the different local conditions are another." (quoted in White 1989, 15)

While not arguing for a class-reductionist approach and remaining aware of other forms of domination and subordination,[13] what constitutes capitalism as a historically distinct mode of production is the existence of a fundamental dichotomy between the two major classes, "which are divided by the central antagonism in capitalist society over the production and appropriation of surplus-value" (Campling et al. 2016, 1749). These two major classes are capitalists on the one hand, and labourers on the other. Where capitalists, as a result of the above mentioned processes of (ongoing) primitive accumulation, own or control the means of producing social wealth, labourers are forced to sell their labour power in order to survive. Thus, at its most fundamental level, "class is […] a relationship of exploitation" (de Ste Croix 1984, 99) that crystallizes in what Marx calls the "hidden abode of production" (1990, 279). It is exploitative because the production process is based on the appropriation of a surplus by the capitalist class that stems from the work of the laboring class.

What distinguishes this mode of production from similarly exploitative relations in non-capitalist societies is that under capitalism the "[e]xploitation of labour [is] driven by the need to expand the scale of production and increase productivity in order to make profit" (Bernstein 2010, 22).[14] In this process, there is a shift in the role of the market, from being a site of opportunity that can be engaged, to being a site of compulsion that exercises a coercive discipline that must be adhered to (Wood 2009; 2016). This discipline is felt by capitalists that must realise profits or face annihilation in the market place. In turn, labourers that have been divorced (either wholly or partly) of their means of subsistence and are consequently compelled to sell their labour on the market in order to secure wages to buy food for e.g. home consumption for which they now also depend on the market (the "reproduction" of labour).[15] In

[13] As Henry Bernstein (2010, 115, emphasis in original) notes, "class relations are *universal but not exclusive* 'determinations' of social practices in capitalism. They intersect and combine with other social differences and divisions, of which gender is the most widespread and which can also include oppressive and exclusionary relations of race and ethnicity, religion and cast."

[14] As Marx (1990, 644) puts it, "Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is, by its very essence the production of surplus-value. The worker produces not for himself, but for capital. It is no longer sufficient, therefore, for him simply to produce. He must produce surplus-value." For more on this, see Chapter 2.

[15] Although, of course, questions of social reproduction under capitalism encompass much more than "just" reproduction of labour: "Social reproduction, as the name implies, encompasses that broad range of practices and social relations that maintain and reproduce particular relations of production along with the material social grounds in which they take

this manner, processes of production as well as reproduction become dependent on the market. Yet, it is important to note, from the perspective of labour, "a livelihood does not depend on wage income alone, for it includes the unmarketed labour of women, children and men" (O'Laughlin 2009, 191).

The fundamental class relation of antagonism between capital and labour notwithstanding, struggles do play out within these classes too. The relations within them can be both antagonistic and collaborative. Collaborative when agents within classes act consciously as a class "for itself" towards the other class in struggles e.g. over control of the means of production, or antagonistically when fractions within each of these classes are at odds, e.g. over distribution of surplus-value or as a result of segmentation along other social divides (e.g. gender).

Furthermore, class relations between the two major classes are also at play in the other moments of circulation of capital beyond production (realization and distribution of value). Thus, the extraction of surplus value from labour can happen in a variety of ways. In the agrarian context, de Ste. Croix (1984) distinguishes between two kinds of exploitation: direct and individual and indirect and collective. The direct and individual exploitation happens through the above noted capital-labour relation. The indirect and collective exploitation takes place when a state which "represents primarily the interests of a superior class or classes, imposes burdens disproportionately upon a particular subject class or classes" (de Ste. Croix 1984, 106). This can, for example, be taxation, military conscription and forced labour. Deere & de Janvry (1979) provide a number of other patterns whereby surplus is extracted from producers in the other moments of the circulation process – including the moment of realization of value (the market). In this moment, notably when peasants face monopolistic merchants, extraction via terms of trade may take place, that is, unfavourable prices for the commodities sold, relative to commodities purchased. Additionally, usurious interest rates on debts to money lenders, merchants and/or rich peasants are an important source of surplus transfer as peasant production is notoriously unstable (Deere & de Janvry 1979).

Of course, when moving to the concrete, it is not straightforward to identify even the two major classes. Particularly in relation to postcolonial and rural contexts across the global south there has been great debate concerning the

place." As a result, social relations of reproduction "unfold in dialectical relation to production, with which [they are] mutually constitutive and in tension" (Katz 2004, x)

nature and extent of class formation.[16] Significantly, it became clear that the conditions for full proletarianization through a complete dispossession of the majority of populations across the global south were not established. This left conceptual and empirical questions about the class basis of the "peasantry" that persisted to exist. What became clear was that instead of the classical process of dispossession rural populations underwent in England (see above), rural populations across colonial and postcolonial formations were in different ways incorporated into the international capitalist economy. Rather than full on enclosure from above and the resultant dispossession, however, this could take more subtle forms, e.g. through the noted indirect and collective exploitation through taxation of land or people and/or obligation to cultivate certain crops oriented towards the domestic or export market. As a result, these "[p]rocesses of incorporation generated different types of class formation among the farming populations of the colonies […], now subject to the commodification of subsistence and with possibilities of accumulation for some" (Bernstein 2010, 53).

These processes of incorporation were and are therefore crucial for the development of commodity relations in rural economies, setting off or compounding processes of differentiation. This led to a number of different insertions into capitalist social relations with some of them spanning the capital-labour divide. This is, for example, emblematic of households[17] in petty commodity production that can occupy different positions in different moments. Once producers one way or the other have been locked into commodity production, the noted tendency toward differentiation sets in. Some households may over time manage to produce small surpluses through the exploitation of labour power and are hence in the process of becoming petty capitalists. Other households are simply managing to reproduce themselves and do not hire in labourers but engage in "self-exploitation", that is relying on non-commodified family labour. Such households will, in many cases,

[16] These debates are too extensive to rehash here, but in addition to the work of dependency theorists mentioned above are the contributions stemming from the mode of production debate. For review of the relevance of these debates for the agrarian question(s), see Akram-Lodhi & Kay (2010b).

[17] Historical materialist and feminist research has done much to challenge the conception of the household as a "black box", conceptualising it rather as a site of struggles that reflects "inequalities in social relations of gender that are shaped by broader economic and political processes" (Razavi 2009, 205). For an historical materialist take see Oya (2004). The present study nonetheless primarily interrogates processes of rural differentiation between households. For reflections on this, see Chapter 2.

combine this self-exploitation with wage employment for households that have successfully transitioned into petty capitalist production. Finally, another group of households may be struggling to even reproduce themselves, what has been called the "simple reproduction squeeze" (Bernstein 1979), due to e.g. insufficient means of production and are hence gradually forced to rent out or even sell their means of production, in the process becoming the "free" labourers that were created by force in the classic case of England. In Lenin's influential schema (as explained in Bernstein 2009; 2010), these different groups amounted respectively to rich, middle and poor peasants.

As O'Laughlin puts it in the opening quote of this section, in the context of global capital accumulation contemporary processes of class formation are complex. In an attempt at updating Lenin's schema and accounting for these complexities, Bernstein has introduced the concept of classes of labour to encompass Lenin's middle and poor peasants. Within these classes of labour, people have to rely on a broad array of activities to reproduce themselves and their households. As Bernstein explains (2010, 111), this entails "different sites of the social division of labour: urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural, wage-employment and marginal self-employment."

As should be clear by now, the particular phenomenal form of class dynamics is an empirical question, yet empirically discerning these complexities is a difficult task. The strategy I have used to do so is presented in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the contemporary wave of dispossession studies framed in terms of a global resource rush. It identified four conceptual challenges in the literature: (1) the relation between instances of enclosure and dispossession ("grabs") and capitalist development, (2) how to grapple with grabs of multiple resources, (3) the importance of understanding the role of multiple actors across time and space and (4) how all of these dynamics across scales cumulatively intersect and interact in specific landscapes. Through an enquiry into production of space, modern landed property, state space and class dynamics under capitalist development, it has sought to address these challenges. Weaving these together, the conceptual framework contributes with an analysis that contextualises particular instances of dispossession by enclosure ("grabbing") within a much broader analysis of the underlying

political economic processes that mark such phenomena. Thereby, the analysis demonstrates how any grab is just one particular moment in the multiscalar production of space. In other words, momentarily striking occurrences of dispossession by enclosure have to be grasped in relation to the more mundane – but no less crucial – long term processes of dispossession by differentiation. Moreover, contending with how space as such is produced and struggled over under capitalist development, it seeks to move beyond the resource silo approach of much of the resource rush literature. As the empirical analysis will show, in moving to the concrete, this allows for an analysis uncovering how multiple actors – from the state to differentiated villagers – become implicated in the multiscalar production of space.

3. Interrogating the production of the Northern Tanintharyi landscape

> [N]eo-critical geography [is] … collaborating in the obliteration of the very insights that put geography on the political and theoretical map after the 1970s – namely the core belief that socially divided societies reproduce their forms of social differentiation in geographical space and, by corollary, that hierarchically produced geographies reaffirm and reproduce social differences." (Smith 2005, 895)

> [G]eography has been particularly subject to what might be called 'fanons': the tendency to lurch from one intellectual fashion to another without much attention to what came before. Many graduate students see little or no point in reading the 'old stuff' when the rewards come from being up-to-date with the latest imported ideas from other fields that they then bend to their own purposes." (Agnew 2012, 322)

In Smith's pointed 2005-essay in Political Geography, he chides the rise and increasing dominance of what he called "neo-critical geography". This brand of geography does not see (or look for) hierarchical patterns in sociospatial structures or how they are established, rooted and reproduced through the prevailing mode of production. Since Smith penned his essay, such neo-critical geography has arguably become more entrenched in the discipline. In the latest "fanons", as Agnew puts it, ever more elaborate ways of eschewing hierarchies are pursued, prioritizing instead, for example, an "ontological levelling" as the post humanist trend aims to whereby it is no longer possible to distinguish between "marine geology", "feminist networks", "the navy" or "pipelines" – all are "actants" bounding around in a myriad of "assemblages" (see among many others Winder and Le Heron 2017). Working in a context like Myanmar, though I would argue everywhere else too, it is quite obvious that all types of scaled hierarchies along lines of class, gender and ethnicity (and many others) are present and if these hierarchies are to be challenged, a framework that can discern and analyse them is necessary. As Smith (2005, 897) puts it towards

the end of the same essay, "[i]f hierarchies vanish today in our academic theories, then so too vanish most of the targets of our political critique."

Consequently, this project turns to some of the "old stuff" that is currently not in fashion in the discipline, namely an historical-geographical materialism and a dialectical mode of thinking. While maybe not in fashion, this chapter argues for the relevance of this approach in order to understand the sociospatial processes of primitive accumulation and rural differentiation that the research questions are oriented towards. I attempt to explain the underlying worldview of this approach and subsequently turn to how it has guided my research strategy and fieldwork throughout the course of the project.

Ontological and conceptual clarifications

In contrast with the idealism of much "neo-critical geography" and work on agrarian-environmental transformations that gives explanatory weight to discourses, materialism asserts that "matter is prior to and independent of thought" (Tetreault 2017, 13). In this view of the world, history does not move forward through the interplay of ideas, but rather "through the dialectical resolution of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production" (ibid, 14). A historical materialist analysis of any society therefore takes point of departure in the prevailing relations of production, that is: "the social conditions under which the human labour of transforming nature to support the populace is undertaken" (Walker 1985, 169).

In a useful distillment of how to go about interrogating these relations, Henry Bernstein has formulated four key questions, namely "who owns what, who does what, who gets what and what do they do with it?" (Bernstein 2010, 22). These four questions cover, respectively, the social relations of property and ownership, social division of labour, social division of the 'fruits of labour' (not purely income) and the social relations of consumption, reproduction and accumulation. While the relations under study themselves are immaterial, they have objective material basis and consequences independent of what we may think about them. Thus, the four questions help to discern, "processes of accumulation, production and social reproduction, and for explaining differences and relations between classes of rural people, including the material basis for such differences, that is, command of land, labour and capital" (Oya 2004, 290). In this manner, the questions can help in the interrogation of and distinguishing between modes of production – of which

capitalism is one. In other words, interrogating the relations of production under capitalism in any given place will lead to a particular set of responses to the four questions.

In terms of the who owns what-question, following the above discussion of class, Marx assumed that processes of primitive accumulation meant that under capitalism, two major classes can be distinguished according to ownership of the means of production. For example, in a small fishing village in Myanmar, one group in the village may be discernible, because they own the boats and the equipment used for fishing, whereas another group do not own anything and have to sell their labour power to the boat owners.

The different position of the two classes according to the means of production in turn shape responses to the second question, clarifying the different activities performed between the classes in the process of production, but also within the classes, e.g. segmentation along lines of gender. In the fishing example, who performs the harvesting of the fish, post-harvesting activities around processing the fish, selling the fish etc.

In turn, these first two questions shape the social division of the fruits of labour, namely the distribution of the surplus value that arises from the process of production. Back to the fishing village, how is the money gained from the selling of the fish distributed between the boat owners (profits) and labourers (wages), amongst the labourers (e.g. segmented wages according to gender and generation).

Finally, "what do they with it", sheds light on how profits and wages are spent and/or further distributed. For example, part of the group of what was initially categorized as boat owners may actually not own the boat, but have to pay a portion of the profits to the actual owner in the form of rent. In order to pay for their fishing equipment, other boat owners may have acquired debts to merchant capitalists to whom they may be forced to sell their catch and on top of that have to pay a portion of their profits in the form of interest to service their debts. Additionally, and distinguishing the capitalist mode of production from others, is that the boat owners have to re-invest part of their profits into buying means of production and more or better labour power, as they are in competition with their fellow boat owners – over the most skilled labour and over the limited amounts of fish that are accessible to them under the current means of fishing that they have (e.g. size of their boats and motors, types of fishing nets). The labourers, on the other hand, might be indebted to merchants and/or boat owners as well in order to pay for their children to go to school, to get to the hospital, or simply to buy food for their own survival, e.g. if the

wages they receive are not high enough to allow for this, in Marx's terms, reproduction of themselves and their families.

What distinguishes capitalism as a distinct mode of production is that it is inherently geared towards expansion as the capitalists must re-invest a portion of their profits to purchase or improve means of production and labour power – or face annihilation by their competitors. If we study any particular sociospatial formation (e.g. a coastal village, capital city, etc.) over time through the lens of these four questions, we will be able to note shifts in the responses we find in tune with the development of the mode of production. For example, the amount of boat owners may decline, while the amount of boats and/or the size of boats that individual capitalists own increases. In this manner, as Bernstein notes, "[t]hese four key questions can be usefully applied across different sites and scales of economic activity, from households to 'communities' to regional, national and global economic formations. They can also be applied to different types of societies at different historical moments" (Bernstein 2010, 24). As such, the questions lend themselves to the type of multiscalar approach pursued in this dissertation and, as I argue below, is necessary for the dissection of any landscape.

Armed with these four simple questions and from the starting point of examining the social relations of production, we can helpfully shine light on what Marx calls the different moments within the overall process of circulation of capital highlighted through each of the four questions. These individual moments, need to be understood as internally related. As formulated in the Grundrisse, it "is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity … The process always returns to production to begin anew" (Marx 1993, 99). This suggests a process of circulation of capital consisting of different moments, within a larger totality, whereby surplus value is produced, realized and distributed. Quoting from Volume 1 at length,

> The transformation of a sum of money into means of production and labour-power is the first phase of the movement undergone by the quantum of value which is going to function as capital. It takes place in the market, within the sphere of circulation. The second phase of the movement, the process of production, is complete as soon as the means of production have been converted into commodities whose value exceeds that of their components parts, and therefore contains the capital originally advanced plus a surplus-value. These commodities must then be thrown back into the sphere of circulation. They must be sold, their value must be realized in money, this money must be transformed once again into capital, and so on, again and again. This cycle, in

> which the same phases are continually gone through in succession, forms the circulation of capital. (Marx 1990, 709)

Marx, then, understands capital itself as a process and a relation – value in motion as Harvey puts it (2006a; 2017; and see particularly Marx 1990, 255-256). Basically, capital enters in its money-form, money-capital, to purchase means of production and labour-power as commodities. These are then combined in the process of production, whereby surplus-value is produced by labour – surplus value here understood as "unpaid labour embedded in the commodity" (Campling et al. 2016, 1749). This is the origin of the surplus-value that Marx refers to above. The new commodity and its surplus-value must then be realized again in money-form through the market. Once this surplus-value has been realized in money-form, it is then distributed amongst different actors again in different forms, including wages, taxes, industrial and merchant profit, interest and rent. Part of the capitalists' profits then re-enter the circulation as money-capital and the process begins anew. Each of these moments then, production, realization and distribution are moments of struggle within and between the two major classes (discussed in Chapter 2), but with the moment of production accounting for the origin of surplus-value that the entire ensuing circulation process is based on.

Marx's understanding of capital flows from his dialectical method, namely for analytical purposes replacing things with processes and relations. This entails moving beyond the common-sense view of the world as existing of things with their own histories and external connections with other things. Instead, we turn to a more dynamic understanding of the world based on processes that contain history and possible futures, and relations, "containing in themselves, as integral elements of what they are, those parts with which we tend to see them externally tied" (Ollman 2003, 202). In this manner, focus shifts away from e.g. the head of a household as an individual entity to the relations amongst people within that household and between that household and other households and how these change over time. Thus, through the prism of processes and relations, under the capitalist mode of production, "the characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations" that exist between them (Marx 1990, 179). The class relation then, "exists independent of individual will" (Walker 1985, 167). That is, it is objective and exists whether the individuals implicated in the relation perceive it or not.

Examining these relations in a given sociospatial formation (e.g. a particular landscape) can then illuminate processes of and opportunities for change

within those socialspatial formations. With this shift, we are able to identify agency. As opposed to the often obscure notions of power within post structural perspectives that eschew class analysis and instead reference domination with no clear end (Smith 2000; Walker 1985), power and agency in this understanding is exactly exercised and waged in the class relation. Agency then is here understood as "a dialectical process produced through the 'friction' of relations within and between multifaceted classes … Individual agencies actively shape material conditions. But material conditions, which are the result of human activities past and present, in turn constrain agency" (Campling et al. 2016, 1748). Or, with more evocative language as Marx (n.d., 15) put it in the opening passages of the 18th Brumaire, "[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

The shift in mode of analysis, in turn requires moving back and forth between what Marx called the abstract and the concrete. Crucially, this distinction does not mirror that between theory and empirical, but rather "utilizing *general* concepts ('capitalism', 'class', 'surplus value') to identify and analyse *particular* social forms (for example, the corporation, processes of local class formation, the nature of the Brazilian and Indian state)" (Campling et al. 2016, 1746, emphasis in original). In the preceding chapter, this was mentioned through the distinction between essential relations (referring to the class function of modern landed property) and the diverse phenomenal forms that this can take across varied empirical contexts (from the state to chieftancies). Quoting David Harvey (2006b, 86-87) at length, an approach to interrogation following

> Marx's method of descent from the surface appearance of particular events to the ruling abstractions underneath is very different [from the inductive method]. It entails viewing any particular event set as an internalization of fundamental underlying guiding forces. The task of enquiry is to identify these underlying forces by critical analysis and detailed inspection of the individual instance. … From this perspective we see that all case studies necessarily internalize theory construction. 'Doing theory' is, therefore, an inevitable concomitant of all forms of historical-geographical materialist inquiries.

In this manner, successfully moving back and forth between the abstract and the concrete, should ideally yield better theories, better understanding of particular events and hence a better understanding of agency to transform the existing social relations of production.

As this would suggest, inherent within this approach is a deep and continuous historicisation. But what constitutes the geographic? Radical geographers from the 1970s onwards, sought to grapple with how the circulation of capital and its different moments took distinct spatial forms. That is, how capital circulates in and through space, and in the process transforms it – the production of space, as discussed in Chapter 2. For example, as argued by Harvey (2006a), for some parts of capital to circulate (in the form of money, commodities etc.) other parts of capital have to be fixed in place. The prerequisite for such fixing is processes of primitive accumulation that create both surplus populations and the possibility of surplus production. In tandem with primitive accumulation, the formation of fixed capital is crucial, "a variety of forms of fixed capital – physical infrastructures such as docks and harbours, transport systems and so on – which are relatively large-scale … need to be produced early on in the history of capitalist development" (Harvey 2006a, 226). These forms of fixed capital that are relatively immobile, what Harvey calls the built environment, "functions as a vast, humanly created resource system, comprising use values embedded in the physical landscape, which can be utilized for production, consumption and exchange" (Harvey 2006a, 233).

Fixing capital, though a necessary prerequisite to unlock capitalism's dynamism, simultaneously has a locking in effect. As a form of value in motion, fixed capital is geared toward the production of surplus value, but as the realization of value from these formations typically have a long turnover time, fixed capital "exercises a coercive power over future uses" (Harvey 2006a, 220) of the landscape as it becomes increasingly "fashioned according to the dictates of different modes of production at different stages of their historical development" (Harvey 2006a, 233). Thus, the increasing amounts of capital locked into the landscape as fixed capital in immobile form (roads, railways, harbours etc.) has profound political implications, because it gives a degree of "structured permanence" to the dominant social relations (Harvey 1996, 50).

It is in these terms that the point that social relations are inherently spatial relations – and vice versa should be understood: the landscape concretizes the social relations that go into its production. As a result, the landscape becomes "the phenomenal form of the social processes and practices of production, consumption, and exchange" (Mitchell 2003, 240). Furthermore, a spatial reading of capitalist development opens up the question of scale and requires an understanding of how the essential relations take different phenomenal forms across scales. Analysing any particular landscape then, say in Southern Myanmar, therefore requires a sensitivity

> to the complex material processes that operate not just locally, but across and within a wide variety of scales. We need to understand the landscape as constituted through processes that construct 'structured permanences' ranging from the bodies of workers, through the local 'place facts' and on to the regional, national and global economies and social relations within which it is embedded. (Mitchell 2003, 243)

In this manner, dissecting the production of a landscape requires moving across temporal and spatial scales – in this dissertation, as I further argue below, moving from the local scale of class differentiation in three particular villages, to regional geopolitical and geoeconomic struggles across Southeast Asia. Hence, the "multiscalar" nature of the analysis.

As this grasping of the spatiality of capitalism suggests, being attentive to space in no way precludes a simultaneous attention to history.[18] Indeed, to the contrary, as Fernando Coronil (1997, 30) has explained, in his approach to the formation of the Venezuelan petro-state,

> [i]f, as radical geographers propose, geography matters, it is in no small measure because matter itself is made to matter. Since the significance of nature is always constituted historically, the point of recognizing *the importance of geography, in my view, is not to displace history but to integrate historical and geographical perspectives*. (Coronil 1997, 30, emphasis added)

The next section explains how I have sought to operationalize this approach in pursuit of my research questions and some of the issues that came up along the way through my fieldwork in Southern Myanmar.

An historical-geographical materialist approach to the production of the Northern Tanintharyi landscape

As the widespread critique of and resistance toward land grabs in Myanmar today would attest to, dispossession is rampant across the country (see e.g. LIOHN 2015). Indeed, as recently noted by Jones (2014a, 167) "Myanmar is essentially experiencing the early phases of primitive accumulation". Especially in the current moment in Myanmar then, the dialectical method to

[18] A critique levelled against geographers by my colleague Andreas Malm in his otherwise brilliant PhD-thesis-turned-book Fossil Capital (2016, 6).

objects, events and places, is particularly well suited, as in this lens places and events are not understood in isolation but as internally related and part of a larger whole. This challenges common conceptions and analyses of Myanmar, where the hegemonic media and policy narrative is one of seeming amnesia toward the decades of violent conflicts around access to and control of natural resources instead conveying a tabula-rasa situation following the 2011-shift to a civilian administration (Jones 2014a). This amounts to a distinctly non-dialectical approach, whereby, "the pieces of our everyday experience are taken as existing separate from their spatial and historical contexts, whenever the part is given an ontological status independent of the whole" (Ollman 2003, 9). By contrast, as explained above, thinking dialectically requires a deep historicizing, because the quest "is never for why something starts to change (as if it were not already changing) but for the various forms this change assumes" (Ollman 2003, 14). Thus, instead of merely looking for momentous and profound changes following the 2011-transition, thinking dialectically with Hart (2004, 98), "[a] processual and relational understanding refuses to take as given discrete object, identities, places and events; instead it attends to how they are produced and changed in practice in relation to one another."

This means of investigation may sound like an endless and ever expanding study with no temporal or spatial limits. But by contrast, the implication of dialectical thinking, is rather that any whole system subjected to analysis is present within the individual parts or units of that system. The process of abstraction in dialectics therefore involves interrogating reality by "breaking it down into manageable parts" (Ollman 2003, 60) – ultimately deciding on the processes and relations you are analysing, what data to gather and how.

In this manner, through the first year prior to initiating my fieldwork, I went through a process of beginning "with the whole system, or as much of it as one understands, and then proceed[ed] to an examination of the part to see where it fits and how it functions, leading eventually to a fuller understanding of the whole from which one has begun" (Ollman 2003, 14). In my case, the whole system was Myanmar's transition and the role of processes of primitive accumulation that, following Lee Jones' analysis and what I was hearing from activists, were (and are) unfolding in this transition. To interrogate it though, I had to delimit both temporally and spatially within this whole – identifying and understanding the functional role of a specific landscape in these processes (Mitchell 2012).

Temporally, I limited the study to the state-mediated capitalist transition following 1988, which several scholars of Myanmar have deemed key in setting off new rounds of primitive accumulation (e.g. MacLean 2008, Woods

2011, Jones 2014a, b). Spatially, the project focuses on Southern Myanmar, which for decades has been the site of profound transformations all involving different forms of primitive accumulation. While the antecedents of these activities stretch far back, the conflicts and struggles are intensifying in the current moment. This is particularly so in Southern Myanmar's Tanintharyi division (Borras & Franco 2018; Borras et al. 2018; Woods 2019), where a narrow stretch of land set between the Andaman Sea and the Thai border, is at once the site of massive palm oil concessions (the district destined to be the "palm oil bowl of the country" by the military regime in the 2000s), a planned industrial hub through a Special Economic Zone and a road ensuring connectivity with the Greater Mekong Subregion slicing through old growth forest, the highest density of terrestrial and marine protected areas as well as extraction zones for fisheries, offshore gas, timber, coal and tin. All of these are furthermore located in areas that for decades have been "targets of concentrated military operation" (Ferguson 2014, 3) through conflicts between the military regime and different Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs).

One of the spaces that in particular brings these dynamics together is the Northern part of the Tanintharyi division. Following post-Cold War geopolitical and geoeconomic realignments, this entire area was subjected to a new state mode of production. In short, with Thai capital increasingly in search of a spatial fix beyond Thai borders, Thai foreign policy aimed at turning neighbouring countries from "battlefields into marketplaces" and consequently the Thai government radically shifted its approach towards neighbours – not least the Burmese military regime as well as the EAOs along its borders (Hirsch 2009). Where the Thai government had tacitly supported the EAOs on its borders during the Cold War, the economic prospects of integrating the so-called liberated areas under EAO control into formal and legal regional circuits of capital began outweighing prior primarily political considerations. As Kramer (2009, 10) sums it up, for Bangkok based policy makers, the "'liberated areas' were no longer seen as a buffer zone [against creeping communism] but as an obstacle to regional economic development". Simultaneously, this meant an upward shift in the scale of capital accumulation – from the smaller illegal border trade mainly in the hands of the EAOs to the ushering in of new economic projects developed between the Thai government and the Burmese military regime. This initially covered fishing and timber concessions, but eventually turned into projects of a much larger scale involving Myanmar's hydrocarbon resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone.

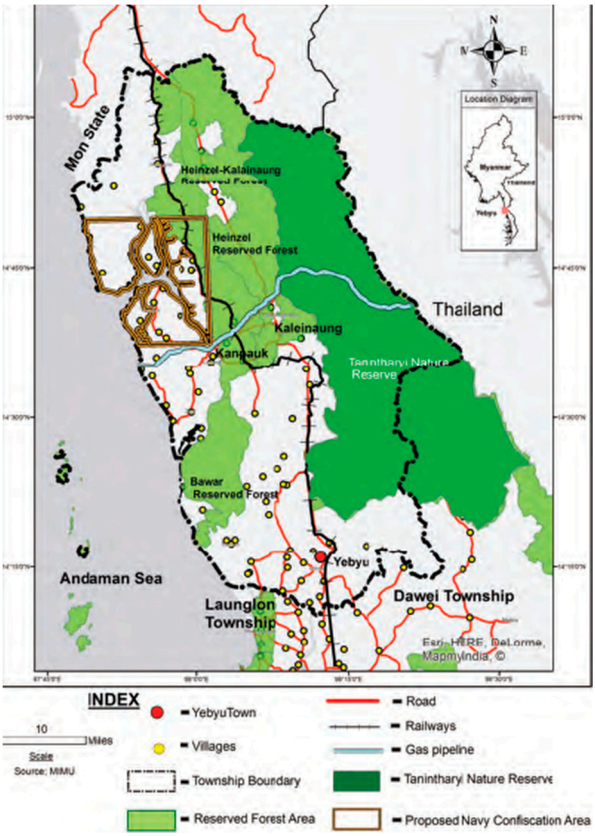


Figure 2
Yephyu township in Northern Tanintharyi shown with selected projects in the area. (Source: Local CSO (anonymised) 2016, 19. Reprinted with permission)

In pursuit of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, this dissertation grapples with how these multiple forces came together in Yephyu township in Northern Tanintharyi, when a number of gas pipelines (marked in Figure 2 in blue) linking the offshore Yadana gas bloc with Thailand to accommodate its energy hunger were built from the early 1990s onwards.

Operationalising the framework: data gathering

My strategy for interrogating the production of Northern Tanintharyi draws from Henry Bernstein's noted four key questions of political economy concerning the social relations of production, discussed above: "Who owns what? Who does what? Who gets what? What do they do with it?" (Bernstein

2010, 22). This follows Don Mitchell's methodological axioms, where he argues that in the analysis of any landscape "the key issue at stake is always the relations of production" (Mitchell 2008, 34). The question then is how to practically go about the analysis of changes in these relations of production.

As Figure 2 suggests, Yephyu township is still a relatively large geographical space to cover – and so in order to further zoom in on my part within the whole, I focused on three villages (see Figure 1 above) that are found at different points along the pipeline: one fishing village (Daminseik) where the gas pipeline has landfall, one (now predominantly) farming village (Ohn Pin Kwin) through which the pipeline cuts and one agro-forestry village (Mi Kyaung Laung) that was forcefully relocated by the military in order for the pipeline to be built. The three villages were selected because of the diverse resources that villagers depend on as well as their historical-geographical relation to the pipeline. The selection process was based on an initial 4-day scoping trip, where I did 15 interviews with key informants (village administrators or elders) in a number of different villages across Yephyu township.

The primary data subsequently gathered on Yephyu can be organized into four different data subsets:

1. Household interviews across the three villages (n=56). The interview guides used was built up around Bernstein's four key questions, but they were hidden in the sense that the guide encouraged people to present their life stories. This helped to elucidate how the social relations of production have changed over time, especially post-1988, herein the degree of differentiation within and between villages along lines of class, gender, generation and ethnicity - yielding insights into the pace and character of change across Yephyu. The selection of interviewees was not random, but purposive based on their relation to the means of production – that is, Bernstein's first question. Before the interviews in each village began, a classification of the village was made according to who owns what – focusing on the relevant means of production in the particular village (i.e. owning boats in the fishing village, land in the others) leading to a division of households into groups of rich, middle and poor (the latter two encompassing the segmented classes of labour noted in the preceding chapter). From these groups, I attempted to get an equal representation of each as well as a gender and age balance in order to tease out gender and generational dynamics – as Razavi reminds us, "'the household head'

did not necessarily have the same interests as other members of the household" (Razavi 2009, 201). In this manner, households were taken as the scale at which what White (1989) calls the symptoms or indicators of transformations in the relations of production were empirically observable (see below on limitations for more on this).

2. Interviews with village administrators (n=15). These were also based on Bernstein's four questions, but addressing the village, rather than the household scale.

3. Interviews with international NGOs, donors, regional state officials, former members of EAOs active in the region and several human rights activists that have worked in Myanmar over the past 25 years (n=20). For each of these interviews a guide tailored to the actor in question was made in order to gauge particular views on the historical and political economic dynamics in Yephyu and/or the Tanintharyi division as such.

4. In addition, I have on a continuous basis been working with several local civil society organization (e.g. organizing and carrying out workshops) that are active around natural resource politics in the area and beyond. Although the engagements with civil society activists and villagers in this way are more difficult to quantify, they have nonetheless, yielded many experiences and conversations through which my contextual understanding has also developed significantly. Such engagements were further enriched by (ongoing) discussions with colleagues in the Transnational Institute (TNI) that have been working in Myanmar for over 25 years (see below for more).

The qualitative tools used for gathering primary data were therefore a motley collection of semi structured interviews, participant observation and my own active participation in different events (e.g. workshops). The work was done in rounds of fieldwork in January 2016, October-December 2016, March 2017, October-December 2017 and for a few weeks in January, June and October 2018. Throughout this period, I followed the approach systematised by Nicholas Loubere in his Systematic and Reflexive Interviewing and Reporting (SRIR) method. Rather than the more typical method of transcription, which "reduces data by stripping out non-verbal information through the

textualization of recordings after fieldwork has been completed" the SRIR method yields much more rich data from the interview process (Loubere 2017, n.p.). Following this method, during interview processes in the first three data subsets as well as other moments during fieldwork (those captured in the fourth dataset) "researchers note responses, observations, feelings, hunches and preliminary analyses – only recording interviews if possible and convenient" (ibid). For datasets one, two and four it was neither possible nor convenient and recordings were only done in a few of the interviews in data subset three. Instead, notes were gone through immediately after each interview with the interpreter confirming content and any noted verbatim quotes. Subsequently, systematic interview reports were written up every evening of fieldwork allowing for preliminary coding and analysis to begin *in situ*, which "facilitate[d] critical engagement with emergent themes *during* fieldwork" (ibid, emphasis in original). Eventually, these interview reports were collated and upon returning from fieldwork in Myanmar subjected to deeper analysis. The temporality of the fieldwork with several visits to Yephyu with months in between allowed for an iterative process of analysis – data collection – analysis – and so on. Respondents in data subset one and two were, however, only interviewed once, while data subsets three and four involved continuous meetings with these different respondents working in or around Yephyu township.

The information gathered from the four data subsets through SRIR-method were continuously triangulated within and between each other. Additionally, the primary data as a whole, has been supplemented and triangulated by a range of other secondary data materials: colonial documents, existing academic work, reports by international finance institutions from the post-2010 era onwards (e.g. World Bank, IMF, ADB), CSO reports from 1995 onwards, newspaper clippings from the early 1990s, publicly available documents from Total, who refused to give an interview (the main and first gas company to be active in the area). Although many other fields would perhaps today also lay claim to this mix of primary and secondary data – new and old – and processes of triangulation, as Michael Watts wrote back in 1983, "[t]he blending of source materials and the synthesis of field and archival information is, I suspect, a particular strength of the geographic approach" (Watts 2013, 37).

Gaining access

> [It is] surprising how many classic monographs cover their tracks, obfuscate the mistakes, errors and panic, and forget the lived realities of working in the

> ‘field’, however defined. To be blunt: fieldwork is important, but it ain’t necessarily pretty. (Watts 2001, 1)

Notwithstanding my own process of deciding upon Northern Tanintharyi intellectually, it should of course also be acknowledged that the current political climate in Myanmar was a conditioning factor for where it would even be possible to go, let alone what type of qualitative data I was able to gather and how. The main ethnic armed group active in Tanintharyi, the Karen National Union, did not sign a ceasefire agreement with the Union Government until 2012. This means that there have been significant restrictions on the movement of foreigners imposed by the Union Government across Tanintharyi. Restrictions are still in place in the two Southern districts (Myeik and Kaw Thaung) with some areas still completely off limits for foreigners. Many of the areas that are accessible in the South that would have been very interesting to look into are under heavy surveillance by security police as well as by the notorious “cronies” in control there. Cronies has become a vernacular term in Myanmar for “a state-linked oligarchic elite which enjoys considerable economic dominance and close relations with military and state officials” (Jones 2014, 151). For example, one of these cronies basically runs the Southern city of Myeik. He owns a vertically integrated fisheries firm, controlling vessel building and repair, as well as processing, transport and selling of fishery commodities to the lucrative Thai market. Part of this operation is run from a small island off Myeik, where he employs some 5000 people, who live basically in serfdom as he owns the means of production as well as the social infrastructure on the island (houses, school, and hospital). While out on the island, posing as a tourist, I was implored by my “guide” at the time not to take any pictures for fear of repercussions he would feel, if we were seen. The crony is notorious for his ability to control what foreigners can and cannot do in Myeik through his connections. This to the extent that in one of my interviews with an international NGO working on coastal and fisheries issues in the area, the interviewee wouldn’t say the crony’s name aloud (we were in a restaurant owned by said crony) for fear of listeners. Instead he wrote down the name in my notebook and pointed to it, whenever he came up in the conversation. The interviewee warned me against doing any form of work that would turn out critical towards the crony. In another example, the security police tailed me and a co-organiser of one of the three mentioned workshops and sat in the back of the room throughout the workshop taking notes.

My organizational entry point into Tanintharyi was through the scholar-activist organization the Transnational Institute (TNI), which further shaped

my choice.[19] TNI has been working in the country since the early 1990s and so going through them meant that I got in touch with their partners in Tanintharyi. As part of the ongoing cooperation between them, I got involved in different forms of technical support, engaged especially with one civil society organisation, the Dawei Development Association (DDA). The technical support involved presentations at conferences and the organizing of a series of workshops for coastal fishing villages in the regional capitals of Tanintharyi's three districts (Dawei, Myeik, Kaw Thaung). The organizing of and participation in these events facilitated my travelling around Tanintharyi meeting up with and interviewing local CSOs, NGOs and foreign donors working in the region. The contextual knowledge gathered as well as the experience of gathering this knowledge for more logistical[20] and pragmatic reasons concerning security, noted above, also impacted on my choice of zooming in on Yephyu township in Dawei district.

Getting access to the village scale in Yephyu then, was conditioned by this prior cooperation with DDA. My translator and co-facilitator in two workshops was an activist working with DDA – Ko Aung Lwin. Ko Aung Lwin is born and raised in Kanbauk (Yephyu district capital), so speaks the local language (Tavoyan) and was already familiar with a lot of the issues in Yephyu township as he had travelled around in the area knowing many of the village administrators. Once we were on the road and beyond issues with the security police,[21] gaining access to the villages and villagers was therefore relatively easy with Ko Aung Lwin working as both translator and fixer of the interviews.

[19] For more on this group, see: https://www.tni.org/en/myanmar-in-focus

[20] A, for me, handy upshot of the increasing development of infrastructure around Dawei district is that travelling to and from as well as within the district is made much easier than Tanintharyi's other two Southern districts.

[21] Due to the difficulties of obtaining a research-via all of my research happened under a tourism visa. While on the one hand, this made gaining access to some physical areas easy (e.g. military sites, because they thought I was just a tourist uninterested in any contentious issues), it made explanation of why I continued to come back to the area to any type of state institution rather difficult and akward. This for example impacted on my housing arrangements: I had first though I could stay at a guesthouse in Kanbauk (regional capital of Yephyu township), meaning I would have a maximum of 15 minutes by car to the field sites. However, when I returned to the guesthouse the second time within two weeks, the security police (which all hotels/guesthouses in Myanmar report their vistors to) got suspicious and began asking questions about why a tourist was coming back to this area again (I was basically the only foreigner in the city) more about what I was doing, who I was, who I was with etc. I consequently agreed with Ko Aung Lwin that it would be better for both of us, if I stayed in Dawei city. This eased the security police's suspicions (as

One significant issue regarding the accessibility of especially the middle and poor groups in the villages, i.e. the workers, was that during the day when we were in the village, as Ko Aung Lwin put it, "the workers are working!" In the fishing village for example, this meant that while it was easy to get interviews with the boat owners who as owners of the means of production acted more like "managers" (as one boat owner presented himself, while he was overseeing the sorting of the day's fish catch done by a group of women), it was more difficult to get a hold of the male workers (who were at sea most of the day) and the female workers (only available in particular times of the day, when they were able to take a break from wage labour or reproductive care activities). We eventually worked around this, by coming early in the mornings allowing for what Evans and Jones (2011, 850) refer to as "go-along" interviews with the male labourers as they were preparing to leave for sea and arranging specific times to meet with the women labourers during their breaks. All of these different locations and constellations were clearly imbued with the broader social relations (e.g. the interview with the manager referenced above), we were interested in uncovering – clarifying the importance of gaining access to these particular locations and situations for improving the gathered material and one's ability to analyse it (Elwood and Martin 2000). All of these observations, through the employed SRIR-method, complemented the individual interviews themselves.

Limits of data gathering

> Never assume you understand more than 5% of what's going on.

It was with this humbling point that a colleague and comrade from TNI welcomed me to Myanmar in January 2016. Being two young men, one foreigner and the other at least party known for his political work around Yephyu township, of course impacted on power dynamics in the interviews and the information gathered. This was clear on several occasions in the first and second data subset, where the interviewees themselves had their own agendas (Jacobsson and Åkerstrom 2012). For example, one of the interviewees, who we later found out was the second biggest landholder in the village, underreported his landholdings and the role he played in controlling rubber production in the village as a merchant capitalist. Similarly, some

Dawei is a relatively touristy city meaning I could blend in there) but meant that I had a total of 4 hours transport by car every day.

interviews with explicitly political actors, e.g. chair of the regional parliament, were "deviant" in the sense of persistently avoiding certain research topics e.g. land grabbing. Where in both these cases the interviewees were – in different ways – authoritative figures that were confident and comfortable with their upper hand in the interview, power balances in some of the interviews with women, especially poorer and precarious women, were very different with their own impacts on the interview.[22] For example, in one interview with an older woman in the fishing village, as the interview progressed, several of the questions from the interview guide were deemed inappropriate by Ko Aung Lwin and hence were avoided altogether. However, while this would have been a limiting factor had the traditional method of recording and transcription been followed, the SRIR-method can deal with such unexpected issues by integrating these observations into the data gathering process.

Across the three villages we were working in, we were interviewing people from three different ethnicities (Burman, Mon and Karen). The Burman typically spoke Tavoyan, which Ko Aung Lwin speaks fluently. With the Mon-people we interviewed, Ko Aung Lwin switched to Burmese, which all of them spoke. However, the third village was Karen and with a few exceptions (the village leader who was a priest and his wife) no one else spoke (or was willing to speak) Burmese. When we were working in this village then, we had another interpreter. He was supposed to translate from Karen-English, but on many occasions due to difficulties with understanding the question (both by the interviewee and the second interpreter) and for follow-up probing, Ko Aung Lwin had to intervene. As a result, in several interviews the interpretation went from Karen-Burmese-English. This of course impacted on my understanding of the dynamics in this village and the overall data quality is generally less thick than that gathered in the other two. To complicate things further, and as elaborated by scholars working on Karen resistance struggles (e.g. Malseed 2008), part of their strategy is building up and solidifying a Karen identity – a crucial part of which revolves around their supposed connection with nature, through a strategic essentializing narrative of what it is to be Karen. These

[22] That being said, what some would call my "positionality" as a supposedly powerful white male researcher was challenged on several occasions. For example, and on a lighter note, in one of the interviews with a couple in Daminseik, Ko Aung Lwin burst out laughing mid-interview. Some women had come to listen in on the interview and as it turned out, they had begun discussing my age. Being of quite short stature and despite my attempts at hiding my "baby-face" with a beard, Ko Aung Lwin's laughter was prompted by one of the women exclaiming: "He definitely can't be more than fifteen years old!" When my actual age (30) was given, this provoked head-shaking and even more laughter.

ethnic politics also filtered down into the interview situations. In some instances, after several rounds of follow-up probing failed to yield a clearer understanding, Ko Aung Lwin would shrug his shoulders and say with a smile "They are Karen! They are very different from Burman and Mon." In order to make up for such limits, the noted SRIR-method, again, sought to integrate such observations during the interview process and turning them into additional insights beyond the interviews themselves. Nonetheless, the SRIR-method can of course not counteract for the quality of data and the less thick nature of data subset one for this third village was sought compensated by in-depth discussions with respondents in data subset four.

Ko Aung Lwin's work as an activist, his knowledge and access to the villages and villagers, as well as my own reasoning for pursuing these research questions may bring up the issue of bias for some readers. However, as explained above, the focus of this research did not concern the subjective opinions of my interpreter, myself or even the respondents about the reality they experienced – although these of course also came up. Rather, the aim was to tease out and analyse the immaterial, but objective, relations of production and their development across the three villages. Instead of biases of the researcher or researched (as is the main concern within postmodern idealist strands, see e.g. Dwyer & Limb (2001)), the question of relevance here is the validity of the gathered data on these objective relations.

Referencing the work of especially Polly Hill, Carlos Oya (2004, 293) in his brilliant piece on methodological issues in the study of rural class formation, warns against "the notion of the 'household' as universal and unproblematic". Nonetheless, in approaching the data gathering in the three villages, I took the household as a starting point to unpack the broader social relations of production that were under consideration. Informed by the debates in agrarian political economy noted in Chapter 2, I assumed some degree of differentiation within these villages that could be distinguished between households, notably in terms of the who owns what question, hence dividing the households within the villages into the three different categories noted above. As Oya (2004, 294, emphasis in original) clarifies though, this typology "is intended to be a *mid-point* in the analysis of rural class formation and specific trajectories of accumulation – it is not the end point." Hence in the coming empirical chapters, readers will see that these categories are merely a preliminary heuristic device used to operationalize the framework in the field. Through the course of analysis, the detailed life histories seek to bring out some of the aspects of cooperation and conflict within some of the households along lines of gender and generation hence attempting to avoid the pitfalls of the "black box"

approach to the household warned against by historical materialists and feminists (e.g. Oya 2004; Razavi 2009). As noted though, I did have this household scale as my point of departure for data gathering and in the analysis prioritize questions around production, rather than reproduction. Some readers might therefore find my treatment of gender and generational questions inadequate.

Finally, I should note that the analysis is limited by the data itself. Due to the practicalities of doing fieldwork (in addition to those mentioned above around language, also limits on time and resources and questions around security), the data from the three villages vary and my understanding of certain issues are not as complete as I would have hoped (e.g. the role and function of migration across classes). The examination of rural class differentiation may therefore not be as all-encompassing as that argued for by e.g. Deere & De Janvry (1979) and Oya (2004) both of which advocate for combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods. Nonetheless, the analysis aspires to overcome prevalent pitfalls, herein moving beyond purely description of symptoms (as White 1989 warns against) towards explaining processes and mechanisms of differentiation.

Ethical questions

As should be clear already at this stage, doing research in Myanmar in the contemporary moment is riddled with complicated ethical questions. Instead of the usual somewhat banal and predictable positionality discussions that characterizes postmodern (particularly the postcolonial) work – herein the ritual self-flagellation of white researchers working in the global South – the main issue I want to raise here is the question of security and anonymity.

Despite the slight improvement around civil and political rights in the past years, activists in Myanmar, particularly those working on questions around the environment, are in an extremely precarious position having to daily weigh their actions against the very real threats of repercussions from the military and/or the cronies. These threats against environmental activism play out both violently and non-violently. In the fall of 2016, during one of my field visits, a local activist was stabbed at a city festival. She later died on the way to hospital. The murder was never formally solved, but for people in activist circles, the message was clear. Tellingly of the parallel worlds that tourists (I here include myself) and local people live in, no one in the crowd of foreigners at the hostel I stayed at in Dawei ever heard of this and I only found out about the brutal incident two days later, when speaking with one of the local activists. On the non-violent side, Ko Aung Lwin is to this day raveled in a court case

with the mining company, Delco, that is suing him for defamation. The case concerns an op-ed he wrote in a regional newspaper, where he poses as a fish in the Tanintharyi river that has been gravely polluted by the Delco mining operation. In this manner, he narrates the deteriorating ecological situation in the river. While he does not even mention the name of the company, Delco pursued the court case and after losing in several of the lower district courts, the case is currently awaiting decision at the national level – after Delco has appealed every prior ruling (for more on the history of the mine and Lwin's case, see Leehay 2019).

Faced with such issues, the mentioning of names of individual activists and particular organisations in a doctoral dissertation that will in all likelihood not be read by more than a handful was almost a non-issue for them, when I double-checked with them in the final stages of the write-up. Nonetheless, this was of course done.

I was unfortunately not able to check back with the many villagers that shared their time and life stories with me. Life stories that I have tried to relay in the following chapters and that the bulk of the dissertation relies on. Instead, each interview was preceded by a detailed presentation of the project and how the material gathered would be used – should they agree to take part. One interviewee refused to take part, but otherwise Ko Aung Lwin remarked how people found the interviews uncontroversial and unsensitive, due to the mainly economic nature of the questions. Thus, each interview was based on an informed consent from the respondent. This consent was given verbally and not in writing. Local researchers as well as Ko Aung Lwin advised against seeking written informed consent, as they thought this would unnecessarily antagonize potential respondents in villages that would be skeptical signing forms that some might also have trouble reading. In tune with their verbal consent, all respondents have been given pseudonyms and I have attempted to anonymise them.

I have kept the village names because to anyone who knows anything about the history of the area, any basic description of the villages' relation to the pipeline would make them immediately identifiable. This is because some of the events in the villages have already been described in grueling detail in the publications from Earth Rights International from 1996 onwards that draw on accounts from the people that fled the villages to refugee camps in the border zones. Many of the respondent's life stories here similarly document the brutality that the military regime unleashed on rural populations. While these stories may seem sensitive, they are – tragically – not. First of all, similar stories have already been published and secondly, they are not limited to the

military era, but abound in media coverage throughout contemporary Myanmar under Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government as well. People were therefore willing and many even eager to share their own and their villages' histories.

Finally, I would also like to emphasize that the point of the political economic analysis that I pursue here, is not to launch any type of vilifying moral critique towards the current government or even the prior military regime. If I have succeeded, it will hopefully rather stand as uncovering the brutality of "development" under capitalism and hence an indictment of the broader structural forces that any and all governments – dictatorships or not – have to contend with in our contemporary society.

4. State space in Myanmar

> [N]ationhood implies violence – the violence of a military state, be it feudal, bourgeois, imperialist, or some other variety. … [T]hese two moments [of economic growth and violence] indeed combine forces and produce a space: the space of the nation state. (Lefebvre 1991, 112)

Important struggles around state formation played out for centuries prior to the gradual British occupation from 1824 onwards of the territory now known as Myanmar (see e.g Lieberman 1991). These important historical antecedents notwithstanding, this chapter focuses on the period following 1824, precisely because this marked a turning point in the politics of geography over and in the territory through the attempt of the British to – in piecemeal fashion – cudgel it together. The present chapter therefore elucidates the spatial dynamics of the key political economic shifts from 1824. The chapter is structured into three main parts: (1) the period from the British occupation until the Japanese invasion of 1942 (2) from 1942 and the independent state's struggle (from 1948) with holding together the vast Burmese territories inherited from the British until the political economic crises of 1988 and, finally, (3) the state-mediated capitalist transition from 1988 up until today.

Colonial state space

In 1824, British India declared war against Burma in the face of the advancement of the Burmese kingdom towards Eastern Bengal. Being the most important possession in Britain's colonial empire, India had to be protected at all costs. In this manner, Burmese territories in the first instance became integrated into British India for the protection of India. As Brown (2013, 78) puts it, "Burma was seized not because of what it was but because of where it was." By the end of the Anglo-Burmese war in 1826, the Burmese kingdom was forced to secede the border territories to the west of Arakan (the contemporary infamous Rakhine State) and the Southeast Tenasserim. While

the British annexation of Arakan makes sense following Brown's geopolitical reasoning ("where it was"), the annexation of Tenasserim at this stage less so. As will be examined at length in Chapter 7, the wrestling of Tenasserim was driven by the British Navy's (and hence the empire as such) thirst for timber, particularly teak.

In the early years of the occupation, the timber industry developed unchecked and as the targeted teak forests in the South were depleted, the British sought to expand their Burmese conquest further North, initially in search of more teak forests. Thus, the second Anglo-Burmese war unfolded from 1852-1853 over the Pegu province in central Burma, leading to its annexation. This ensured British control, firstly, over the Pegu teak forests. However, this also secured control over the Irrawaddy Delta, which would turn out to be of much greater significance for the colonial economy. The third and final Anglo-Burmese war took place in 1885 and by 1 January 1886, Britain annexed Upper Burma. On 26 February 1886, Burma was consolidated under British rule, becoming a province of British India. In this manner, the British gradually conquered the territory currently known as Myanmar, which until then "had never been ruled as a coherent entity" (Jones 2014b, 786). This formally brought together a myriad of different minority ethnic groups – particularly, though not exclusively, residing in Upper Burma – with the majority-ethnic group, the Bamars, that primarily resided in what under the British would become Ministerial Burma (see Figure 3).

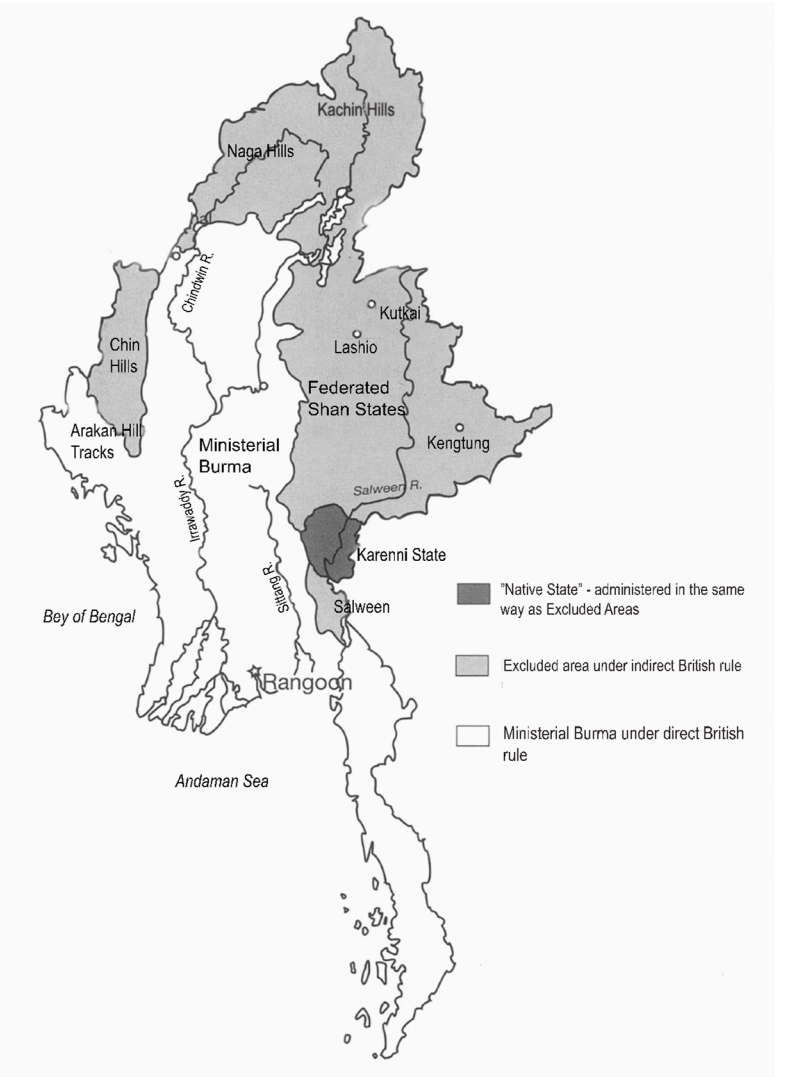


Figure 3
Different forms of state space in British colonial Burma. Source: Adapted from Callahan (2003, 28)

In the early years of the occupation in Tenasserim, the British initially sought to set up an administration "based in large measure on the Burmese pattern" (Cady 1958, 81). This profoundly changed already after the second war, however, with the setting up of different ministries (forestry, agriculture, etc.)

under control of the British that gradually initiated the reorganization of "Burmese society for production, extraction and trade" (Callahan 2003, 31). This reorganization was compounded following the third war where Burma was integrated with the other three provinces in British India (Madras, Bengal and Bombay), embedding Burma into colonial flows of commodities, money capital and labour. Furthermore, hereinafter any larger decisions about the province were either taken by or had to be approved by the governor-general of British India. This piecemeal state-formation process in Burma was thus from the outset more as an appendage to the colonial government in India then based on any coherent and explicit vision of a British Burma. Thus, "[t]he British never built a colonial state in Burma; they merely packed up some components of administration in India and shipped them to the new territory" (Callahan 2003, 23).

From 1886 then, Indian government structures were brought to bear on Burma. Rather than going through the arduous process of training the local population into performing lower rung tasks in colonial administration, the British instead imported Indian labour to do this. Similarly, in disregard of precolonial administrative structures, Chief Commissioner Charles Crosthwaite introduced the Village Act in the late 1880s, based on the local administration system in India. This act designated the village as the key administrative structure and placed a village headman at its core, enshrining this position with powers of revenue collection and police officer. As Mary Callahan (2003, 23) explains, this expanded the reach of the colonial state: "[t]he new village system led to a gradual but steady increase in centralization and government involvement in the daily lives of indigenous people."

While administrative structures flowed from India to Burma, substantial parts of the revenue collected by the colonial administration in the province went the other way back to the central government of India. This was justified through the different responsibilities that the scales of government had with the central government in charge of railways, military works and senior political administration, while the provincial government was in charge of the police, prisons, education, health and general administration. Irrespective of this justification, in Burma these revenue remittances were seen as a considerable "colonial drain" (Brown 2013, 28).

The colonial economy that was built up from the arrival of the British was organized varyingly around rice, oil and teak. Where teak was the initial focus of the British in Tenasserim and in Pegu, from the mid-19th century, their focus shifted towards rice production. As discussed further below in Chapter 6, this rice production centered in on the deltaic plains in central Burma that were

converted from swamps to rice fields with the colonial administration awarding plots to those that took part in the reclamation (Bagchi 1997). Until then, the region had been thinly populated, and the conversion therefore relied on the mass migration of tens of thousands of migrants that would become rice cultivators – the backbone of the rice economy. The ensuing transformation of the landscape was significant, as Brown (2013, 31) evocatively describes,

> When the British annexed lower Burma in the early 1850s, the vast deltaic plain of the Irrawaddy and Sittang rivers had relatively few people and was largely abandoned to nature, while Rangoon was a 'labyrinth of hovels [and a] wilderness of mud'. Half a century later, huge tracts of lower Burma's deltaic plain had been cleared and were now occupied by great numbers of cultivators and by vast expanses of rice, while Rangoon was established as one of the great port-cities of the East, British Burma's administrative, financial and commercial capital.

While this rapid transformation of the landscape was thus built on the labour of Burmese agriculturalists, foreign interests would subsequently come to dominate the sector as well as the other main sectors in the colonial economy: oil and teak.

Despite the best efforts of the colonial administration, rice production was, however, off to a slow start. The expansion in production and export and thus the integration into the broader imperial economy did not take off until the Suez Canal eased commodity flows: "for the first twenty years of the British occupation [of Lower Burma] the rate of expansion [of acreage under rice production] was slow, but […] immediately after the opening of the Suez canal in 1869, it increased rapidly, reaching a maximum about 1900 and then, when good land was no longer readily available, declined" (Furnivall 1931, 47). After an initial orientation towards Europe, India would subsequently assume a dominating position, accounting for 53 per cent of the exported rice in the 1930s (Bagchi 1997). In this manner, Burma would become India's "breadbasket".

While access to the world market ensured higher prices for the Burmese rice cultivators, this access was mediated through foreign merchants and the expansion of production itself was based on access to foreign credit – with Indian money capital playing a particularly dominant role. The introduction of the Lower Burma Land and Revenue Act of 1876 meant that land that had continuously been squatted for rice cultivation, could function as security for loans. From the 1880s, this law facilitated that surplus capital from the Bank of Bengal flowed through the Indian moneylenders from Madras, the chettiars,

to the local rice cultivators (Bagchi 1997). Chettiar capital thus penetrated the delta at various scales from financing the enclosure of the Irrawaddy delta and preparation of land, to more short-term loans to individual harvest cycles (Brown 2013). Furthermore, Indian merchants also exerted significant control in the subsequent rice milling and rice trade with India and as a result, "the substantial trade in Burma's rice to India came to be transacted almost entirely by Indian merchants" (ibid, 8). Similarly, for the trade destined towards Europe, just four European firms dominated and nearly all of Burma's rice was shipped by British firms (Brown 2013).

In the period from the late nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century, the colonial economy came to be structurally dominated by this single commodity. In the first years of the twentieth century, rice accounted for three quarters of the total value of seaborne exports (Brown 2013). Aside from rice, the two other most valuable commodities were oil and teak, accounting for, respectively, one tenth and one twentieth of the total value. While some Burmese (and Karen, see below Chapter 7) labour was used in the direct extraction activities of teak and oil, subsequent processing and export was dominated by foreign actors, as in the rice sector. Thus, while Burma on paper was running huge trade surpluses, very little if any of this surplus was reinvested in Burma itself – most of it was extracted out of the country, from the wages of Indian labourers to the considerable profits of the European oil and teak companies. This added on to the administrative colonial drain set up by the province's relation to the central government.

In the colonial economy then, the main role for Burmese was as rice cultivators. Indian labour dominated in the subsequent milling and trading processes in the Rangoon docks. Where this position in the late nineteenth century had meant a considerable rise in material living standards, the increasing commercialization of agriculture through the penetration of merchant capital and the closure of the rice frontier in the delta meant that the tendency toward differentiation noted in Chapter 2 slowly but surely began to exert itself. Some, as described by Michael Adas (1974), managed to significantly expand their land becoming major landholders and even transitioning out of production into the role of landlords. Others, however, particularly as a result of the debt relations developed with the chettiars, became landless labourers and/or tenants, that increasingly struggled to eke out a living in the rice economy. So widespread was this tendency of dispossession by differentiation that by the first years of the twentieth century, one-tenth of agricultural land had reverted from defaulted rice cultivators to so-called "non-agriculturalists" – that is, the chettiar moneylenders. This dispossession of the

Burmese and their worsening position in the rice economy was a topic of debate amongst the contemporary colonialists, weighing the economic growth and, hence, colonial state revenues against the deteriorating life opportunities of the Burmese. As Governor White, who attempted to introduce legislation against the transferal of land to non-agriculturalists, noted in his memoirs,

> Gradually, but surely, the Burman is being squeezed off the land and … if, as seems likely, the proposed legislation is abandoned, the land will fall into the hands of non-agriculturalists and natives of India. Free trade in land … from an economic point of view … is probably sound. More rice will be grown for export; more land revenue and customs duty will be garnered. But … the standard of living will be lowered. The deterioration of the Burmese race, which will inevitably accompany their divorce from the land, will be a subject of regret when it is irremediable. Similarly, tenants in Burma … need protection. (quoted in Cady 1958, 167)

Any such attempts at intervening against the "free trade" in land or protection of tenants, was, of course, viscerally opposed by alliances of landlords, chettiars, the European mercantile community and within the colonial administration itself (Cady 1958). For the colonial administration, particularly attempts at preventing the transferal of land to non-agriculturalists would have impacts on the rice economy. Chettiar capital was key in the expansion of the rice economy and any policy that undermined their structural position, which might have favoured the Burmese landless or near-landless, would also have undermined "government revenue and the earnings of rice traders, millers, lenders, import merchants, and shipping lines … In brief, in British Burma, maintaining the rural social order would come only at a substantial economic cost, notably to foreign interests" (Brown 2013, 41). Consequently, the process of dispossession by differentiation continued. By the late 1920s, upwards of one quarter of agricultural land was owned by the chettiars (Brown 2013).

Things all came to a head with the 1930s world depression, where rice prices took a beating. With the extreme degree of dependence on the single commodity this significantly impacted across Burma's colonial economy. Yet it most visibly hit the already struggling rice producing landowners, leading to a wave of defaults on loans and an accelerating dispossession. Thus, from 1930-1937 1.9 million acres were transferred from Burmese cultivators to chettiars and at this point, "Burma's cultivators had come to own less than half Burma's rice land" (Brown 2013, 56). With nowhere else to turn in the colonial economy – as noted opportunities for Burmese in both teak and oil were

similarly meager – the ranks of tenants and landless labourers therefore swelled.

Thus, in the space of a few decades under the colonial economy, a system of "debt-induced export-led exploitation" was facilitated, primarily to the benefit of European and Indian capitalists (Bagchi 2009, 99). Particularly from the 1930s, the already severely strained political, cultural and social fabric of precolonial Burma broke down and social unrest ensued. The 1930s saw a series of violent uprising in cities, particularly riots targeting Indians, as well as the Hsaya San peasant rebellion (Aung-Thwin 2011). These different uprisings bolstered the burgeoning nationalist movement and signaled the beginning of the unravelling of British colonial state space across the territory.

The initial reaction of the colonial administration was the Government of Burma Act that came into force on 1 April 1937. This act formally separated Burma from India and set up a governing system consisting of the governor and a cabinet of nine Burmese ministers that were responsible to an elected House of Representatives (Cady 1958). This political separation had been struggled for by the nationalist movement, an increasingly powerful force in Burmese politics from the 1920s onwards. Yet the political and economic terms under which it came were carefully crafted to uphold British interests, if anything, bolstering the nationalist movement. The Governor was appointed from London and despite the beefing up of the House of Representatives with new constituencies from rural areas – herein ethnic minorities – the governor retained important powers (including over monetary policy, tariffs, foreign relations). Furthermore, an all-sweeping formulation authorized the governor to assume "any or all of the powers vested in or exercised by any body or authority in Burma" (quoted in Cady 1958, 353), which the governor could invoke whenever he (because it was inevitably a he) saw fit. Politically then, "[t]he constitution of 1935 was thus in no sense a radical instrument; it was definitely not intended to satisfy nationalists bent on promoting revolutionary objectives whether in the political or economic field" (ibid, 353-354).

Concerning the economic terms, London included a number of decisions that would create substantial friction. Firstly, over a period of 45 years, Burma was to repay the Government of India interest-bearing debts worth 507.5 million rupees, the main part of which covered the India-owned Burma Railways. Yet, included in this sum was also the cost of the Government of India's original conquest of Burma, hence Burma had to pay for its own conquest. Secondly, for at least three years after coming into force, i.e. until 1940, Burma could do nothing to alter the terms of trade between Burma and India and after that only "by mutual consent" between India and Burma (ibid,

355). Finally, over the same time period, Burma was not allowed to regulate migration from India, which in light of the role of the Indian chettiars as well as the many Indian labourers in Rangoon, had been a key issue for the nationalists. Consequently, "[t]he so-called 'compromises' intended to soften the economic shock of separation operated mainly to the benefit of India and the British employer and trader in Burma" (ibid, 355).

Despite the political attempts at ensuring continuing benefits to Indian labour and capital, the 1930s saw the gradual retreat of both from Burma. On the one hand, Indian labour saw increasing competition from Burman labourers – in the rice fields, the docks, as well as the colonial administration, where "Burmanization" policies sought to remove the Indian dominance. On the other hand, Indian chettiar capital effectively lost interest in the rice delta following the 1930s crisis and hence Burma. The chettiars had no interest in the vast swathes of land that they took over particularly in the 1930s – they were in the business of lending money. These economic drivers were supplemented by the aforementioned increasing physical violence against Indians, as had taken place through different riots. All that being said, India, of course, continued to loom large in the Burman economy, as the major trading partner, and a number of institutions continuing to play a key role, e.g. the British Indian central bank.

The final push to the Indians and British, however, came not from Burmans, but from the Japanese and their invasion of Burma in 1942. Through this "[t]he course of Burma's history was being changed, once again, by foreign circumstances and ambitions that were of little or no concern to Burma itself" (Brown 2013, 79).

Struggling with independence

> States make their own territories, not under circumstances they have chosen, but under given and inherited circumstances with which they are confronted. (Brenner & Elden 2009, 367)

From 1942 onwards, the state space that had existed under the British, primarily oriented around Ministerial Burma, effectively unraveled. The Japanese managed to flush out the British over a matter of months in 1942. They, in turn, occupied the central parts of the territory through a military administration until December 1944, where the British re-invasion began.

The war years had significant economic and political consequences. Rangoon was bombed by the Japanese in December 1941, destroying much of

the ports, mills and related infrastructure. When the British retreated, they, in turn, destroyed key infrastructure including around the oil industry to prevent that this fell into the hands of the Japanese. With subsequent rounds of bombing by both parts in the re-invasion, Burma's economic infrastructure (railways, roads, ports, oil refineries, rice mills, etc.) by the end of the war had been totally shattered. Furthermore, while the 1930s saw the first signs of retreat of Indian capital and labour, this was compounded with the Japanese invasion, where an estimated two thirds of the Indian population fled from 1941 – 1942. With them, the capital and labour "that had been essential in the running of colonial Burma's modern economy and administration" disappeared (Brown 2013, 84). Finally, with the collapse of the colonial administration (partly due to this Indian departure) the ability to collect the all-important land revenue from the cultivators was lost. In any case, the rice economy more generally also collapsed in this period, with a dramatic fall in the production and most of the export also grinding to a halt.

Politically, the rise of Burmese nationalism as a powerful force in the 1920s and 1930s was consolidated in the 1940s, where it also became armed. On 1 August 1943, Burma was declared an independent state with its own head of state and prime minister, Dr. Ba Maw, Minister of Defence, Aung San, and Minister for Foreign Affairs, U Nu. While this independence was clearly hollow, in that final authority remained with the Japanese military, the "symbolic prestige of power" was crucial for the movement and each of these individuals would come to play a pivotal role in the subsequent independence period (Brown 2013, 89). Additionally, the early 1940s saw the formal buildup of a distinctly Burmese armed force. In opposition to the Indian or Karen dominated colonial armed forces under the British, different nationalist organisations from the mid-1930s started to form their own armies (or *tats*). However, in 1941 the first national armed force in Burma was instituted as the Burma Independence Army (BIA), eventually becoming the nationwide armed forces (or *Tatmadaw*). Despite only existing from December 1941 to June 1942, where it was disbanded by the Japanese, the BIA "set important parameters for citizenship, definitions of 'national security', and visions of nation-ness that carried over in the postwar era" (Callahan 2003, 53). When disbanded the former commander in chief of the BIA, Aung San, would assume leadership in the downsized Burma Defence Army (BDA) and, as noted above, also assume the position of Minister of Defence. The BDA would, in turn, become more and more independent of the Japanese military administration becoming a powerful force in its own right. Additionally, ideas dominant within 1930s nationalist groups (notably Dobama Asiayone) about

who were and who were not Burman began incubating in the BDA. Crucially, the 'them' in this dichotomy included any indigenous collaborators with the British, notably the Karen and later the communists. Quoting Mary Callahan (2003, 67) at length about the implications of this (and see Figure 3, above),

> Missing from both 'us' and 'them' categories was the 30-35% of the population who lived in the former Excluded Areas. Because Japan's de facto authority never extended far beyond the central regions of former Ministerial Burma, the territorial and experiential segregation of the past fifty years only deepened. None of the Burmese armies marched through any significant stretch of frontier territory, nor did their territorial authority extend beyond the central regions. Still, however, their ideas of where and what 'Burma' was included all the territory within the British-drawn boundaries. (emphasis added)

This had two major political legacies. On the one hand, the tactical engagement in governmental affairs by Ba Maw and his ministers under the Japanese, yielded experience in state-making that would subsequently be wielded after independence. On the other hand, particularly the formation of the army entrenched divides between the Communist Party of Burma and ethnic armed organisations that opposed the Japanese and wanted to work with the British and allies, versus those that collaborated with the Japanese – albeit in a tactical manner as a means to later on gain independence. Still at this stage, the disparate forces could unite in opposition to the Japanese, banding together in the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), and the Minister's in Ba Maw's government played a key role in defeating the Japanese. The force built up in the new Burmese national army would ultimately help the British in flushing out the Japanese military administration, when the Minister of Defence and General Aung San turned his forces against the Japanese, meeting them outside of Rangoon in March 1945 (Cady 1958).

Upon the return of the British, their priorities were economic and social reconstruction, not further progress towards self-government – let alone independence – which "has been interrupted and set back by the Japanese invasion" as a statement to the house of commons put it (quoted in Brown 2013, 89). With the ever stronger nationalist sentiments across Burma, however, this was unacceptable. The nationalists saw the plans for economic rebuilding as a means through which to reinstate British and Indian dominance over the economy. Consequently, the AFPFL became the vehicle through which disruption of the British plans for reconstruction were mobilized and organized. At this point, the AFPFL was a potent force that could unite disparate political groups against the British and already in August 1946, the

British were faced by a general strike. The British administration was on its knees. In January 1947, General Aung San led a delegation to London to negotiate terms of independence, which were quickly agreed upon. Already in the following month, Aung San was back in Burma leading negotiations between his interim government and a number of ethnic organisations at the so-called Panglong conference. To cajole support from as many of the ethnic groups as possible, the subsequent agreement reached between the interim government and the present ethnic organisations – importantly, neither Karen or Karenni groups were present – stipulated that a future Union of Burma would work towards substantial regional autonomy and Burma's constitution furthermore "permitted minority states to secede after 1957" (Jones 2014b 786). Based on this shaky alliance, Burma gained independence the following January in 1948. Following several years of war, however, at this point, "Burma barely functioned" (Brown 2013, 79) with significant political and economic implications for the coming AFPFL-government.

Breaking with the colonial economy and first industrialisation attempts

The independent AFPFL-government led by U Nu was faced with immediate challenges to the control of the territory that had been handed down to it by the British. In the months after independence, the noted split between the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and ethnic armed organisations on the one hand and the nationalist Burmese on the other hand came to the fore. The CPB had already been expelled from the AFPFL in October 1946 and as a result were in opposition to the negotiations led by Aung San for independence. Thus, at the time of independence, despite the communists having played a key role in ensuring rural support for the independence movement, the CPB was not granted any position in the newly independent government. From the get-go then, the CPB was against the new government and by mid-April of 1948, "the threatened communist insurrection had begun" (Brown 2013, 92). A couple of months later in November, the AFPFL government was confronted with a demand by the Karen National Union (KNU) for an independent Karen state. The KNU had not taken part in the Panglong conference and was inherently sceptical towards the promises of increasing regional autonomy. Their scepticism proved correct when the AFPFL denied their request. By January 1949, the KNU and several other newly formed ethnic armed organisations consequently took up arms in pursuit of regional autonomy (Kramer 2009). Despite their aspirations of ruling over the entire territory that had been cudgelled together by the British, the AFPFL's state space was significantly curtailed and challenged: "The delta rice districts, the oilfields to

the north and the mining and forest areas were in rebel hands: and crucially river, road and rail communications were constantly vulnerable to attack" (Brown 2013, 93).

This had significant implications for the U Nu-government, which all but collapsed in these first few years. With the loss of territory, the government could not collect taxes and the continuing insurrections – communist and otherwise – meant a ruin of the different colonial-era exports, herein oil, teak, mining and the production and export of the all-important rice-crop. Furthermore, Burma's infrastructure that had been destroyed in the war years, had still not been rebuilt, debilitating even internal trade within the country. On top of these circumstances, the newly independent government in its haste to rid foreign influence dismissed both British and Indian officials. This, however, made things even more difficult for the new government that as a result was left with a situation of "far too few Burmese with the training, skills, and expertise necessary to run effectively a modern economy, society, and government administration" (Brown 2013, 95).

Despite these difficulties, U Nu's government pushed ahead with attempts at completely restructuring the economy in pursuit of nationalization, Burmanization and industrialization. This vision had been set as one of Aung San's final accomplishments before his assassination in July of 1947. Subsequently, these core elements, "defined the independent state and bore the immense authority of the martyred national hero" (Brown 2013, 170). Thus, the state took over substantial portions of the key colonial-era rice, teak, oil and mining sectors. The export of rice was taken over by the State Agricultural Marketing Board (SAMB). Taxes levied through the export of rice through SAMB were a means for the state apparatus to supplant the land revenue tax that had been key in the pre-war era, yet was impossible to subsequently reinstate, due to the government's lacking control of the rice districts. This tax in the years after independence secured up to 41 per cent of the government's revenue, yet the tax squeezed the rice cultivators, with long-term implications for rice production: "the fact that under the SAMB regime the cultivator received a low, undifferentiated, and unchanged price for his crop clearly discouraged growth and improvement in the rice economy in the 1950s" (Brown 2013, 99). Coupled with the implications of this statutory monopoly, the state more generally neglected the rice sector, with no attempts at mitigating the expulsion of the chettiars through e.g. new forms of rural credit institutions. The only initiatives taken by the state was the land nationalization act of 1948 and 1953, which evoked language of land redistribution particularly targeting the role of the now infamous "non-agriculturalists".

However, with the chettiars departure from Burma through the 1930s and 1940s indebtedness was no longer the same hot-button issue and, in any case, its implementation was significantly disrupted by the different insurrections. In the teak sector, the State Timber Marketing Board took over all the concessions that had until then been given to a handful of European firms putting it at the helm of the extraction, milling and export of teak. Finally, in the oil and mining sectors, U Nu's government did not nationalize the foreign companies, but instead went for a model of establishing joint ventures between the state and the companies. Due especially to the continuing insurrections across the country, neither teak, nor oil and mining reached their pre-war levels of production and export (Brown 2013).

In addition to this nationalization process, U Nu sought to spur on a state-led industrialization. U Nu's government in 1951 approached a US consultancy firm to concretely move ahead with the industrialization vision. The state industrial enterprises that were to be set up included "a steel mill, a factory to produce jute sacks, a pharmaceutical plant, two sugar mills, a tea-packing plant, and a brick and tile factory" (Brown 2013, 106). The financing of the plan was premised on a continued high price of rice. Following, amongst others, the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, which led to the stockpiling of rice, rice prices had doubled between mid-1950 and 1952 (Brown 2013). This boosted the profits of the SAMB and hence government revenue, which – the idea was – would feed the industrialization process. The boom in rice prices, however, came to a halt and with it "the government's financial position deteriorated, the trade surplus disappeared, and Burma's foreign exchange reserves began to drain away" (Brown 2013, 106). As the plan had been based on an assumption of budget surpluses, this effectively undercut the entire project. Hence by 1955, the plan was scrapped. Instead, U Nu attempted to appeal to both foreign and local capital. However, with U Nu's track history of expulsing foreign economic interests along with continuing statements around inevitable nationalizations, foreign capital was not forthcoming. Local capital, on the other hand, as a result of the terms of incorporation of Burmese into the colonial economy had never adequately developed (Brown 2013, Jones 2014a, Ford et al. 2016).

Meanwhile, the Tatmadaw under U Nu's government was significantly expanded with the modernization of the army also considered a key national priority (Callahan 2003). This was initially spurred on by the threat of Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) deserters that had been chased out of China's Yunnan province into Northeastern Burma in 1949. In the subsequent years, the budget for the Tatmadaw ballooned and by 1951, the army's proportion of the national

budget was 40 per cent (Callahan 2003). Nonetheless, the KMT continued to be a threat, eventually gaining support from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in two failed attempts to retake China from the communists in 1951. After this failure, they instead buckled down in Northeastern Burma and by 1953 was a de facto occupying power. This new type of threat very early on in independence meant that army modernization was elevated to a "top national priority" (Callahan 2003, 12). Nevertheless, throughout the 1950s the insurrections continued with the communists and different ethnic armed organisations gradually gaining strongholds across the peripheral zones of Burma's British-determined territory. Consequently, and alongside U Nu government's failure at instigating any industrialization process, the army began flexing its muscles:

> "With rebels seizing control of virtually all of Burma's borders by the late 1950s, the Bamar-dominated army became central to maintaining the country's integrity, expanding dramatically and assuming extensive state-building functions, its power gradually exceeding that of central government agencies" (Jones 2014b, 786-787).

Military rule and the Burmese way to socialism

In April 1958, the U Nu's AFPFL-government split into two different factions – one faction, "clean", led by U Nu and a "stable" faction led by socialists U Ba Swe and U Kya Nyein. With the stable faction supported by the army, U Nu attempted to court the participation of the Communist Party of Burma in the government as a counterweight. Yet, this was quickly met with fierce resistance from a number of regional army commanders that threatened with a coup (Jones 2014b). In the face of the increasing threats across the borderlands against the Union and this political jostling that the military saw as a sign of the inability of civilian leaders to prevent disintegration of the country, the military enforced a first coup. U Nu was pressured to step down, leading to the so-called caretaker government from 1958-1960 at the hands of General Ne Win.

The caretaker government took over power with reference to restoring law and order, while preparing for elections to hand power back. While in government, the military took a number of other different initiatives, e.g. around waste management in Rangoon, attempts at increasing agricultural output and improving food distribution. Simultaneously, the role of the

military as an economic actor in Burmese society was significantly expanded. In this period, the Defence Services Institute, which had initially been formed to run the military's canteens now "opened or bought banks, an international shipping line, an import-export business, the single coal import license, a hotel company, fisheries and poultry distribution businesses, a construction firm, a bus line that carried thirty thousand passengers daily in Rangoon, and the biggest department store chain in Burma" (Callahan 2003, 191). At the end of the brief stint in government, the military produced a pamphlet documenting what had been done. The pamphlet brimmed with pride around the military's achievements along with scathing criticisms of the previous decade of civilian administration (Callahan 2003).

In February 1960, U Nu and his Clean AFPFL – now renamed the Union Party – won a significant majority in the parliament. Yet, a number of governmental decisions led to the military quickly intervening again. On the one hand, Buddhism was made a state religion. This greatly aggravated particularly the Kachin and the Karen of whom many were Christian. Simultaneously a number of concessions towards different ethnic groups promised by U Nu – e.g. state status and increasing levels of autonomy – were by the military seen as threatening the territorial integrity of the Union of Burma. All the while, no improvements were made concerning the economic situation in the country. In culmination of this "inefficient" leadership, which the military contrasted to its caretaker government between 1958-1960, General Ne Win again seized power on 2 March 1962. This time around, it would not just be a caretaker government, but one that would last all the way until his resignation in August 1987 (Jones 2014b).

Upon seizing power, Ne Win "tore up the 1947 constitution" and set up a Revolutionary Council and a Revolutionary Government, consisting of senior military officers – both of which were chaired by Ne Win himself (Smith 1991, 79). Through a number of publications, the Revolutionary Council laid out its worldview and plans. *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, published in April 1962, laid out the Revolutionary Council's overall view of how to develop a socialist economy and a socialist democracy appropriate to Burma. Subsequently, *The Constitution of the Burma Socialist Programme Party* was published in July and gave political structure to the Revolutionary Council. The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was initially only constituted by members of the Revolutionary Council and Government, but the military's plan was to transform the BSPP into a mass based party. As part of this, the Law to Protect National Solidarity was promulgated in March 1964, whereby BSPP became the sole legal political organization. In the following years, the Revolutionary

Council (RC) ruled by decree and "[a]part from the ritualized symbolism of mass rallies and orchestrated show of support for the RC, politics was of an exclusionary nature whereby a small coterie of junta members made all the important decisions" (Tin 2005, 112).

The socialist economics espoused by the RC, turned out to not be a radical break with U Nu, but rather an entrenching of the strategy that had been at the core of the independent state of Burma in reaction to the colonial economy: nationalize, Burmanize and industrialize. The Burmese Way to Socialism clarified that all forms of agricultural and industrial production, as well as distribution, transport and trade was to be in the hands of the state. In tune with this, the RC moved quickly in nationalizing and, hence, Burmanizing, any of the remaining foreign commercial interests – notably the oil companies that had been in joint ventures with the previous government in January 1963 and all of Burma's private commercial banks in February. Also in February, the RC announced that all major industries would be nationalized by June, meaning that "the state would take over production, distribution, import, and export of all major commodities" (Brown 2013, 138). In agriculture, the state and its institutions would come to play an even more dominant role than under U Nu. Where the SAMB had sought to eliminate foreign interests in rice production while boosting state revenue by procuring rice at a much lower price from the cultivators than the export price, the production and trade was still private. However, in July 1963, trading in a range of agricultural commodities – herein the all-important rice – was also nationalized, meaning that "procurement, distribution and export were now undertaken solely by" Trade Corporation No. 1, as the SAMB came to be named (Brown 2013, 141). The procurement policy was key in that – while it was purportedly voluntary – it entailed compulsory quotas of specific crops that had to be delivered by Burma's cultivators. Finally, in October 1963 private imports were banned and then in April 1964 export trade was nationalized and, subsequently, "[f]oreign trade was now a state monopoly" (Brown 2013, 138).

From this point of departure of widespread nationalization and Burmanization, the focus of this first decade or so of the RC was on state-led import-substitution industrialization. Despite substantial investment by the state bolstered by Official Development Aid from a few actors (notably the Japanese), this did not progress and industrialization remained fleeting. Due to the persistent "neglect of the export sector in the overall development strategy" and subsequent shortages of foreign exchange, the state-owned economic enterprises were hampered by insufficient access to "essential industrial raw materials and spare parts" that had to be imported (Myat Thein 2004, 107-108).

As a result, the industrial sector as a whole was characterized by "[t]he use of outdated machinery as well as lack of maintenance of existing industries lower[ing] not only their productivity and production capacity, but also the capacity utilization" (ibid, 108). Furthermore, the sheer scale of the task for the state bureaucracy to command the entire economy proved impossible. The state bureaucracy, now consisting of military personnel with no relevant experience or training, was charged with the planning of all sectors in the economy from production to export across scales of capital – from the newly nationalized oil companies and local subsidiaries of Unilever to the small-scale Burmese manufacturers that while too small to be brought under state control, were still put under state direction. Thus, the industrial sector actually regressed, with its share of GDP falling between the 1960s and the mid-1970s (Brown 2013).

The share fell, despite the fact that agricultural production also stagnated. When Ne Win assumed power, although far from the levels attained under the British colonial era, exports of rice were still at 1.718 million tons. By 1973 this export had dropped to 146,000 tons (Brown 2013). This drop in rice exports reflected a gradual retreat from the international economy. With falling exports more generally, the regime had to force through restrictions of imports. Out of necessity, however, machinery for the attempted industrialization drive had to be imported. This meant that Burma was running a balance of trade deficit from the mid-1960s onwards leading to a further systematic drop in foreign exchange reserves that over time would prove ruinous for the regime.

For the population at large, the military regime's policies were felt through a complete lack of the state's ability to secure the population's basic needs – now supposedly organized through the People's Store Corporation. This led to both civil unrest on the one hand and on the other hand an illegal economy beginning to flourish from the late 1960s onwards.

Faced with this economic and political failure, in the early 1970s, the Revolutionary Council shifted its strategy. In September 1972, the Central Committee of the BSPP adopted a new strategy document, *The long-term and short-term economic policies of BSPP*, that to some degree altered the prior approach. While the overall goal of state-led industrialization remained, this was now to be driven by processing and manufacturing industries based on Burma's own agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mineral resources. Furthermore, it was stated that there would be a place for local private capital and the military regime would now open up to foreign borrowing and aid flows (although aid flows from a handful of countries had already been in place in the previous decade). The subsequent years saw some growth in a number of

nature-based industries – notably rice production and teak, which supplanted rice as the main export earner in the 1980s (see Chapters 6 and 7, respectively). Yet, this was not enough to turn the overall trend of a stagnating economy. Despite the opening towards local private capital, these years only saw a rise in the smallest scale of privately owned businesses, and by contrast a "sharp reduction in the position of private Burmese capital in medium-sized and large-scale processing and manufacturing" (Brown 2013, 153). As a result, shortages of basic commodities increased and the illegal economy continued to flourish – with imports flowing across the border from all sides: Thailand, China, India and Bangladesh.

In addition to the revised economic strategy, the Revolutionary Council – by now sure that it could guarantee the outcome – initiated a process of handing power over to the nominally civilian BSPP that it had been building up over the previous decade. In a heavily facilitated process, rule was handed over to BSPP based on a new constitution for a single-party socialist state passed through a sham referendum (attaining 90.2 per cent approval) in December 1973 (Tin 2005). The constitution administratively divided the country into seven divisions, intended to be primarily inhabited by the majority Burman population, and seven states reflecting the main minority ethnic groups (Mon, Karen, Kayah, Shan, Kachin, Chin and Rakhine). These states comprise approximately 57 per cent of the land area (Kramer 2009). Yet, no concessions whatsoever were given to the ethnic minority groups concerning increased autonomy in any of these states in the constitution and as a result another cycle of conflicts broke out. The different ethnic armed organisations, in turn, became more assertive in their struggles to create liberated areas on their own hand. Yet, the military that for years now through the state had been building up its own organization also managed to push back the different insurgent groups, clearing them especially from central Burma. In the remainder of the territory, the military began pursuing its infamous "Four Cuts" strategy, attempting to cut the links between the different insurgent groups and civilians through food, finance, recruits and intelligence. Significant and severe human rights abuses followed (for more on this see particularly Chapter 6 below).

In the ensuing years in the 1970s and in tune with broader geopolitical developments, two alliances emerged amongst the rebelling ethnic armed organisations and the Communist Party of Burma (Kramer 2009). The National Democratic Front (NDF) was in control of virtually all of Burma's territory bordering Thailand until the end of the 1980s. This group consisted of different Mon, Karen, Karenni and Shan armed organisations and was pro-Western and anti-communist. The NDF was therefore tacitly supported by Thailand and, by

extension, the USA that in its Cold War policy saw Thailand as the "last domino" in the region. For Thailand and the USA, the NDF was a crucial buffer between the Thai and Burmese communist parties (Kramer 2009).

The other main alliance congealed around the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). From 1962 and particularly after 1967, where the military regime in the eyes of the Chinese did nothing to quell anti-Chinese riots in Rangoon, the CPB received support from the Chinese communist party. This culminated in January 1968, where CPB troops in an attack from the Yunnan Province in China overran the Burmese military outposts and took over significant parts of Northern Shan State. From here the CPB managed to form alliances with a range of local ethnic armed organisations eventually creating a liberated area covering the entire Chinese border – including a very lucrative opium trade, which now financed the CPB and allies (Kramer 2009).

By the mid-1980s the economy was in tatters. Despite the significant increase in flows of aid (in loans and grants), this did not yield any expansion in exports with which to repay the debts that were steadily accumulating from the mid-1970s onwards. With the ever-worsening balance of trade and decrease in foreign exchange, Burma's piling up of debts became increasingly untenable. By 1985 these amounted to 4 billion USD and accounted for 80 per cent of export earnings in 1985/86 (Brown 2013).

The military regime had until now been ambiguous towards the flourishing illegal economy. On the one hand, the provisioning of basic commodities lessened the risk of widespread social unrest. Yet, on the other hand, the significant trade, involving the import of commodities and the export of precious stones, timber, rice, minerals and rubber deprived the state of significant revenues. Where these flows had mainly benefitted the Burmese illegal traders – *hmuang-kho* – with the two rebel alliances control of the Thai and Chinese borders, this lucrative trade now also financed their resistance campaigns. Something had to be done.

In August 1987, General Ne Win in a major concession acknowledged the economic failure and instructed the BSPP to initiate plans for economic and political reform within one year. Subsequently, on 1 September 1987, the government liberalized the domestic rice trade. Five days later, for the second time since 1985, General Ne Win announced a demonetization scheme whereby "between 60 and 80 per cent of all money in circulation in Burma had been made worthless" (Brown 2013, 155). While the targets of this demonetization scheme were the illegal traders – Burmese and the ethnic armed organizations – this came with devastating impacts for ordinary people that "were forced to use their remaining notes and coins solely to cover

essential food purchases, including rice, cooking oil, and salt, and abandoned or deferred buying consumer articles, even basic clothing" (Brown 2013, 156). Furthermore, while the end of the state procurement of rice and hence the low and fixed prices provided relief for the rice cultivators, it exacerbated the impacts of demonetization for Burma's urban population that were still dependent on low fixed incomes.

Enter the SLORC

Thus, by the late 1980s, the ruling Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was in dire straits. After some 25 years of sclerotic rule following the Burmese Way to Socialism, the economy was deteriorating rapidly and by December 1987, Burma had been granted status as a Least Developed Country by the UN. While this designation allowed for a rescheduling of its external debt payments, the regime remained desperate for foreign exchange and jumpstarting growth of the economy. But it was too late. The combination of economic stagnation, the demonetization scheme and the ongoing widespread oppression led to an eruption of protests across cities in the Bamar-dominated parts of the country on the 8th August 1988. These protests were, however, brutally put to an end by the military, killing thousands in the streets of the string of cities that had been involved in the protests. The protestors that survived – particularly students – fled to the border in the refuge of the liberated zones that were under the control of the ethnic armed organization. With the BSPP at this point in a de facto meltdown, the military once again overtly took over, forming the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

Yet, the military regime was not interested in remaining in power. The subsequent period from 1988 - 2010 was characterized by several attempts by the military to transfer and return formal power to a civilian administration. However, despite attempts already in 1990 and in 1996, it was not until 2010 that this transfer succeeded. When the transfer eventually did succeed, it was a product of a confluence of geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts through which the military secured what Lee Jones has called a "managed transition" (2014a; 2014b). The following section outlines first the series of formal political processes around the attempts at transferring power, before turning to the geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts that structured these political processes and eventually created the context in which the transfer of power

could happen on the military's own terms. Following Jones (2014a, 156; see also 2014b) the overall argument presented here is that "the military regime initiated democratization from a position of relative strength, not weakness, enabling it to secure a dispensation where it could set the broad contours of reform."

Attaining a "discipline flourishing democracy"

For the top tier of generals in the army uncircumscribed civil administrations could generally not be trusted as this would resolve into chaos and disruption of Burma. As earlier instances of unrest, the 8-8-88 uprising was seen in this tier as a collusion of external and internal threats attempting to overthrow and eventually destroy the state. Following this reasoning, the military intervened to – as the name of the subsequent regime not so subtly suggests – restore order. This was based on a set of core national principles, namely: "non-disintegration of the union; non-disintegration of national solidarity; and perpetuation of national sovereignty" (Tin 2007, 66). These were red-lines that had to be upheld for the military to proceed with handing over power to a civilian administration. However, it took a very specific combination of the forces of economic growth and violence for this to happen, because these red-lines were of course anathema to what the Ethnic Armed Organisations had been struggling toward for decades.

Nonetheless, already in mid-1989 amidst the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma, SLORC initiated the first attempt at handing over power. The envisioned process was to hold polls to elect an assembly that would draft a new constitution. Upon assuming power SLORC had suspended the 1974-constitution. This had failed in the securing order and attaining the national principles and hence a new one would have to be drafted. Once drafted there would be a referendum on the constitution and once, as the army envisioned, this was accepted, national elections would be held again, bringing in a civilian government on the basis of the new constitution. Things did not go according to the plan, however, as the main opposition force organized around the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 60% of the vote in the polls for the assembly. Upon this landslide, the NLD called for an immediate transfer of power – supported by Western governments – if necessary on the basis of the 1947 constitution. The Tatmadaw, for its part, stood firmly on the point that without a new constitution, power would not be transferred. As the 1947 constitution had opened up for secession, this was a non-starter following the Tatmadaw's three national principles. The first round consequently failed (Jones 2014b).

SLORC's second attempt began in 1992, when it convened a National Convention, which lasted from 1993-1996 – again with the aim of drafting a new constitution and following the same subsequent process envisioned in 1990. Having learnt from the process in 1990, SLORC emphasized that the point was to move toward a "discipline flourishing democracy". Thus, to avoid the pitfalls of the 1990-process, SLORC intervened in the members of the National Convention, in order to "dilute elected representatives with more pliable individuals" (Jones 2014b, 788). Furthermore, representatives from some of the ethnic minorities were also present in the National Convention. These had splintered out of the Communist Party of Burma following its collapse in 1989 and had subsequently signed ceasefires with SLORC between 1989-1991 (Kramer 2009). In tune with national principles, however, SLORC sought to circumscribe the entire process, by setting a number of non-negotiable principles for the new constitution that were based on enshrining SLORC's three national principles into "Aims and objectives of the State", ensuring a highly centralized state with limited autonomy for states and divisions with no opportunities for secession as well as safeguarding a leading role for the military in upholding national integrity. Simultaneously, terms were inserted concerning the Executive that were specifically aimed at making Aung San Suu Kyi – the famed leader of the NLD-movement and daughter of General Aung San – ineligible (Jones 2014b). In this manner, SLORC sought to foreclose what the EAOs and the NLD had been fighting for. As a result, the NLD walked out of the NC in 1995 and several of the ceasefire groups within the negotiations demanded greater autonomy. As a result, SLORC abandoned the NC in 1996.

Third time's a charm. In 2003, after SLORC had been through a re-shuffling turning into the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), a National Convention was reconvened under the auspices of the SPDC's "roadmap to democracy". The exact same process as earlier was followed. While the NLD boycotted, this time the National Convention had increased participation from Ethnic Armed Organisations, as an increasing number had signed ceasefires with the SPDC. While the participating ethnic-minority leaders complained of lacking influence, the National Convention this time concluded successfully, ending up with a constitution "virtually identical to that proposed by SLORC in 1993" (Jones 2014b, 791). Following this, as planned, in 2008 a constitutional referendum was held and while widely criticized as a sham (held in the upheavals of the Cyclone Nargis that is estimated to have killed over 100,000 people), the constitution was thus adopted. The constitution reiterated the territorial administrative system of a number of minority ethnic states and

Bamar-dominated divisions (see Figure 4). With the constitution in place, the Tatmadaw moved quickly, leading to national elections being held in 2010 (also boycotted by NLD) and the eventual transfer of power to a civilian administration in 2011 – led by President Thein Sein.

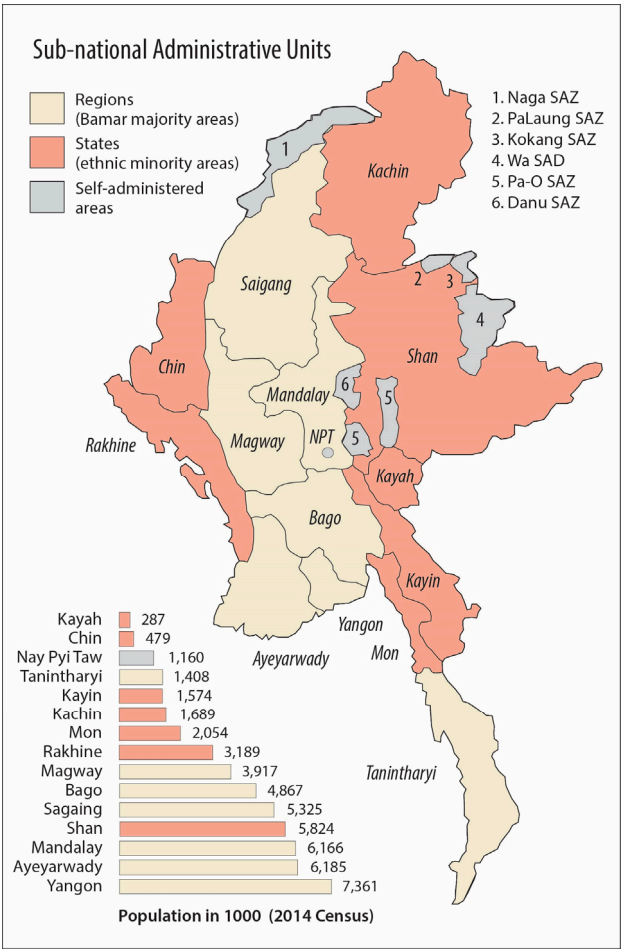


Figure 4
Sub-national administrative units from the 2008 constitution. Source: Stokke et al. (2018, 3) reprinted with permission. In 1989 SLORC changed the name of the country to Myanmar and simultaneously changed the spelling of a number of cities, states and divisions. The changes of relevance here that can be seen on this map are: Irrawaddy became Ayeyarwaddy; Pegu became Bago and Tenasserim became Tanintharyi. Note the British Tenasserim covered contemporary Tanintharyi, Mon and parts of Kayin.

At surface level this process may seem baffling – why did the military regime succeed with this handover in 2010, when it could not in 1990? Following the understanding of the state developed in Chapter 2, requires a look both beyond the national scale and simultaneously relating these formal political dynamics to processes of capital accumulation and sociospatial transformation that from 1988 changed significantly from the historical periods described above.

From "battlefields to market places": geopolitics meets geoeconomics in Southeast Asia

> Uneven geographical development on all scales in the global landscape is certainly an expression of the structured social relations of capitalist societies and the multifaceted logic of capital accumulation, but it is simultaneously authored by everyday individuals and classes, groups and governments. (Smith 2003, 24)

> [A]s a territorial expression of power, geopolitical calculation is not extinguished by the rise of geoeconomics, but it is significantly circumscribed and reworked. (Cowen & Smith 2009, 42)

With the closing of the Cold War a series of realignments took place in Southeast Asia that fundamentally shifted and remade geopolitical and geoeconomic landscapes. They were to a large extent politically driven by Thailand that under the Cold War was aligned with the US and had cast itself as the Eastern front of the free world. After Vietnamese troops withdrew from Kampuchea in 1989, the waning of Chinese support for the Thai Communist Party as well as the Burmese regime's abandonment of the Burmese Way to Socialism all the perceived existential threats to the ruling powers from communist insurgencies from the East, West and internally had one way or another been quelled. Consequently, following some internal struggle between the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Military over the line to be pursued, the Prime Minister's policy of "turning battlefields to marketplaces" was announced in 1989. Cementing this approach, the Foreign Affairs Minister, later in the year followed up with the point that now "the business of diplomacy is business" (quoted in Um 1991, 246). For the Foreign Minister, this was a direct result of a shift in the perception of security and – ultimately – how to wield and consolidate power: "as we have attained a certain level of security, we should concentrate on strengthening our economic base,

which will be an important determinant of our national security in the long run" (ibid).

Importantly, this shift in foreign policy was happening in the context of a Thai economy that had been booming since the early 1980s. By the end of that decade there had been significant expansion in most sectors with four years of double-digit growth in the period 1987-1990 (Pasuk & Baker 1998). The shift in foreign policy then was as much about the need to uphold these levels of growth and from this perspective, the recently opened neighbouring states figured prominently as new frontiers to be integrated into regional flows of capital. This was based on "the expectation that Thailand's economic power can be bolstered by the vast resources and potentials of the neighbouring states of Indochina and Myanmar (Burma)" (Um 1991, 246).

Indeed, following a gradual depletion of domestic resources and hence the "closure of Thailand's domestic resource frontier" (Hirsch 2009, 125) facilitating Thai capital's access to resources in the neighbouring territories was paramount. The closing off of internal frontiers was further consolidated by nascent environmental concerns amongst the Thai population leading to different policy measures that effectively undercut the supply base of a range of extractive industries – including timber and fisheries. Simultaneously, the Thai industrialization drive meant that it was increasingly in search of energy sources beyond Thai borders. These structural imperatives led the government to send a series of Thai delegations to Burma from 1987 onwards in order to strengthen bilateral relations that until then had been frosty, at best (Um 1991). After decades of tacit support for the EAOs that had resided on its borders with Burma as a buffer against the presumed communist threat of the BSPP, the Thai state's allegiance thereby shifted from EAOs to SLORC. As Jones (2014b, 791) puts it, "[p]owerful politico-business elites sought full access to Myanmar's lucrative, largely untapped natural resources, which required sound government-to-government relations, not piecemeal smuggling." Importantly, these business elites were closely connected with the Thai military and/or with the coalitions parties of Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's government, and as a result, they had rapidly gained political power. In this manner, the ascendant Bangkok-based elites were prioritized over the "rich provincial magnates" based on the Thai side of the border with Burma that had made "big and quick money", when the illegal border trade in logs, gems and guns took off and flourished from the 1960s onwards (Pasuk & Baker 1998, 225-6). By 1987, this illegal border trade was estimated at USD 3 bn – 40% of Burma's Gross Domestic Product (Jones 2014b). Despite the gradual thawing of the relationship between powerbrokers in the two countries,

the relationship remained a frustrated one and so a tie to the Thai military, which ensured mediation with the Burmese military, became a prerequisite for the Thai capitalists to gain legalized access to Burma. In this manner, "the Thai military – and the Thai state more generally – [became] one of the most logical conduits for Thai FDI in the country" (Glassman 2010, 70). Particularly a delegation to Yangon led by the Thai General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh in December 1988 – three months after SLORC had taken power – proved to be a pivotal and lucrative trip.

Upon assuming power, SLORC was in trouble. SLORC was faced with both political and economic crises. Its way out of these crises entailed a significant reworking of sociospatial relations, managed through a combination of three processes: spatial integration of the territory into regional flows of capital through liberalization; rigorous pursuit of ceasefire agreements and enlisting the EAOs in processes of capital accumulation; and a massive program of infrastructure investments. By reworking the state's relationship particularly to neighbouring states and a nascent capitalist class within Myanmar[23], it was itself thoroughly transformed.

Already on the precipice of bankruptcy in 1988, Western governments and financial institutions attempted to exert further pressure on SLORC through enforcing sanctions on trade and investment referencing the atrocities unleashed towards the 8-8-88 protests. In reaction to this, the regime went further down the road of partial liberalization of the economy that had already been dabbled in through the final convulsions of Ne Win's BSPP-regime. SLORC, however, significantly deepened these measures. Most significantly, this entailed welcoming in foreign investment and extractive activities, set off by the Foreign Investment Act of November 1988. The law explicitly had the aim of "[e]xploitation of abundant resources of the country with a view to catering to the needs of the nation in the first instance" along with "exporting whatever surplus available" (Union Government 1988: 1). Consequently, a series of policies facilitating large-scale extraction in a range of natural resource-based industries including fisheries, forestry, mining and agriculture were introduced (Tin, 2007). These policies further opened the territory up to the incoming Thai capitalists and on that December visit of the Thai general and his compatriots a series of concessions regarding especially timber, fisheries and mining were made. This immediately provided a much needed influx of investment for SLORC, while simultaneously delivering a significant blow to the EAOs with "rents now flowing to the regime rather than the

[23] In 1989, SLORC changed the name of the country to Myanmar

rebels", which had heretofore benefited from the illegal trade flows (Jones 2014b, 792).

For the extraction to unfold successfully however, a series of military offensives were required as the EAOs by the late 1980s controlled the entire border area along Thailand. Having successfully negotiated a round of first ceasefires with EAOs in the Northern part of Myanmar along the Chinese border, troops were freed up to double down against EAOs in the Southeast along the Thai border. Here, particularly the Karen National Union (KNU) and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) were impediments to the envisioned extractive endeavours – especially around fisheries, timber, mining and later offshore hydrocarbon resources. After several rounds of assaults against KNU's heartland territory – failing to take permanent hold of KNU's headquarters, Manerplaw, in Karen State along the Thai border – the regime shifted strategy in 1992. Coinciding with the initiation of the second attempt at handing over power through the convening of a National Convention noted above, the military under the leadership of General Than Shwe released a number of political prisoners, took a more lenient approach to Aung San Suu Kyi's imprisonment and embarked on a number of "peace tours", including visits to Mon and Karen State. On these tours, EAOs were urged to, "return quickly to the legal fold after considering the good of the government. We extend our invitation with genuine goodwill. We do not have any malicious thoughts" (speeches broadcast through state media, quoted in Kramer 2009, 10).

Both KNU and NMSP were part of the National Democratic Front – the coalition of EAOs that had pursued a pro-Western and anti-communist policy, firmly on the side of the US and Thailand. However, as alluded to in the above, for the Bangkok-based business-elites and policy-makers, "the 'liberated areas' were no longer seen as a buffer zone [against communism] but as an obstacle to regional economic development" (Kramer 2009, 10). As a result, following the public calls for peace by SLORC, Thai authorities began pressuring NDF members all along its border (not just the Southeast) to sign on to ceasefires with SLORC. This pressure was exerted quite actively. Already in 1989, during SLORC's military offences, Thailand had allowed military units to cross into Thai territory in order to attack insurgent strongholds. Furthermore, a handy upshot of the logging concessions was that the Thai companies "would cut logging routes and roads through rebel-held territory, which could later be used by Rangoon to launch offensives against these groups" (Kramer 2009, 10). Delivering a decisive blow to the NMSP, the Thai military announced that, if NMSP did not enter into ceasefire

negotiations, 10,000 Mon refugees would be forced out of Thailand back into NMSP administered territory. 10,000 people that NMSP – following rounds of assaults from the Tatmadaw – was in no position to cater for. Meanwhile, the Tatmadaw kept hitting KNU-controlled areas, finally leading to the fall of Manerplaw in 1995, which functioned as both KNU and NDF headquarters. With this fall, the NMSP caved and on the 29th June 1995 signed a ceasefire agreement with SLORC. The KNU for its part, while its territories had been radically curtailed through the Tatmadaw interventions, kept up arms only signing a ceasefire much later in 2012. However, following a series of further offensives by the Tatmadaw against the KNU, by the late 1990s the organization had lost most of its territorial control. This dual strategy of offensives against the EAOs, gradually undermining their territorial control, while subverting economic flows away from them towards the regime proved lucrative: foreign investments exploded from USD 58 mn in 1990-1991 reaching USD 800 mn in 1996-1997, right before the last significant military blow towards the KNU in 1997.

Amidst this emerging "ceasefire capitalism", as Woods (2011) has put it, the regime became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, binding the country to continuous liberalization in its foreign trade regime (Alamgir 2008). As with the investment policy this was part and parcel of undercutting the power of the EAOs. Attesting to the significance of the ceasefires and reorienting of trade flows away from the illegal, black market operations controlled by the EAOs, towards legalized flows that tied the EAOs into formalized circuits of capital in this period: "[c]ounted together, the three elements – arms, narcotics, and the black market – represented an estimated 105% of Myanmar's official trade in 1990 … this proportion fell to an average of about 70% in the second half of the 1990s and then to about 50% by 2005" (Alamgir 2008, 983). Also, through its trade policy, the regime strategically began shifting the structural power of different actors in society – away from the different sectors that the state could not take full control of, e.g. agriculture, towards the state-controlled sectors, notably the hydrocarbon energy sector. This sector is under the purview of the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) that early on in the 1990s paired up with its counterpart in Thailand, PTT Exploration and Production, and the two transnational corporations Total Oil and Unocal (now Chevron). This specific partnership contributed greatly to the fact that by 2002, the regime "exported over USD 800 million worth of gas, which contributed to its first ever trade surplus" since taking power in 1988 (Alamgir 2008, 981). Similarly, in later partnerships in the 2000s, herein the one located in the now controversial Rakhine state with the Chinese,

MOGE is the only partner on the Myanmar side of the project, controlling everything from extraction to the subsequent trading (Alamgir 2008). As a result of this trade and investment policy, "[i]n the subsequent decades [following 1988] the energy sector, including hydropower and oil and gas, was the primary recipient of FDI and in the 2006-7 fiscal year, it accounted for more than 98 per cent of all foreign investment" (Simpson 2017, 82).

The other key actors in foreign trade and to which much of the in flowing investment went to were military linked firms. This was the other means through which the military regime ensured a dominating position in Myanmar's political economy through the 1990s and 2000s: cultivating a network of organizations and individuals with close connections to the military, though formally separate. In 1993, SLORC set up its Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). The idea behind it was to entice support for the military regime through different local development initiatives. Subsequently, the USDA was given "control of several national markets and, at the regional level, extensive interests in transportation, aquaculture, plantations, real estate and rice-milling" (Jones 2014a, 150). While upon arrival SLORC through the different policies attempted widespread liberalization and privatization of State Economic Enterprises (SEE), the actual privatization process turned out to be "hesitant, partial or easily reversed" (Brown 2013, 178). The shift away from privatization happened particularly following the re-shuffle of SLORC into the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997 (Jones 2014a). After the initial liberalization and privatization measures taken by SLORC had failed to yield significant industrialization (with the exception of an export-oriented garments industry exporting to the US and the European Union) the strategy shifted back towards companies under direct control of the military. Subsequently, the regime created its own two military companies to boost its position within the economy: the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited and the Myanmar Economic Corporation. Today, the two companies have turned into veritable conglomerates, with economic interests between the two of them in everything from ports to telecommunications to cigarettes and petroleum imports, prompting the Financial Times in 2017 to warn by then eager US and European investors of a "military-commercial complex" (Peel 2017). Finally, the regime – both under SLORC and SPDC – nurtured a group of what would colloquially become known as "the cronies". These were individuals closely linked to the military that would support its overriding national principles. Through these connections, they were ensured "trade licences, construction contracts, joint venture deals and other lucrative opportunities" (Jones 2014a,

149). As a result, starting with joint ventures with the influx of Thai investments, "many businesspeople with the right connections made small fortunes exporting timber, agricultural commodities and marine products, giving them the capital to form construction firms to capitalize on a boom in real estate and government infrastructure spending" (ibid). This government infrastructure included the building of an entirely new capital in Naypyidaw and a vast road network of over three and a half thousand miles of highways (Brown 2013). In addition to the military-owned firms, individual high-ranking officers within the military and their family members, this subset of cronies then became the main beneficiaries of the SLORC/SPDC-mediated capitalist transition through the 1990s and 2000s.[24]

The relationships subsequently developed between the cronies and the state is significant, as these have ramifications up until today. Jones describes it as a "symbiotic" relation (2014a, 151) , whereby the cronies were and are clearly dependent on state patronage for their continued accumulation, but at the same time, the state became more and more dependent on the cronies for everything from transport of merchants around the country to building of key infrastructure in the 1990s and 2000s, including pipelines, roads and indeed the entire new capital in Nay Pyi Taw. Furthermore, coming up to the 2010-elections, the Union Solidarity and Development Association was converted to the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Several cronies were subsequently approached both for funds as well as to run for parliament on a ticket from the USDP, which subsequently won the elections.

Throughout this period then, the Tatmadaw's main concern was the question of territorial integrity and political stability. Ultimately, with the 2010-elections ushering in the new constitution, this was achieved gradually, not by the tactics of brute force that had been pursued until 1988, but through combining processes of economic growth and violence leading eventually to a mode of capitalist development that has been characterized as "highly rapacious and coercive" (Jones 2014a, 167). It was through this gradual shift in the balance of forces in society then that the Tatmadaw eventually succeeded in pushing through a transition toward a civilian administration in 2010 on its own terms – those that both the EAOs and the NLD had resisted in 1990 and 1996. By the time of the National Convention (NC) in 2004-2007 that eventually led to the current constitution, all EAOs except the Karen National

[24] The extent of their accumulation is meticulously covered by the Irrawaddy newspaper in its 2008 *Tracking the Tycoons* article: http://www2.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=14151&page=1

Union had signed a ceasefire and despite voicing similar concerns around regional autonomy, they all supported the constitution. While the NLD's walkout from the NC in 1993-1996 had effectively ended that round, the democracy movement by 2004 had been so weakened that their boycott of the 2004-2007 NC did not matter. Furthermore, the military's creation of the formally separate USDP meant that there was a nominally civilian vehicle to transfer power to.

Industrialisation and democracy under State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi?

From 2011, the USDP-government led by General Thein Sein initiated a number of political reforms. These concerned on the one hand basic civil rights and electoral democracy. On the other hand, political economic reforms revisited and consolidated the thrust in the SLORC-era liberalizations, including a swathe of laws facilitating investments into the country generally (e.g. the Investment Law) and in industrial zones (e.g. Special Economic Zone Law) and natural resources specifically (e.g. the twin Vacant, Fallow and Virgin land law and the Farmland Law, the Foreign Petroleum Law). Optimism concerning Myanmar's plight was further compounded by the Karen National Union's (KNU) – the oldest ethnic armed group – signing of a ceasefire agreement in January 2012. Following these reforms, Western states began suspending or entirely lifting sanctions and UN organisations and international NGOs, multilateral and bilateral donors began pouring into Yangon and Naypidaw. As a result, from 2012-2013, aid to the country soared by 788% (Stokke et al. 2018) and in the period from 2012-2016, USD 28.33 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) poured into Myanmar. This should be seen relative to the USD 40 billion in FDI covering the period 1989-2012 (Vakulchuk et al. 2017). Finally, the first free and general elections since 1990 were held in November 2015. These delivered a resounding victory for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy, a massive defeat for the USDP and a marginalization of ethnic minority parties (Stokke et al. 2018). The constitutional blocking of Aung San Suu Kyi assuming the presidency, was circumvented by creating the new position of State Counsellor, making her *de facto* state leader under the 2008 constitution.

The above developments' seemingly positive veneer notwithstanding, the optimism came crumbling down already a year into Aung San Suu Kyi's

leadership, when rumours about the gradual unfolding of atrocities in Rakhine State began surfacing. As has subsequently come out, this amounted to genocide inflicted on the Rohingya ethnic-minority. Less widely discussed, however, was how similar (if at a smaller scale) acts of violence were systematically being waged on a range of other ethnic minority groups in both the North and Northeast of the country. Furthermore, the Aung San Suu Kyi-initiated Panglong II-process – referencing the historic meeting presided by her father – has gained little headway, with ethnic organisations complaining that the political economic reforms are undermining the basis for increased regional autonomy.

Meanwhile, the NLD-government is pushing ahead with attempts at instigating industrialization. Since 2012, Myanmar has become one of the fastest growing economies across Southeast Asia – averaging at 7.5 per cent in from 2012-2016 (Stokke et al. 2018). The Asian Development Bank foresees that similar growth rates can be expected in the coming years, yet highlights that this will require sustaining high rates of FDI (ADB 2017). Consequently, the NLD-government's *Industrial Policy* paper from February 2016, seeks to create opportunities for profitable investment for local and foreign capital through a series of economic corridors carving through the country. This is to be facilitated through, amongst others, tax incentives and "one stop" service centres for investments in the different regions covered by the corridors. The corridors themselves are to include different types of industrial zones, special economic zones and ports along the coast, while linking directly up to industrial and agro-industrial processes in neighbouring countries through the different regional economic corridors already envisioned in the Asian Development Bank's Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). In this manner, for example, the envisioned Dawei Special Economic Zone in Tanintharyi is to be linked up to Southernmost corridor of the GMS, which will stretch from Myanmar to Vietnam (see Figure 5).



Figure 5
Placard at the Dawei Special Economic Zone's visiting center displaying its geoeconomic position and the larger economic corridor of which it is (hoped) to be a part of. Source: Author

Where ethnic borderlands already underwent some degree of capitalist integration in the early years of SLORC through different extractive industries, the industrial policy that is being pursued now boldly seeks to shift scales of such integration. As under SLORC in the late 1980s, the NLD-government's current scale-shift in terms of capital accumulation is managing to enlist much larger players behind its state space project than the EAOs can muster. While interests from foreign investors in the country has subsided since 2016 (Stokke et al. 2018), there is significant push from China, Japan and Thailand

respectively for three different coastal Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and port infrastructure in Kyaukphyu (North), Thilawa (Central) and Dawei (South) and a myriad of extractive projects particularly in resource rich minority-ethnic areas, where EAOs remain active (compare Figures 6 & 7).

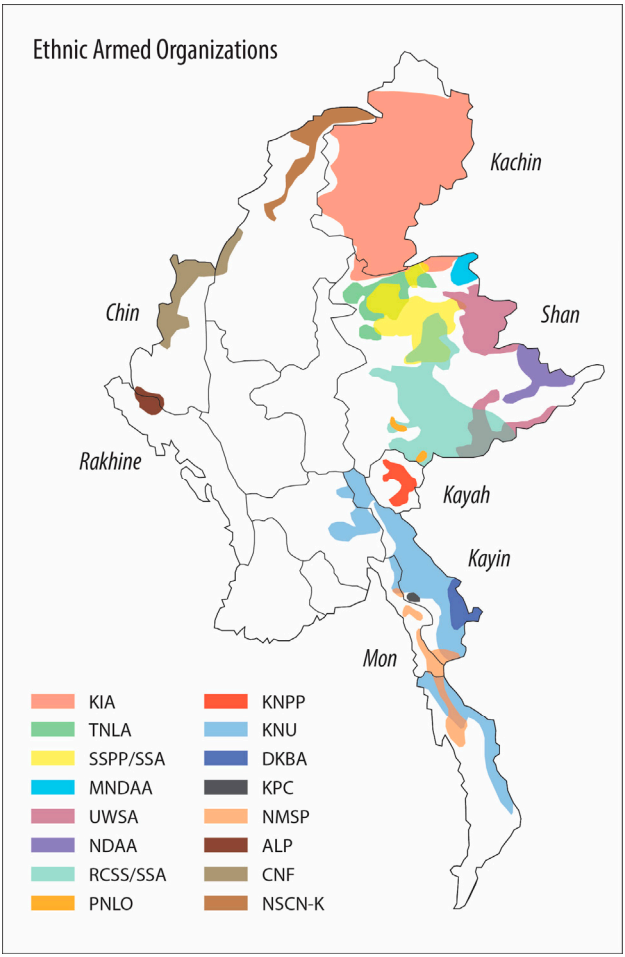


Figure 6
Presence of active ethnic armed organisations across Myanmar. Not the ones of relevance to this dissertation are NMSP and KNU in light of their presence in Southern Mon State and Northern Tanintharyi division.
Source: Stokke et al. (2018, 23), reprinted with permission

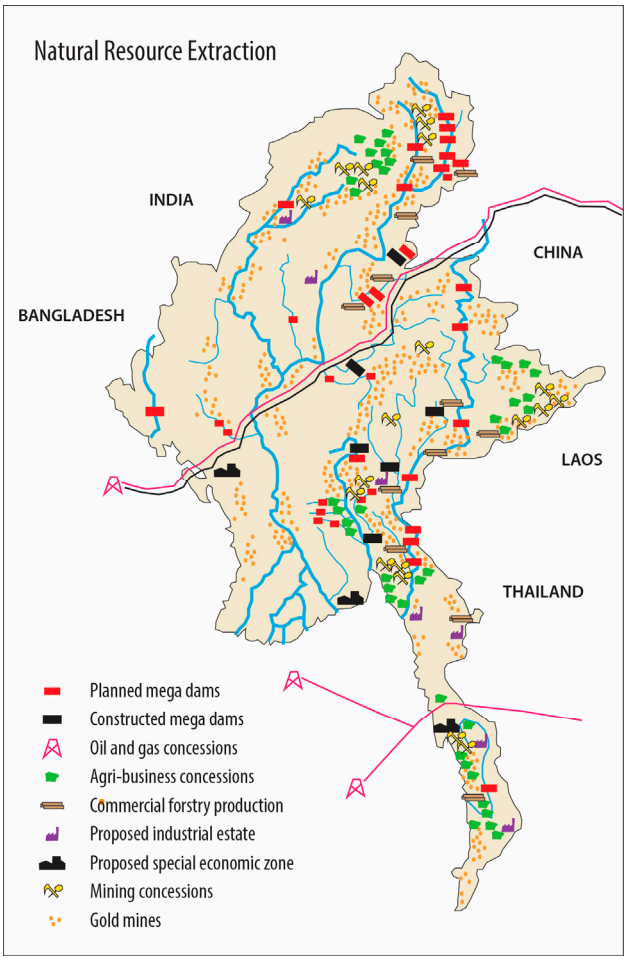


Figure 7
Location of major development projects across the country – herein the three Special Economic Zones.
Source: Stokke et al. (2018, 23), reprinted with permission

However, at the time of writing, only the Thilawa SEZ is functioning with the other two zones mired in problems around financing and resistance from local residents against the terms of their dispossession. Meanwhile, agriculture, hunting, fishing and forestry together remain the "biggest single contributor to GDP" and ensures employment for over 65% of the population (Stokke et al. 2018, 37). This has prompted criticism on the lack of focus on agricultural development, leading one activist writer to comment that,

> Contrary to the hype about the strategy serving to make Myanmar the prosperous junction of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China, the current export-oriented, extractive industrial paradigm is a dead-end for the country. (Bello 2018, 37)

Finally, the implications of the "managed transition" loom large. In the years since the transition away from direct military-rule, the position of the cronies has if anything become even stronger and as Lee Jones (2014a, 151) forewarns, "Myanmar's crony capitalists are poised to exercise considerable influence over the trajectory of reform." Moreover, others have subsequently argued that oligopolists is now a more appropriate term for this class, since they increasingly act independently from the state and military apparatus and hence are no longer merely cronies of other (higher) power blocs (Ford et al. 2016).

As all previous government's since independence, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's government therefore remains caught up in contentious struggles around the politics of geography: who gets what, where, and why and who loses where? Following a long history of failed state-led industrialization attempts in the pursuit of development, this time around, it is being sought through a distinctly neoliberal approach with a significant authoritarian and violent bent to it. The rural realities that this approach intervenes in will be examined next.

5. Struggles in ocean space and class differentiation in Daminseik

Colonial stagnation

> Apart from the question of exploiting the natural resources we have at our door, the development of [the fisheries] industry is intimately bound up with wider and more important national interests. The creation of a population along the sea board, "which would have those hardy qualities developed which are the outcome of exposure and danger" would be an invaluable asset to a future self-governing Burma which one day will have to find the personnel for the navy to guard her own shores. (Khin 1948, 59)

Written at the dawn of Burman independence, prior to the coming decades-long civil-war, U Khin's thoughts on the role of the fishery sector in the budding nation and how it was tied up with "more important national interests", over time turned out to be pretty on the mark. His 1948 analysis of the fisheries sector, prior to which he had been working as Assistant Director of Agriculture in Tanintharyi for the British, particularly notes the plentiful waters off the Tanintharyi and Mon coast: the Andaman Sea. In hindsight though, the fishery resources played less of a role in terms of producing a population that could supply the navy with a steady stream of cadets in the expected aim of protecting it from foreign foes, and more so in terms of providing rent for subsequent cash strapped governments. Despite this potentially crucial political and economic role of the fishery sector, which, as Khin notes approvingly, Burma was among the first provinces in India to target specifically through legislation (the Burma Fisheries Act of 1875), the sector at his time of writing remained underdeveloped: "[the] fishing industry all along the Burma coast is, however, poorly developed. It has had neither attention nor capital commensurate with its potential resources devoted to it" (Khin 1948, 55).

Unlike a number of Burma's neighbouring territories across Southeast Asia, particularly in the Gulf of Thailand, coastal towns and villages were not yet

spatially integrated through roads or rail with markets and – barring a few satellites that had facilitated the British empire's teak trade – coastal shipping was also not developed (Butcher 2004). Colonial records document that marine catches peaked in the 1860s and steadily declined right up until the time Khin was writing. In the same period, imports of salted and dried fish rose dramatically – from 1300 tons in 1878/79 to around 9000 tons by the early 1930s (Butcher 2004). Most of these imports came from India and the rest from other territories across the region by way of Singapore. Throughout the British colonial period, and again in contrast to several of the neighbouring territories, salt was heavily taxed in Burma and consequently fish processing and trading, in which salt was an absolute key facilitator, never really developed at the time as merchant's capital focused on rice instead, where profits were greater and production actively enticed by the British (see Chapter 6). As a result, the plentiful waters – particularly in the Andaman Sea – remained largely a source of livelihoods for coastal villages and did not yet play the role envisioned by Khin or different frustrated colonial observers: "The sea fisheries (of Burma) are of great potential importance and are imperfectly worked … Burma should be able to supply her own requirements and to export this commodity" (Sir Harvey Adamson, 1918, quoted in Khin (1948, 49)).

Across the rest of Southeast Asia, however, national fishing industries with support from the state, were beginning to take off. This expansion of the fishing sectors across the region would subsequently shape processes of capital penetration into what would become Myanmar's Exclusive Economic Zone many years later.

Regional expansions

As detailed by Butcher (2004) in his study of the "closing frontier" in Southeast Asian fisheries, from the 1930s onwards a significant expansion took place driven first by the Japanese until around the 1960s and subsequently by the Thai fishing industry from the 1960s onwards. This expansion played out through two processes: on the one hand, a more intensive application of existing fishing gears in current grounds and in new grounds ecologically similar to existing ones. On the other hand, the expansion played out through the application of new fishing technologies in ecological strata that had barely been fished or not fished at all. Particularly in terms of the latter process, the state in some sociospatial formations, like Japan, played a crucial role by

providing training, subsidies and supporting exploratory voyages. Consequently, the Japanese fishing fleet was present across the region.

Following the second world war and with the heating up of the Cold War, aid flows were increasingly directed towards Thailand that was the only country in mainland Southeast Asia allied with the USA and the rest of the 'free world'. One of the targets of this aid was the national fishing sector. In 1961 through a bilateral aid agreement between West Germany and Thailand, German fisheries experts worked together with counterparts in the Thai Department of Fisheries to introduce trawling technology into the sector (MFR 1988; Butcher 2004). Simultaneously, the fisheries department conducted campaigns on the benefits of the demersal species in order to stimulate national demand for what the trawlers were catching. Consequently, "very early in the project it became clear that trawling offered the potential for huge profits" (Butcher 2004, 195). In subsequent years, eyeing these potential profits, massive investments were made into the sector and the number of Thai trawlers grew exponentially: from 99 vessels in 1961 to 2,700 in 1966, 5,200 in 1974 and 9,000 in 1988 (MFR 1988). The Thai fleet quickly spread throughout the Gulf of Thailand, but the ecological impacts of this new fishing technology became evident just as quickly. This, in turn, impacted profit rates: "the amount of fish that a trawler caught in an hour began to decline rapidly." (Butcher 2004, 196). As a result, the fleet of trawlers had to find new grounds.

After an initial expansion into the waters of Vietnam and Malaysia, the "great diaspora of Thai trawlers" eventually left the Gulf altogether migrating to the Andaman Sea – herein into Burmese waters (Butcher 2004). In contrast to the Gulf, the Andaman Sea – and particularly the Burmese parts – still had plentiful waters for the diaspora to pursue. Indeed, the move into the Andaman Sea and the richness of the waters here are shown by the huge increase in the proportion that demersal fish catch from here accounted for in Thailand's national catch: from 4 per cent in 1961 to 29 per cent in 1969 (Butcher 2004). In addition to prowling through the Andaman Sea, the diaspora fleet continued to spread throughout Vietnam and Cambodia too. However, this seemingly friction free expansion of the fishing frontier would not continue.

The claiming of ocean space

> As state-landed property, coastal states sit at the nexus of rent-appropriation and other distributional struggles around surplus value, (perceived) 'national

> interests', geopolitics, resource management and industry regulation in EEZs. (Campling & Havice 2014, 715)

By the late 1960s the dramatic developments in fishing technology and the expanding frontier of where such technologies were in use began to spill into existing regional Cold War tensions between the Thai government and the governments of Vietnam, Cambodia and Burma. In tune with other Third World'ist projects of laying claims to ocean space in the 1960s and 1970s (Campling & Havice 2014), Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam all proceeded to do so, formally barring off the Thai trawlers from some 280,000 square kilometres of fishing grounds – or half the area once exploited by the Thai fleet (MFR 1988). In Burma, the military regime in 1968 made its claim of territorial waters 12 nautical miles from a point it destined as "the shore". In an attempt to uphold this territorial claim, in the period between 1968-1976, the Burmese regime arrested over 200 Thai fishing vessels for trespassing in its waters (Butcher 2004). In April 1977, under the auspices of the new constitution, the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) established an Exclusive Economic Zone.

While this was intended as a powerplay, further consolidating and extending the BSPP's claim of ocean space to 200 nautical miles, the conclusion of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea negotiations (UNCLOS) in 1982 complicated matters. Where UNCLOS formally solidified the Burmese state's control over the Exclusive Economic Zone, the UNCLOS agreement simultaneously stipulated that states should give access to foreign fleets when there were "surplus stocks" in their waters. As noted in a FAO report from 1984, at that time Burma "is one of the few countries in Southeast Asia (if not actually the only one) in which potential yields do exist" (Pauly et al., 1984: 101). However, no agreements were made and instead the cat-and-mouse between the Burmese navy and the Thai fishing vessels continued.

The Thai fishing fleet's presence in the early 1980s in neighbouring state's EEZ was thus without permission from the would-be host states and further exacerbated conflicts between these and the Thai fishing fleet – leading to seizures and confiscations of 275 Thai fishing boats from 1980-1984 across the EEZs of Burma, Vietnam and Cambodia. This was, however, a tiny fraction of the Thai fishing fleet. In order to combat this, several of the governments in the region began beefing up their abilities to police their waters – significantly pushed forward by the interests of fishing fleets of other countries, e.g. Japan. In 1986 catches landed in South Thailand's largest fishing port, Ranong, plunged by 40 per cent when the Burmese regime went into a joint venture

agreement with the Japanese company Nikata allowing for a drastic increase in surveillance of the EEZ. According to a report from the US government's Marine Fisheries Review, Nikata provided the Burmese, at the time, state-owned fishing company with "training, technology, equipment and cold stores" (MFR 1988, 66). While some of the fish was sold in Burma, the better-quality products were exported to Japan. Simultaneously, "[t]o protect their investment, the Japanese have provided the Burmese with 42 patrol boats and 6 helicopters to discourage poaching" (MFR 1988, 66).

Coming up to the momentous changes that happened across the region in 1988 (see Chapter 4), the relation between the military regime and Thai fishing capital was about to be significantly transformed. With the coming into power of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) the strategy shifted from asserting control of the EEZ through opposing Thai fishing to asserting control to facilitate Thai fishing and secure rent flows from the fleet of Thai vessels instead.

In December 1988, three months after SLORC came into power – and clarifying that the principles set out in the Foreign Investment Act of "exporting whatever surplus available" was to be taken seriously – the regime agreed with Thailand's General Chaovalit that it would grant fishing rights to Thai trawlers. This was followed up with the Fishing Rights of Foreign Vessels Law and in March 1989 SLORC's fishery department issues five Thai firms with licenses to fish in Myanmar waters. The licenses were initially valid for one year targeting a specified concession area and the contracts stipulated that the Thai firms pay between 600 and 800 USD per gross ton of catch (Kramer 1994). Already by May 1989, however, a new agreement regarding fishing cooperation was signed between the Thai and Burmese regime, facilitating the selection of Thai partners for joint ventures with a company set up by SLORC. The terms of this agreement had changed – maybe partly in pursuit of the attention to the national fishing industry that Khin had sought 40 years before – so the Thais had to employ labour from Burma and had to land their catches in Burma. On the Thai side, the Thai-Myanmar fisheries company was set up by the government in order to manage and organize the participation of the Thai fishing industry through a central fishing company. Thai firms were then "encouraged by the government to buy shares in the company and come under its protective umbrella in order to facilitate problem solving" (Innes-Brown and Valencia (1993, 338). The areas particularly targeted for subsequent concessions were, predictably, the bountiful and – for the Thai fleet – nearby and familiar waters in the Andaman Sea off the coast of Mon State and Tanintharyi division.

Distributional struggles

These dynamics of shifting scales of capital accumulation and state power in ocean space also had massive implications for the "livelihoods of those using much less powerful fishing gear", particularly when "because of the size and power of their vessels the operators of trawlers and purse seiners could easily destroy any small nets or boats that happened to get in their way" (Butcher 2004, 229). The conflicts over the ability to benefit from ocean space did not just play out regionally, but across scales.

While the SLORC-facilitated expansion of the Thai fishing fleet into Myanmar's EEZ may have been legal, it was far from legitimate. The question of access to and benefits from extraction of fish in Myanmar's EEZ were enmeshed in the ongoing civil war between SLORC and various insurgent groups – especially in Mon and Tanintharyi. The social ramifications of the Thai fishing fleet were palpable. Mentioning the concessions to Thai fishing companies in Tanintharyi, the Mon Information Service documenting 'Life in the Country' under SLORC wrote that: "the local fisher population is banned from fishing in the wide sea area of the concessions granted to the foreign fishing companies" (1997, 8). In October 1989, six Thai trawlers were seized by Mon rebels and the Communist Party of Burma and by the end of the year, over 100 fishing vessels had been hijacked – all of them returned after ransom was paid though (Bangkok Post 1989). A little over a year later, on December 29th 1990, the All Burma Student's Democratic Front (ABSDF) blew up the largest and most modern vessel formally active in Myanmar's EEZ, owned by a company based in the Ranong port in Southern Thailand. The ABSDF stated they had received complaints from local small-scale fishers about the impacts of the Thai fishing fleet because this specific vessel was "operating in their area" (Kramer 1994, 71). In response the Ranong Fishery Club came out against SLORC in strong terms, criticizing the regime for not being able to control the insurgent groups while calling for the need to protect the Thai vessels. As noted by Um (1991, 265), under the UNCLOS-regime, "[g]uaranteeing access to resources has become just as vital as the actual defence of national resources". By January 1991, 265 Thai fishing vessels were formally operating in Myanmar's EEZ under the auspices of the joint venture with SLORC. In reality, the number was much higher. The insurgent groups, however, continued to step up their campaigns around the distribution of benefits from fisheries extraction, becoming increasingly systematic and institutionalized in their approach. In April 1991, the insurgent groups that were united under the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), demanded that

the Thai trawlers operating in waters under their control should apply for fishing licenses under their Burma Waters Supervisory Committee. They targeted all active vessels, with the demanded license fees progressively rising according to the vessels' ice carrying capacity. The income stemming from the licenses would be distributed internally within the DAB – partly to finance arms on the inspection boats that were manned by Karen and Mon insurgents as well as Burmese students (Bangkok Post 1991).

Despite this contention, the Thai government restated earlier agreements with the Burmese military representatives. In August 1991, a delegation that included a range of representatives of the Thai fishing industry extended the joint-venture agreement until March 1992.[25] This extension included letters of intent from the Thai companies to invest in fishmeal and canned tuna factories as well as ice production and storage facilities (Bangkok Post 1991). In reality though, the development of the fishing industry never amounted to much, with the Thai vessels occasionally landing catch in local ports, but only to transship it on the way back to Thailand (Hosch 2015).

Throughout the early 1990s, frustrated Thai vessel owners had to pay rents to the military regime as well as various insurgent groups. However, with the ramping up of the military regime's campaigns against them and the simultaneous pursuit of ceasefires strategically dividing the alliances amongst different ethnic groups (notably the Democratic Alliance of Burma), the regime gradually outcompeted them in the struggle over appropriating rent from Thai fishing capital. Nonetheless, the relation with Thai fishing capital remained turbulent, with SLORC periodically granting access and then reverting on its decision throughout the rest of the decade. This followed shifts in the relation with the Thai government, e.g. in 1999 when Thai trawlers were periodically banned due to the regime's perception of a lenient treatment of Burmese dissidents in Thailand. Attesting to the importance of these grounds for the Thai fishing industry, it was estimated that the ban cost the fishing industry USD 3.8 million pr. day (Gutter 2001). The most recent ban was in 2014, purportedly with the aim of limiting overfishing (ILO, 2015). In spite of this, throughout the period Thai owned vessels have been present either circumventing bans, by entering into deals with the navy, through joint-venture companies, or simply ignoring them (Butcher, 2004; Tezzo et al., 2018).

In the meantime, a significant national offshore fisheries sector has developed. In 1998, what state-owned production facilities that had been built

[25] The delegation included Charoen Pokphand, today one of the 13 largest seafood corporations in the world (Osterblom et al. 2015).

up, particularly through the joint-venture agreements with the Thai fishing companies in the early 1990s, were privatized. This was part of SLORC's broader privatization drive in the 1990s, the era that also saw the rise of Myanmar's crony class. Similar to how these cronies have come to dominate other sectors of the economy, they also play a pivotal role in today's fisheries sector. The national offshore fleet today consists of over 2,700 vessels (Johnstone 2016). According to a study by the ILO, in the period 2010-2015, the fishery sector was the fourth largest contributor to Myanmar's GDP and the fourth largest source of foreign exchange – with the export sector in 2016 amounting to USD 502 million (DoF 2017). Very little public information on the ownership structure or profit rates following privatization is available, but it is widely referenced by industry observers how a select few cronies with close ties to the former military government exert considerable control and are accumulating massively through a number of vertically integrated firms (interviews, October-November 2016; ILO 2015). The Myanmar Fisheries Federation (MFF) has played a pivotal role in this process. The MFF was created in conjuncture with the privatization process in order to organize the new private actors in the sector. The current chairman of the MFF and president of the Fishing Vessel Owners Association, Htay Myint, is one of the 17 cronies identified by Burma News International (2013) that rose to power in the post-1988 era. Myint was formerly on the US-sanctions list for his close ties with the military regime. He started out with investments in the fisheries sector and later invested profits from here into Yangon's residential and commercial property markets. His company, Yuzana, developed interests in a range of industries spanning transportation to hotels to oil palm and rubber plantations (Irrawaddy 2008).

Over the past decades then, the distribution of benefits from fisheries went from being a bargaining chip in regional geopolitical struggles, to struggles over competing territorialization projects, to, finally, facilitating the rise of Myanmar's national cronies. Throughout these transformations of who had access to what, the plight of coastal fishing villages was scarcely a concern. The Marine Fisheries Law (1990), following the main thrust of SLORC's policies, was primarily aimed at establishing a stream of revenue to the regime from the national fishing fleet. Yet, in response to the unrest around the role of the Thai fishing industry in the early 1990s and clashes between coastal fishing villages and the trawlers, SLORC passed reforms of the Marine Fisheries Law in 1993, re-stating the 10-nautical mile delineation wherein the offshore fleet is not allowed to venture (Schmidt & Soe 2015). Nonetheless, the offshore fleet of vessels under crony-control today operate with impunity and basically fish

in whichever way can secure profit – including by venturing further and further inshore into the areas that are otherwise by law reserved for the smaller-scale inshore fishing fleet. This has led to conflicts with fishing villages up and down the Tanintharyi coast (Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Dawei, Myeik and Kaw Thaung, December 2016). Small-scale fishers argue that the navy, which currently has the mandate to uphold the inshore-offshore divide, is complicit in this process, as noted by a fisher from Dawei, "people who have money can break the law in the sea without consequences" (FGD, 01.12.2016).

The following sections turn to how these dynamics in the fisheries sector intersected with the military regime's intervention into the Northern Tanintharyi landscape to facilitate the construction of the gas pipelines that would have landfall just South of Daminseik.

Daminseik

Daminseik is a small fishing village of around 270 households. Driving from Kanbauk, the route alters from bumpy dirt roads that while easily traversed by motorbike, must be carefully negotiated by cars, to relatively new concrete roads that Total's CSR-program built. Passing through the inland villages before reaching Daminseik, the landscape is dominated by villagers' rubber "gardens", as they call them. The crop, infamous in Southeast Asia for its boom from the late 1990s and 2000s onwards (Hall 2012), was switched to by villagers in the same period. While elsewhere the rubber landscape is dominated by seemingly never-ending plantations, here ownership patterns remain relatively smaller – although the concentration of land ownership that has happened in these villages over the past 20 years has been immense, as we will see in the next chapter. Just before reaching the shoreline, the rubber gardens stop and the landscape all of a sudden opens up as we reach a row of plots of what used to be paddy fields. On the final stretch of road, as we approach Daminseik, the pungent smell of dried fish envelopes the car and the driver hastily rolls up the windows in a vain attempt to keep the car free of the fish smell.

The village is small with two main dirt streets running east-west and north-south. With the exception of two households that have started up small commodity shops, all households are somehow engaged in fishing, as workers, boat owners, money lenders and/or small-scale traders. While this is surely one of the small-scale fishing "communities" heralded by fisher movements and

allies or targeted as homogenous units by policy makers in Yangon, the intense differentiation within the village is immediately obvious. The richest households are found in the front row of the beach, with somewhat of a concentration in the Northern area. This part is furthest from the pipeline that has landfall just South of the village. These richer households lie adjacent to the shoreline, which ensures access to a work spot right on the beach where the catch comes in. In the Eastern and Southern parts of the village, by contrast, the poorer – and poorest – households are found. Either providing the labour for the boat owners living in the front row – or working in family units on a single boat. Here there is little or no space to process the caught fish. What little there is, is in itself a source of conflict as this will often entail enclosing the narrow walkways between the individual houses.

This differentiation within the village, is constituted by the social relations evolving from the fisheries production system. Belying the idea of romanticized and homogenous communities united against ocean grabbing or ready for quick policy remedies, the fisheries production system has led to significant differentiation along lines of class, gender and generation. The households in the village can initially be divided into one group of boat owners and one group who do not own any boats and instead rely on working for the boat owners for their reproduction. The boat owners can in turn be divided into a group of petty capitalists that employ wage-labour and households that own a boat, but rely on family labour, rather than employed labour. The group of labourers are internally segmented around a gendered division of labour and amongst women – a generational one, whereby only women of a certain age can partake fully in the production process. These differences of course impact on the distribution of benefits from the fisheries, where the boat owners take away profits from their selling of the fish and the labourers receive different wages depending on gender and age. However, for many of the boat owners and labourers their profits and wages are lessened by debt that they have with merchants and boat owners, respectively. All of the above relations structure which opportunities different households have: where a few are managing to accumulate capital and are transitioning out of fisheries by buying up land for rubber production (the gardens we had passed by car) others are barely able to reproduce themselves ("just surviving"). This web of social relations is interrogated in the following sections. Through life histories of people, it goes through these different categories and explain their evolution over time in conjuncture with the historical evolution in the fisheries system in the village and the broader dynamics of capitalist development in Myanmar. For the sake

of overview, Table 1 gives a typology of different roles in the production process - herein divisions according to class, gender and age.

Table 1
Different roles in the fisheries production system according to class, gender and age divisions

Boat owners Approx. 40 households	**Fishing gear**	**Role in production**	**Costs and Terms of trade**
	More than 4 boats (25 lakhs[26] pr. boat usually with 25 nets pr. boat at 150,000 kyats pr. net) Own more than 10 acres of land and are gradually transitioning out of fisheries	Little or no direct involvement in production. Hiring in of labourers Some also in merchant-role to other boat owners	Through kin networks manage to bypass merchants Usually debt-free 3 male workers and 1-2 contracted women pr. boat
	Between 2-4 boats Some have plots and whatever they are managing to accumulate from fisheries they are investing in land	Self-exploitation with men in harvesting and women in pre- and post-harvest on par with labourers Hiring in of labourers	Often in debt to traders leading to dependence on them and hence lower price for their catch 3 male workers and 1-2 contracted women pr. boat
	1 boat No land	Self-exploitation	Often in debt to traders leading to dependence on them and hence lower price for their catch
Labourers Approx. 240 households	**Gender**	**Terms of labour**	**Wages**
	Male – harvest activities in groups of 3 pr. boat	From the age of 16 all males are contracted Meals provided by boat owners	Between 110,000 - 150,000 kyats pr. month depending on level of seniority on the boat Often in debt to boat owners
	Female – pre- and post-harvest activities (preparing food, sorting and processing the catch)	Contracted between ages 16-30 Meals provided by boat owners	60-70,000 kyats pr. month Often in debt to boat owners
		No contracts under 16, when pregnant or after the age of 30 therefore have to get work on a daily basis, which is not always possible. No meals provided	Remunerated pr. day by number of containers of shrimp from the catch (see Figure 7). They receive 100 kyats pr. basket and typically manage to gather between 6-10 pr. day. On a monthly basis wages from 10-20,000 kyats Often in debt to boat owners

[26] 1 lakh = 100,000 kyats

> In some places still, an effective community, of a local kind, can survive in older terms, where small freeholders, tenants and craftsmen and labourers can succeed in being neighbours first and social classes only second. This must never be idealized, for *at the points of decision, now as then, the class realities usually show through*. (Williams 1973, 106, emphasis added)

By the early 2000s, following the first rounds of interruption from the building of the pipeline in the early and mid-1990s, fish landings in the village began plummeting and boat owners were feeling a squeeze on their profits. Especially two factors led to this situation: i) the increasing intrusion of larger-scale vessels into the inshore areas undermining the historical fishing practice and ii) a shortage of skilled and disciplined labour in the village.

Until some 20 years ago, the fishing practice – based on what was called a "traditional way" of engaging with the ecosystem – consisted of using the inshore area of ten nautical miles. Fishing was limited to the dry season as going out to sea during the rainy season was too dangerous. For the first two months of the fishing season fishers would remain within the first five miles of the shore, for the next two move out up to 8 miles and then finally up to nine to ten miles before returning further inshore for the close of the season. Each boat would employ men at sea doing the fish harvesting and a number of women sorting and processing (i.e. drying) the catch upon landing it. As this was before the road was built by Total while Daminseik was still much more isolated, the catch would either be sold to regional merchants from Mon (who would travel there by boat) or transported to the regional capital of Yephyu, Kanbauk, by foot (a day's walk).

With the expansion of the fishing frontier through more industrial methods used ever closer to the shore by both the foreign and national fishing fleet, however, this model has gradually been undermined. Since the early 2000s, the intrusion of large-scale vessels into inshore areas has become a regular factor to reckon with for the boat owners.



Figure 8
A large-scale vessel coming even further into Daminseik's inshore area that usual. The picture was taken by the acting village administrator from his boat a few days before our interview (24.10.2017) Source: Author

This intrusion has created havoc in the fishing production system. Their rotational method of fishing, progressively migrating through the ten nautical miles is based on the use of bagnets that are fastened with rocks on the seabed – venturing out twice per 24 hours in motorized boats to change the nets. However, with the intrusion of more industrial fishing methods, the boat owners' fishing nets are destroyed, if these vessels come across their nets. Consequently, the boat owners implore their workers, not to go beyond six miles, which has become the new typical limit for the large-scale vessels (though see Figure 8) as the loss of their equipment can lead to a debt spiral that is difficult to get out of (see below). As a result of this smaller catchment area available to them, their catches are far below what they were historically. As one boat owner described, "With lots of cows on a smaller pasture then how can you get enough for your stomach?" (Interview 22, 04.11.2017)

Concomitantly with this physical reduction of space and the subsequent necessity in transforming the fishing practice, there was a disruption in the labour supply in the village. Prior to the pipeline and the road network being

built, the villagers interviewed that lived there at the time, describe Daminseik as being closed off and more tightknit than it is today. They described a higher degree of trust amongst boat owners and workers and a more general sense of mutual reciprocity within the village with a lower degree of penetration of capital (merchant's and commodities), akin to what James Scott (1978) might call a "moral economy" or a "natural economy" as per Watts (2013, 21). With first the pipeline and later the road network, however, major changes in Yephyu's spatial and therefore social relations took place. The building of the pipeline relied on slave labour from the surrounding villages, as well as from farther North in Mon State. With the interruption of the fisheries production system and their lives more generally that the pipeline meant, many of the villagers fled Daminseik to pursue their luck in Thailand – although often ending up in refugee camps along the border. Simultaneously with this exodus, the building of a road around 1995/6 linked Daminseik to Kanbauk. As a result, Daminseik was "opened up", as one interviewee put it. The road was initially built to facilitate the movement of Total employees to guard the pipeline – guards which remain at the site of landfall just South of the village to this day. However, with the road came also new flows of labour, commodities and merchant's capital. While this new source of migrant labour intuitively should've been to the benefit of the boat owners, they deplored that many of these incoming migrants had never even seen the sea, let alone had any fishing experience. As a result, boat owners in these years faced a shortage of "smart workers" and steep competition amongst each other to attract the ones that were available. In an attempt to attract the best workers, they began giving advance payments to the best of these in order to try and secure their labour for the entire fishing season. However, to their dismay, as this system became generalized as a prerequisite for attaining any labour at all, some of those with looser ties to the village would take the money and simply leave. In a remarkable display of class agency, however, the boat owners responded in an organized way by initiating a new contract system for wage employment, protecting themselves against footloose migrant labour as well as formalizing a tiered system of exploitation of labour according to gender and age.

These contracts stipulate terms of employment as well as the listing of four witnesses within the village that have to sign the contract as an insurance policy for the boat owners (see Figure 9). If the worker flees prior to the end of the season, the witnesses are liable for the advance payment that the boat owner has given out. The contracts furthermore formalize the gendered system of labour, whereby men go out to sea and women do the inland pre- and post-harvest activities. Furthermore, the system relies on a tiered remuneration, with

females of certain ages or situations especially exploited by the boat owners. Despite the attempt at mitigating their troubles with labour, boat owners today still deplored the situation, with one young (early 30s) boat owner couple proclaiming that "it is more difficult being an owner than a worker!" (Interview 6, 01.11.2017).

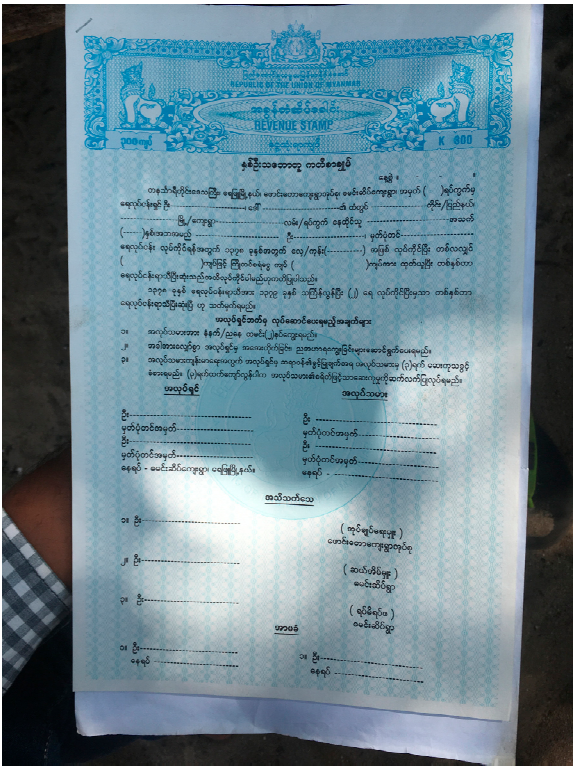


Figure 9
The contract that the boat owners developed. Source: Author

Boat owners

The boat owners engaged in exploitation of labour power make up about 25 of the 280 households and they can be distinguished into two groups.[27] In one group the owners do not take part in the labour process at all, but merely

[27] As per Table 1, in addition to these two groups, 15 or so households in the village have one boat and rely on family labour

oversee it. The other group takes part in the work on par with their paid workers and so engage in a form of self-exploitation.

Daw Si, a female in her late 40s, belongs to the first group. Indeed, she proudly described her daily routine as one of a "director general" (Interview 7, 01.11.2017). Other interviewees characterized her as the richest in the village. Perhaps as a small sign of her surplus, she upon leading us into a spot in her beachside workspace as the only interviewee got one of her workers to serve us tea during our interview and insisted that we should come during the evening for dinner. Daw Si came to the village 36 years ago at the age of 13 with her sisters and cousins from Mon State to the North. Prior to the later surge in migrant labour following the pipeline, they came for work, having heard of the village through relatives that had already migrated there. Seven years after arriving, she married another migrant from Mon, who subsequently passed away twelve years later. At the time of her husband's passing, right around the years when many people were fleeing from the village, they had managed to acquire three boats. Since then, she has been re-investing her money capital and today has five boats as well as 25-acres of rubber gardens. Through overseeing of production on the five boats, she employs 13 male workers at sea and five female workers inland.[28] Her activities during the day involve buying food for the workers and her household – consisting of five sons – managing the workers and organizing the selling of fish. In addition to this "director general" role over her five boats, she has an additional five boats that she lends out. While she doesn't take any rent for these five lent boats, the workers on the boat have to sell their catch to her and they do so at a mere 10 per cent of the market rate – ensuring an even more remunerative source of income than her five boats in production do. Additionally, she has provided loans for some of the other boat owners – including Mi Choo and her husband discussed below. Rather than receiving interest on these loans, however, the indebted boat owners have to sell their catch to her below market rate until they have managed to pay off their debts. Taken together, she oversees a formidable amount of catch in the village. In contrast to many of the other boat owners, who are caught in a debt relation to a merchant from Kanbauk, she sells her fish through relatives in Mawlamyine in Mon State, ensuring a relatively lower level of extraction through terms of trade than that experienced by other fellow boat owners.

[28] Formally employed under the contract system, that is, girls and women not under contract were not counted as employees by the boat owners – unless explicitly asked about.

The young couple quoted for romanticizing the ease of being a worker is in the second group, partly relying on their own household labour. Both Mi Choo and her husband had been workers until four years ago, where they acquired three boats. The money capital necessary to buy these boats and equipment (nets and engines) came from a combination of a loan from Daw Si, inheritance from her parents selling off their boats 11 years earlier, remittances from both their siblings working in Thailand and what they had managed to save up from their wages. In addition to the boats, they simultaneously bought six acres of land producing the cash crop beetlenut.

The division of labour for the workers in the village is strictly gendered, but the same goes for boat owning households in this group. Her husband goes to sea together with the male labourers, and while they are out at sea, she together with the inland female labourers, prepares food for the entire group, which is part of the relation between boat owners and labourers – a remnant of the formerly dominant moral economy. When the men arrive with the catch in the early morning, the crucial sorting and rudimentary processing begins. This entails first sorting out the shrimp from the rest of the catch, which need to be boiled straight away to prevent them from rotting in the scorching heat. Amongst the remainder of the fish, they need to be sorted into any high value stocks that can be sold immediately to traders within the village (see Figure 10) that buy up and sell fresh fish to surrounding villages and the rest, "trash-fish", that are left to dry in the sun on mats and destined as feed for the chicken-rearing industry. She also oversees the following drying process of the shrimp, described in more detail below. In addition to managing the processing, she takes care of all the money issues, including the selling of the fish and shrimp and pay for the workers. As part of their ongoing debt-relation to Daw Si, they have to sell their catch to her. As she remarked with her husband smirking by her side, this internal division of labour was more tough for her than for him, "he just goes out to sea" (Interview 6, 01.11.2017).



Figure 10
Small-scale fish trader transporting fresh fish. Source: Author

Due to these continuing difficulties, boat owners are doing what they can to escape fisheries. Either, if possible, altogether through buying of land to start up agricultural cash crop production (typically rubber, but also beetlenut), or if nothing else ensuring a presumed escape for their children by investing in their education. For Daw Si, the "director-general", investing into her sons' education, herein two university students, was a considerable cost prohibiting further investments into land at the moment. With only two young kids currently in the village primary school, for the younger couple this was currently not an issue. Rather, as the female of the young couple put it, "[w]e're just waiting to buy more land!" (ibid)

Workers

The workers in the village make up the remaining 250 or so households. They view their situation rather differently than the ease recounted by the young boat owning couple with most of them struggling to reproduce themselves on the

wages they receive from fishing. While the group can be distinguished by their lacking ownership of means of production, there are important differences within the group according to which activities are performed in the production process.

Ko Han Myant's situation sheds light on this. A young male worker in his late teens, he lives in the very Eastern row of the village, which you get to from a winding narrow path from the main easterly North-South road. In a small wooden-braided house, he lives with his mother and 5 sisters – his father passed away some years back. They moved to the village 12 years ago from Irrawaddy in Myanmar's central delta-region. As many others, they were moving to escape the repercussions of the tsunami that rolled across the region in 2004. They only managed to move into their current house seven years ago. Before that the family was living in a tent on the beach in the Southern-most part of the village. When they first arrived, he was in school until the age of 10. To make money for the family, however, he first took up work helping in the otherwise female dominated work of processing the incoming catch. He did this until the age of 12 after which he began working for a boat owner in the village to the North of Daminseik. Here he was able to get 40,000 Kyats pr. month for the family – a relatively good wage at the age of 12. He worked here until he was 17, managing to get 80,000 pr. month in his last year of employment. Since then he has become a regular worker under the contract system earning 110,000 pr. month. As you grow older, he explains, and you gain more experience, your relative wage on the boat changes. Typically, there is an acknowledged division of labour on all the boats, where seniors (up to a certain age) earn more than their younger colleagues, "juniors". His two older sisters and mother all work with what he calls "light work", that is the work not recognized by the new contract system, yet a key activity: sorting through the catch as it comes in, gathering the most economically valuable shrimp from the rest of the catch, in preparation for its processing (boiling and drying, in which they are not allowed to take part in). As both sisters are pregnant and his mother is over 30, they do not qualify for the contract-based work, through which you take part in the entire processing system, receive a fixed wage and food from the boat owners. As a result, the three of them together in a month manage to get between 40,000 – 120,000 – depending on the catch and, as they are remunerated according to how many "containers" of shrimp they sort, how quickly they perform this work (see Figure 12). His and their wages go together in a household pool, yet, after their costs as a household, as he explains, they are "not making money, just surviving" (Interview 16, 03.11.2017). For this reason, he wants to go to Thailand – his face lights up and he smiles, flashing

his beetlenut coloured teeth as he talks about the opportunities there. However, as the only son in the family, his mother and older sisters do not want him to leave.

The role of women in the production system is limited to pre- and particularly post-harvest activities. For women workers, however, their degree of participation and their remuneration from this work varies through the course of their lives. Khin Oo, who was able to take a break during her work schedule to talk to us – the whole interview overseen by the boat owner she was working for – explained this through her life story so far. Currently in her early 20s, she got married six months ago and her husband also works for a boat owner. The marriage and subsequent building of a house on land belonging to the boat owner she works for, set them into serious debt that they are currently working off. Khin Oo was born in Daminseik and has been working since the age of eight, when she left school to start work and take care of her siblings. Until she was 16, she got paid 80 kyats per small container of shrimp that she managed to sort out of the landed catch. On good days, she managed to collect 20-25 of these containers. She shrugged about the system, explaining it is a way to "bring in young labour" (Interview 12, 02.11.2017).

Since turning 16, however, she has been working for the current boat owner that was overseeing the interview under a contract through which she earns 70,000 kyats per month. Consequently, her work activities have also expanded. Ten days a month, she gets up at 2-3 in the morning, where she is in charge of preparing the food for the 12 workers. The rest of the month, her day starts at 5-5.30. Once the first catch comes in around this time, they start out by sorting the catch. This means dividing it up according to the three types that the boat owners can sell on to merchants: shrimp, fresh fish and trash fish. The shrimp, once sorted, are boiled in a big pot, then to loosen the shells they are placed in a bag and beaten against rocks, before they are spread out in the workspaces that (some) boat owners have available to them (see Figure 11).



Figure 11
Contracted workers in the shrimp post-harvest process in workspace by the shoreline on the Western side of the village with sea and boats in the background. Source: Author

The trash-fish are spread out to dry straight away with no processing at all, also on the ground, whereas certain higher-value fish are hung up and dried for human consumption. Any fish with high enough value to be sold as fresh are sold straight away, which is organized by the female boat owners, not the labourers.

Six months after her marriage Khin Oo is worried about how they are to pay off their marriage debts. As she notes, as soon as she is pregnant and/or turns 30, she will no longer be able to do this work and will revert back to her "teenage work". In contrast to the hopeful Ko Han Myant, she is less optimistic of the opportunities in Thailand. She remembers how the family had a short spite there when she was 13. While there she and her mother worked in construction and while they received a higher wage than what they can here in Daminseik, the police continuously came and threatened them at their work place and where they lived. As came up in a later interview with her mother, they are still in debt to the brokers, who facilitated their transport back from

Thailand (Interview 14, 02.11.2017). I ask about Yangon, but she doesn't consider this a very good option either: her sister moved there 20 days ago and she is now working in a water bottle factory, earning 80,000 kyats per month. Rather, once they are debt free, she hopes she and her husband will be able to save up money to buy a boat. Again, in this regard, she emphasizes the time limit on her current remuneration level.

And this time limit is no joke. For the female workers on the edge of the hiring system life is tough – particularly when the ramifications of the contract system also hit. Daw Paun Kyi is 55 years old and came to the village 35 years ago from a fishing village in Mon state. She and her husband came to Daminseik in search of better work opportunities – they had heard of Daminseik through traders, who said there were opportunities down here. Upon arrival though, the situation was tough and neither of their daughters ever went to school. For the first 15 years in the village, they worked for boat owners, with the eldest daughter helping as soon as she could start working. Eventually, they managed to buy a boat and 16 fishing nets based on their wages and a loan from a merchant in Kanbauk. During these years, they sold all their products to this trader at 10% below market rate. 3 years ago, however, their boat was destroyed in a storm. This pushed them into a debt cycle, as her husband had to take new loans from a boat owner that he is currently working for to repay the old debt and have enough for food. Today he receives 110,000 pr. month, but it is difficult for him to keep working at the age of 65. Their situation was further exacerbated a year before our interview. A man she had known since childhood came to the village looking for work. As per the contract system, he as a new migrant to the village asked if she would be one of his witnesses on his contract to the boat owner that he got a job with. Having known him all her life, she signed willingly. However, upon receiving the advance payment from the boat owner he had left the village leaving her and her husband liable to pay the boat owner. In order to do so, they had to sell the house they had been living in and move to their current very small house at the Southeastern edge of the village. Today Daw Paun Kyi, her husband and two of their grandchildren live cramped together in a small hut. The grandchildren cannot live with their mother due to difficulties she is having with her husband, who "spends a lot on drinking" (Interview 13, 02.11.2017). On top of all this, 10 years ago she developed an eye disease and therefore had to stop working. Through Total's CSR-program she was able to receive some support for payment of medical bills, but eventually this ran out and today she is blind on one eye. Even without all these trepidations, however, she remarks how the living conditions for the female workers are especially difficult – with their

system of remuneration directly dependent on the fluctuating catches, they have felt the impact of the gradual decline in fish stocks. Before, she recounts, when they would sit and sort the catch, the pile would be so high that they couldn't see each other. This rarely happens today (see Figure 12).



Figure 12
Non-contracted female workers on the Northeastern side of the village sorting shrimp remunerated by number of containers they fill. Source: Author

Escaping to the land, yet trapped by debt

> [C]ommodities do not take themselves to market: they are taken there by merchants. The constant probing of spatial barriers and opening up of new spaces is their forte. (Harvey 2006b, 97)

Seen exclusively from the moment of production then, it would seem that the boat owners in the village are the ones making all the profit through the exploitation of labour-power in the village. Yet, moving to the moment of realization and distribution sheds light on a crucial means of extraction that boat owners are struggling with. Many of the boat owner interviewees refer to

"the lady", during our interviews. Ironically referencing the moniker given to State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, the boat owners were referring to a regional merchant. Similar to how Aung San Suu Kyi is perceived during discussions, this regional merchant is a power to be contended with in the village. The merchant, Daw Phyu, is currently one of the wealthiest people in Kanbauk – the regional capital.

She has been involved in the fish trade for 35 years and with some of the boat owners has a relation stretching far back. Before the road from Kanbauk to Daminseik was built by Total, she would walk to Daminseik by foot, where she bought dried shrimp from fishers, carry as many dried shrimp as she could on her back and walk to the illegal border crossing to Thailand – protected and controlled by the Karen National Union, who would take a cut. On the other side of the border, it was possible to receive a higher price. However, following the military's descent to Yephyu, this border crossing and hence the illegal trade was closed off. During the years of active war in the area in the early 1990s, things were difficult for her, but she sought out new trade routes and networks and through her brother in law got linked up with traders in Yangon. When the road was built everything got easier. From here on out, she began selling fishing gear, basic food commodities in the rainy season and, crucially, supplied people with interest-free credit – provided they sold their dried shrimp exclusively to her. Gradually expanding her business in this manner, today she estimates that she controls one third of the boats in the village. Reminiscent of how with deepened commodity relations, merchants often reap the benefit (Watts 2013), she sells the dried shrimp in Yangon with a minimum of 30 per cent profit rate to Chinese buyers. This has translated into her big house and landscaped garden in Kanbauk. In addition, she has her own commodity shop selling rice and kitchen equipment in Kanbauk with supplies from her connections in Mawlamyine. Yet, Daw Phyu is old, she says, and wants to stop the fishing business that is a lot of work – as she exclaims, "I do all the calculations myself!" (Interview, 04.11.2017) But with the drop in fish stocks, it is getting more difficult to get the fishers to repay their debts. Four of "her" boat owners have already "closed their business" and moved to Thailand in an attempt to work their debts off there through the expected higher wages – if at the cost of increased precarity and danger (ibid). Furthermore, she laments, the judicial system does not yet facilitate suing, so the only way to hopefully get her money back is by staying in business.

From the boat owners' perspective, despite their troubles in repaying their debts, she remains "the best among the bad" (Interview 1, 01.11.2017). In tune with her hopes, all the boat owners who can are actively trying to relinquish

themselves from their debt-relation with her as well as the troubles they all emphasize in fisheries by getting out of fisheries altogether. In a sort of "spatial fix" from below, coinciding with the smallholder rubber boom that has unfolded since the late 1990s, many have used their money-capital from fisheries to buy up plots of land – particularly to cultivate rubber. This, of course, is only a strategy that the boat owners can pursue. For the labourers, the land prices are way above what they can hope to gather through the wages they currently earn. Furthermore, many of the labourers themselves are in a debt relation, not to 'the lady', but to the boat owners that employ them. As one worker exclaimed, "[e]veryone in Daminseik has debt!" (Interview 18, 04.11.2017)

Marine Spatial Planning and Liquified Natural Gas

> [Myanmar] is rapidly opening up to increased coastal and marine investments […] Marine spatial planning assists with the identification and analysis of current and future conflicts through multi-sectoral stakeholder dialogue. (Pei Ya, 2016: 17)

The intricate struggles and sociospatial relations within Daminseik and surrounding villages notwithstanding, the NLD-led government has other plans for Yephyu's and Tanintharyi's ocean space. On 30th January 2018, the government announced that part of its solution to the endemic shortage of electricity throughout the country was a massive bet on imported Liquified Natural Gas and the building of four gas fired plants along the country's coastline. The largest is to be located in Yephyu, which will tap into the "brownfield" site and take advantage of existing fixed capital around the Yadana pipeline – not least in light of an expected plateauing of the Yadana gas field around 2021. Very little information has so far been shared, but it is rumoured that it will involve the building of some kind of infrastructure on one of the islands off the coast of Daminseik potentially meaning a further reduction in the physical space available for villagers' fishing practices. This is just one of a series of large-scale investment projects in coastal and marine space particularly in Tanintharyi, including a sprawling Special Economic Zone, burgeoning aquaculture and tourism as well as expansion of marine conservation areas as part of Myanmar's fulfilment of different climate change conventions (Borras et al. 2018).

With reference to potentially unfolding conflicts as a result of this "opening up", the Department of Fisheries (DoF) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) launched a report on mobilizing Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in the pursuit of what they call a Sustainable Ocean Economy (Pei Ya, 2016). As the opening quote suggests, through Marine Spatial planning (MSP), the idea is to identify, analyse and solve conflicts arising over and in marine and coastal space. This follows a recent global trend involving the spread of MSP as a tool that aims to balance extraction of marine resources with their conservation in the pursuit of win-win-win outcomes on the economic, ecological and social fronts (Silver & Campbell 2018). The report identifies a range of "primary threats" to the coastal and marine environment to be addressed through MSP: overfishing and destructive fishing; coastal development; watershed degradation; marine pollution from extractive industries and, finally, climate change. All of these are symptoms of a broader problem, namely that "Myanmar's marine space is currently still very much an interconnected 'commons' with few incentives for users to tackle shared environmental problems" (Pei Ya, 2016: 31). The way forward, it is explained, is by attaining consensus around sea uses through a "brokerage process" by bringing together a range of "stakeholders", "government, businesses, fishermen, nonprofit organizations, and coastal communities" in order to reach what are deemed "workable solutions" (Pei Ya, 2016: 21, 35). This idea of MSP as providing a silver-bullet towards workable solutions that mitigate or even avoid conflicts and achieve a balance between economic, social and ecological aims is certainly appealing.

The experience in Yephyu with the LNG-project so far, suggests a quite different process. While Ko Aung Lwin and I were traveling around in Kanbauk between October-December 2017, we heard rumours from different village administrators that new plans were on the way. There was talk of another gas pipeline and something about "LNG" – many asked us, if we knew what it meant. By the end of December, it became clearer what the rumous were about. Total's CSR folks gathered villagers from Daminseik and surrounding villagers for what they called a consultation. According to one of the activists participating in the meeting, however, it was more like a "one-way talk show" (personal communication, January 2018). Indeed, the plans for a new Liquified Natural Gas power plant and associated infrastructure were subsequently announced in Yangon in January 2018 – suggesting the meetings had very little to do with consultation. Since then, several other meetings with villagers have been organized by Total's CSR-people, flanked with a Yangon-based company specialized in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA).

Armed with powerpoint presentations in Myanmar language that suggest hasty translation from English, they explain who Total and Siemens are and that the building of the required infrastructure for LNG-loaded ships to offload the gas into a new pipeline and route it to a new powerplant in nearby Ohn Pin Kwin (see next chapter), will not have any negative environmental or social impacts for the village.[29]

Despite such promises, already by October 2018, disruptions very similar to those historically experienced by villagers in Daminseik were in the making. The Department of Fishery had announced that fishing would be prohibited from mid-October to mid-December, to allow for a survey ship to study the coastal waters where the Floating Storage Regasification Unit is to be located. This was communicated through the government-owned New Light of Myanmar newspaper, but the villagers only learned about it, when the manager of Total's CSR-program showed the announcement to Daminseik's village leader. Eventually, as a result of push-back from the villagers, it was agreed that Total would hire two fishing boats from the village to ensure that the survey ship would not cross fishing areas currently in use by the villagers, which would destroy their fishing gear. Although paramount in the here and now, this may prove to be a Pyrrhic victory as the plans for building the biggest of the four Liquified Natural Gas power plants move ahead.

Conclusion

Belying the envisioned conflict-free process of facilitating new investments into coastal and ocean space through Marine Spatial Planning, this chapter has shown how control of and access to marine and coastal resources are enmeshed in multiscalar political economic struggles. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the broader shifts in the region from battlefields to marketplaces, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) fought bitterly to gain control of land and ocean space in Northern Tanintharyi. This was to reconfigure rent relations away from the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) in order for the regime to benefit from the penetration of Thai capital into Myanmar's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In light of the pressing political and economic crises that SLORC faced, the immediate influx of foreign exchange gained from providing fishing concessions to the Thai fleet was

[29] Powerpoint presentation from one of these meetings in May 2018 on file with author

paramount for the regime's survival. For the Thai industry, this secured new grounds for its fleet that following the creation of Southeast Asian coastal state's EEZs was being excluded from fishing grounds across the region. From the late 1990s, SLORC supported the rise of parts of Myanmar's crony class by ensuring their access to fisheries resources and formerly state-owned means of production. Today, they hold a firm grip on the industry, but fish stocks across Myanmar's EEZ are plummeting (Tezzo et al. 2018). Meanwhile, policies like Marine Spatial Planning are meant to facilitate new investment in ocean space, ushering in new types of economic activities that will potentially exacerbate the physical squeeze, as experienced in Daminseik: herein aquaculture, marine conservation, sand mining, coastal infrastructure and related industrial projects and tourism.

These struggles over and in ocean space have had ramifications across temporal and spatial scales down to small-scale fishing villages like Daminseik across the country. Indeed, coastal villages are homes to some of the poorest people in the country (Schmidt & Soe 2015). Yet, as the chapter has shown, within such coastal villages important processes of differentiation are unfolding, leading to vastly different opportunities for people to react to such ramifications. While a select few in Daminseik have the means to potentially opt out of fisheries altogether through the pursuit of land-based commodity production, the majority of working people in such villages have little else to turn to. If the boat owners manage to transition into land-based production, the question then is what will happen with the labourers?

Few of the new sectors that are being welcomed in to ocean space have need for the type of labour that coastal villagers can provide. An exchange at a conference on the expansion of marine and territorial conservation across Myanmar provides a tragic example of this mismatch. After a presentation by an international NGO discussing the benefits of marine conservation and the need to further expand such Marine Protected Areas, a local NGO working in fishing villages asked what the speaker had imagined the coastal villagers were to do for a living, if they could no longer fish. The speaker with tragi-comic misconceptions of the reality in most coastal villages replied: "Well, they can rent out canoes or become guides for the tourists!" (26.01.2016)

Even if not further marginalized by new sectors, the status quo is, as noted, pushing those who can further inland. Yet in the Northern Tanintharyi landscape, as we will see next, such a strategy intersects and interacts with historical contestations around access to and control of land there.

6. Turning land into capital and people into labour in Ohn Pin Kwin

> [T]he earlier English officials were as impatient of alleged hereditary possession of the fisheries as they were zealous in promoting the idea of ownership in land. For, apart from the presumption arising from the area of waste, we have definite evidence that land was not yet 'personal wealth'. (Furnivall 1909, 554)

Although no longer at the hands of British officials, the zealous promotion of ownership – and preferably private ownership – of land continues in Myanmar today. Under their occupation, despite their best efforts, the British did not manage to eradicate the land tenure system under which land "was not yet 'personal wealth'". This was prevalent across the gradually colonized territory now known as Myanmar. In three Anglo-Burmese wars, Britain led a gradual takeover of these vast lands. Arakan and Tenasserim were annexed in 1824-26, Lower Burma was added in the second campaign in 1852 and finally by 1886 through forcible annexation of Upper Burma, the entire territory was brought into the British Empire as a province of India. Burma was never a priority in British imperial policy and instead remained an appendage to the main regional concern: India. As a result, the British only ever built up what Callahan calls a "skinny state" (2003, 21), where, "the priorities were simple: a minimum of inconvenience and a basic requirement that annexed territories raise sufficient revenue to pay for themselves" (Smith 1991, 41). After an initial focus on the teak extraction in the Southern Tanintharyi division (see Chapter 7), British priorities after 1886 increasingly turned toward rice production in the Lower Delta area in Ministerial Burma (see Figure 8). The idea for the British was to use "locally cultivated rice to feed its own industrial workers as well as plantation workers across its empire" (Mark 2016, 447). And for this purpose, Burma proved a great success. By clearing areas in the

Lower Delta, rice production and exports boomed from 162,000 tons in 1855 to two million tons in 1905/6 and by the 1920s, the annual exports of more than three million tons made Burma the world's largest rice exporter (Smith 1991). As with Burma's teak, most of this was destined to India – earning Burma the role of the breadbasket of India. This was particularly paramount for the British in India following massive famines in the late 19th Century. In this manner, Burma became integrated into regional flows of food commodities in the British empire: "Famine in the original sense of the word, that is to say as a result of a lack of food, has become impossible. In case of shortfalls, Burma feeds the Punjab and the North Western Provinces or vice versa; Madras comes to the aid of Bombay or the other way around." (Filon 1899, quoted in Davis 2017, 152)

These significant expansions in the production of rice, of course required equally significant expansion in the area producing rice in the territory. Between 1852 and 1906, the rice growing area in the lower delta expanded from 7-800,000 acres to nearly 6,000,000 acres – with a concomitant boost in the population in the same period from around one million to over four million (Bryant 1997). This expansion however, required an entire reworking of the relationship to land. At the time – and it remains so in places today – the dominant tenure system entailed not the individual private property rights that were recognizable (and taxable) to the British officials, but rather a system of rotational use of lands – not permanently owned by any single individual. As an aghast Colonel Ardagh, who was in charge of Rangoon District in 1862, described it: "the villagers regard land, especially paddy land, to be common land, which, if unoccupied, any villagers have a right to take up, and which when they have done with it they have an equal right to throw aside. […] Accordingly, where land deteriorates and requires a rest, it is thrown into the common fallow ground of the village, and may be taken up by anyone without being liable to objection by the previous cultivator" (quoted in Furnivall 1909, 555).

First attempts at instituting a different and alienable relation to land and boost productivity in rice production happened in 1876 with the Lower Burma Land and Revenue Act. This sought to establish the right to inherit and trade land after continuous use for twelve years. More significant though, as part of the pacification campaign in 1886-1890, where unrest in Upper Burma was quelled by imported Indian soldiers, the chief commissioner of Burma, Sir Charles Crosthwaite, introduced the Village Act. This broke down existing administrative organisations and replaced them with the Indian administrative and territorial grid of the village (Callahan 2003). This colonial mapping

applied to both Upper and Lower Burma, but at the same time divided the territory administratively into direct and indirect rule, whereby some 40 per cent of the total land mass was not under direct rule of the British and hence not administered according to the territorial grid (See Figure 3, above).

In order to counter the existing illegible land tenure system, landownership was assigned through the Village Act and became the basis for taxation. Colonial surveyors producing the cadastral maps declared the man and wife cultivating a plot at the time of survey as land holders. Furthermore, in order to coerce productivity, land that was left fallow by 'land holders' was taxed all the same and any currently unoccupied land was attempted thrown into production through granting of these areas to individuals for free for a set period (Ferguson 2014). The colonial taxation system was eventually institutionalized through the Settlement and Land Records Department (SLRD) set up in 1906, which henceforth issued receipts for taxes collected on the plots included in the cadastral maps (Mark 2016). A few years after the Village Act, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 mandated the colonial state to take over any lands considered waste or arable after which this land could be granted to other uses, "for any public purpose, or for a Company" (Governor General of India in Council 1895, 21). As noted by Ferguson the classification of waste "was not related to the land's biological productivity or utility, but rather its capacity for profit and taxation" (2014, 298). In this manner, the vast territories of Ministerial Burma sought to be turned into productive and revenue generating land. As the above numbers suggest, this certainly boosted rice productivity. In practice though, the colonial government's territorial control even within Ministerial Burma was limited and as a result, the reach of the Village Act was confined to the central Lower Delta area. Not so incidentally, these were also the areas where the lands were best suited for rice production and therefore "increasingly became the main focus of British interest" (Smith 1991, 42). Thus, by 1941 just before the Japanese invasion, rice exports remained at the high level achieved in the 1920s at more than three million tons (Alamgir 2008).

Independence and the spatiality of the Four Cuts

Burma's 1947 constitution established the state as the ultimate owner of all natural resources and land. A few years down the line in 1953, the Parliament adopts the Land Nationalization Act that "nationalized all land, made

landlordism illegal, and leased land to cultivators under a land to the tiller policy" (Mark 2016, 448). As noted in Chapter 4, this was a belated reaction to the dominance of chettiar capital in the colonial rice economy. Following a brief spite of democratic rule from 1947-1958 and then again from 1960-1962, land politics in the coming years were, however, marked much more by war than by formal state policies.

From the mid-1960s onwards, the central government – now run by the military – was at more or less constant war with ethnic insurgency groups particularly across the peripheral zones of Burma that were in opposition to Ne Win's Burmanization project. After the failure of a peace parley in 1963, a new territorial strategy for defeating these insurgent groups was drawn up, known as the Four Cuts. It sought to eliminate the ties between insurgent groups, their families and local villagers through food, funds, intelligence and recruits (Smith 1991). The strategy was aimed at the population generally not just active insurgents, especially to starve the insurgent groups of new recruits – as well as literally trying to starve them. As Smith explains, the reasoning of the ruling Revolutionary Council for targeting the population as such was that "[n]ow that the army embodied the people's aspirations and the BSPP was the only vehicle for political change, all the people […] had to support it" (Smith 1991, 259). The Four Cuts was exercised through a territorial strategy that carved Burma up in three colours: white areas were under the control of government armies and hence considered free, brown areas were contested by both sides, while black areas were under the control of insurgent groups. The idea was that gradually, the black and brown areas would be converted to white, eventually covering entire Burma. Black and brown areas thus became targets of concentrated military operations and all villages were to be relocated to so-called strategic villages that were under the purview of the military. After the first visit to a village commanding that people move, the military would return repeatedly to "confiscate food, destroy crops and paddy" and "[a]ny villager who remained, they were warned, would be treated as an insurgent and ran the risk of being shot on sight" (Smith 1991, 259). In this view, no village or villager was neutral. Rather, they were given the choice of either fighting, fleeing or joining the army (Smith 1991). As a result, the Four Cuts has been described with the Burmese proverb as "drain[ing] the sea, in order to kill the fish" (South & Katsabanis, quoted in Ferguson 2014, 303).

Throughout this period, the lack of political control of the black and brown areas circumscribed the revenue generation from the land that the British had also struggled with establishing. In white areas though, particularly in the Irrawaddy Delta around Rangoon, a system of surplus extraction from

smallholder production was instituted. This was based on forced rice production – with all other crop production made illegal – and compulsory sales of rice at below market rates to the regime. These policies were enforced brutally, "[t]he punishment for violating these rules was death" (Thawnghmung 2003, 9). In order to boost production, as part of the rice procurement scheme, the regime also introduced a High Yielding Variety program in the mid-1970s. Along Green Revolution lines (Patel 2006), it entailed the intensive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, high yield variety seeds and string row planting methods (Thawnghmung 2003). The result of these initiatives boosted rice production from 9 million tons in 1976/77 to 14.3 tons in 1985/86 and through the regime's monopoly on rice exports, this became the largest source of foreign exchange earnings (Fujita & Okamoto 2009).

These foreign exchange earnings notwithstanding, the BSPP-regime was in dire straits economically. In an attempt to boost economic growth, in September 1987 – in conjuncture with the regime's demonetization scheme (see Chapter 4) – BSPP initiated partial market-oriented reforms, starting with the liberalization of the price setting of agricultural products and ending the rice procurement system (though reinstated already two years later in 1989 under SLORC). In this manner, "private internal and external exports of rice and other crops were encouraged" (Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung 2003, 16). Additionally, foreign direct investment was also permitted in the agricultural sector.

Land grabbing under SLORC

After SLORC had assumed power in September 1988, a new strategy around land was put in place. It suspended the constitution that had ceremoniously been in place since 1974 and set off a period of "rampant and unchecked land confiscation" (Mark 2016, 449). This took different forms throughout the country. In areas already under SLORC's control this was partly instituted through a land reclamation program that was initiated in 1991. The program was aimed towards taking "advantage of and to utilize cultivatable land that presently lies fallow" (Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung 2003, 16). It encouraged private commercial interests to claim land that was considered fallow in order to initiate combined paddy and fish production. For this purpose, echoing prior colonial moves around the need to integrate wastelands, a Central Committee

for the Management of Cultivable Land, Fallow Land and Wasteland was formed in 1991 to be chaired by the Minister of Agriculture. The idea was to boost the production of annual and perennial crops as well as livestock raising and aquaculture. In order to attract investments for these purposes, renewable land leases were given for a period of 30 years. In addition, a series of incentives were provided, including subsidized loans and machinery as well as tax exemptions. As it turned out, the program did not boost agricultural productivity and the profits gained by the companies involved came instead from the reselling of the machinery, fertilizers and other inputs that they were allowed to import cheaply through the program. On top of that, there were clear social ramifications with the program heavily favouring the narrow group of cronies that grew wealthy from the 1990s onwards (see Chapter 4). In this manner, the policy was considered heavily "inequitable, since it provides capitalist enterprises with incentives, thereby privileging the urban rich at the expense of poor small farmers. Some of the latter have lost land that they have worked for generations to urban commercial interests, because the land was incorrectly classified by the state as 'fallow and uncultivated' and thus earmarked for reclamation by government" (Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung 2003, 30). By 2011, right before the transition to a civilian administration, 3.5 million acres had been granted through this mechanism (Htoo & Scott 2018).

In the peripheral areas that hadn't historically been under SLORC's control and where many of the extractive projects would subsequently be placed, a different strategy was pursued. Here, in what MacLean calls an "entrepreneurial turn", SLORC enforced a "rapid conversion of previously contested spaces into commodified ones where large-scale extraction could openly take place" (MacLean 2008, 142).

Gas, money and militarization in Northern Tanintharyi

One of the most significant of such spaces for the regime's economic survival was Northern Tanintharyi. In February 1991, after having arrived in the village of Kaleiaung in Yehpyu township, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt orders a series of new army battalions to the area. Unbeknownst to the villagers at the time, his arrival to the area was the first step towards slicing the landscape up with several gas pipelines. These pipelines and the massive investments preceding them were what fortified SLORC's regime in the years to come. Between 1989 and 2010, the oil and gas sector secured most Foreign Direct Investment in Myanmar – the majority of this during the 1990s destined towards the offshore field off the coast of Tanintharyi in what would become the Yadana and Yetagun gas pipelines. Prior to any inflow of money to the

regime however, the military had some work to do. According to the regime's classification, Northern Tanintharyi at the time was a mix of white, brown and black areas. With the gas destined for Thailand, this had to change. As later noted by a Total executive, "unless the area is pacified, the pipeline won't last its thirty-year duration" (ERI 1996, 13).

The first base to be built in the area, was for the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #273 – the LIBs had gained notoriety as the enforcers of the Four Cuts campaign. Their base was positioned between Kanbauk and Ohn Pin Kwin (see Figure 13).

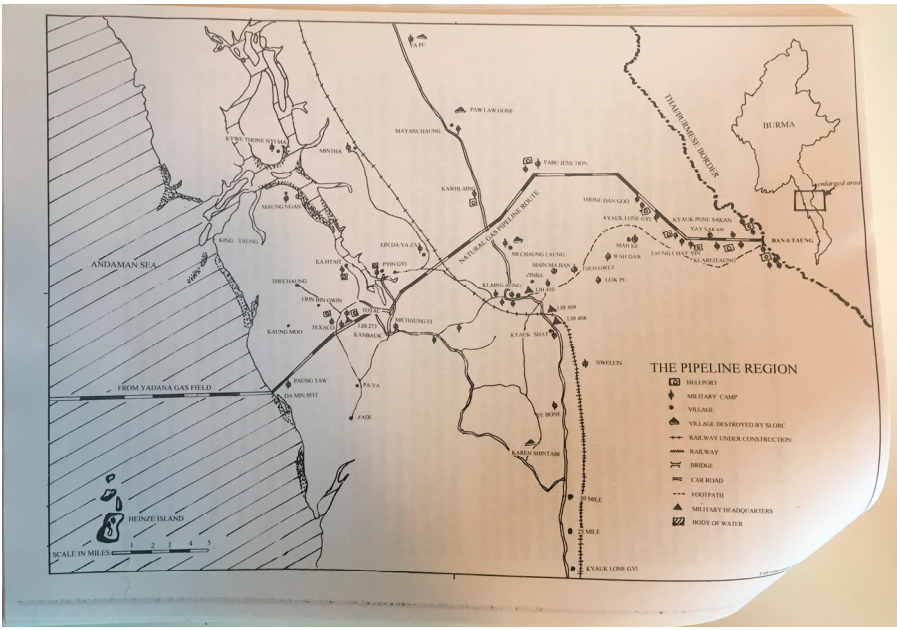


Figure 13
Map from Earth Rights International (1996) of "the pipeline region" showing military bases and impacted villages. Source: ERI (1996), reprinted with permission

Following this, three more battalions arrived in April 1991 building military camps along the designated pipeline route. From that moment, more and more troops were stationed in the area, according to human rights groups at the time, eventually up to 10,000 soldiers. As a villager living close to Ohn Pin Kwin is quoted in an ERI report, "Before 1991, we saw Burmese soldiers very seldomly, only Karen soldiers. But after 1991, LIB #408, #409 and #410 led by Major Han Htin started to base their outpost in our area … I never saw any

foreigners when I was in my village. In 1988, we seldom saw soldiers so that soldiers did not cause us problems as they did in 1992. In 1992, we saw soldiers almost everyday" (ERI 1996, 14). The 273 base by Ohn Pin Kwin eventually took up 2560 acres of villagers' land, where the villagers themselves were mobilized as slave labour to build up the base. From this point of departure, the military proceeded by relocating any and all villages that were now deemed in the way of the coming pipeline. In the following years, as documented by ERI and many others, the military unleash brutality on the local population through killings, rape and torture. The preliminary inflow of money – particularly from UNOCAL – to the regime to secure rights over exploration blocs, facilitates a massive expansion in military spending, which accounted for 40 per cent of SLORC's national budget. In 1992, the very year that Total and the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise sign a production sharing agreement, SLORC sets an all-time high in military spending, "importing USD 390 million in military hardware" (ERI 1996, 5). Additionally, the ranks of the army grew, between 1988 and 1992 the size of the army increased by over 50%. All this helps the regime in its military campaigns across the country, but particularly in and around Northern Tanintharyi, where they ramp up the fighting against the main ethnic armed organisations: the New Mon State Party and the Karen National Union. With these insurgent groups' territorial control gradually curtailed, people are left with no protection against the military and many flee to refugee camps across the Thai border. Thousands remain in these camps to this day.

In addition to the pipeline, a railroad from Yé-Tavoy (Dawei) was also to be built. By October 1993, "up to 2000 people a day were reportedly being forced to labour on the construction of this railway […] Whatever the connections may be, it is clear that the railway is part of SLORC's overall development scheme in the pipeline region" (ERI 1996, 14).

While largely left to fend for themselves, overt resistance from villagers was waged. Yet these were met with fierce and swift threats from the military at times explicitly supported by the companies involved. When villagers from Ohn Pin Kwin unsuccessfully attempted to launch a rocket into Total's base camp in December 1995, an army representative noted that the village will be turned into ash, if other attempts are made, and UNOCAL president, John Imle, dryly remarked "If you threaten the pipeline there's gonna be more military … for every threat to the pipeline there will be a reaction" (ERI 1996, 13). In addition to the land in the immediate vicinity of the pipeline, impacting on villagers' land-based livelihoods, livelihoods based on fishing in the nearby Heinze Chaung river system were also impacted negatively. Whenever

company ships were present, no local vessels were allowed in the river and the army set up checkpoints all along the river, where fishers had to register and pay a toll to access it (Interview 26, 27.11.2017).

These first interventions were the prerequisite for the joint project between Total, Unocal (now Chevron), the state-owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) and Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production (PTTEP) to start up gas extraction from the offshore Yadana field. The pipeline is currently operated by Total on a 30-year license transporting gas from the field to the Thai border. The subsequent building of two further pipelines was a less overtly violent process. A few years after Total's pipeline that is linked to the Yadana field, a pipeline connected to the Yetagun field involving Petronas, MOGE, PTTEP and JX Nippon Oil and Energy was built. This pipeline is managed by Petronas also on a 30-year license. Finally, in the early 2010s, a third pipeline reaching out to the Zawtika field operated by PTTEP and MOGE followed. The three pipelines follow slightly different routes, but are located very close to each other. Like for Total, operation centers for the companies involved in the other two pipelines were built in Ohn Pin Kwin. These later pipelines notwithstanding, the timing of the first pipeline was absolutely crucial for the regime's survival. As noted by ERI in the third of their trilogy of reports on Total: "By virtue of generating multi-billion dollar revenues for the regime, revenue which is not included in the national budget and is instead stored in two willing offshore banks in Singapore, Total and the Yadana consortium have arguably contributed to the intransigence of the military regime more than any other single, external contributing factor." (ERI 2009, 62)

Ohn Pin Kwin

Today, when heading west from Kanbauk towards Daminseik the now paved roads takes you through Ohn Pin Kwin. Along the way you see the remnants of earlier struggles around the landscape: the rundown military bases built on slave labour and roads oscillating between dirt and concrete, depending on whether or not it was possible to get Total to pay for particular stretches from their CSR-programs. With the three pipelines slicing right through the village, pipeline and particularly compensation politics loom large in Ohn Pin Kwin. The village of about 700 households greets you with a junction in the road where you can either turn down to the main road of the village or take a left

passing by the three operation centers of the gas companies. Relics of the gas companies' intervention into the landscape persist: Myint & Associates reads a weathered yellow sign as you reach the village (see Figure 14). The company was a contractor on both the Yadana and Yetagun pipelines. While the company grounds don't look like much anymore, it was through this company that one of Myanmar's now infamous cronies rose to power as a result of SLORC's entrepreneurial turn in the 1990s. By 2008 he was by then one of the ten richest people in Myanmar (Irrawaddy 2008).



Figure 14
Myint & Associates greets visitors to Ohn Pin Kwin. Source: Author

Households in the village are grouped between the company's operation centers and an army base to the South, the Heinze river to the East and a large area to the North that the navy has pronounced is under its control. Heading further West you eventually reach Daminseik and the shoreline (see Figure 15).



Figure 15
Handdrawn map of Ohn Pin Kwin with Myint & Associated marked in the top righthand corner, company operation centers to the right and some of the interview locations noted with numbers

Villagers have been differentiated according to their access to the main means of production: land. The largest landholders, only a handful, boast over 100 acres of land and play the dual roles of producers and merchants, sourcing rubber from smaller producers in the village as well as providing loans for them

in the rainy season. These large land holders were unscathed from the military's interventions into the village in the 1990s and the subsequent pipeline projects. Their accumulation of land through the period is based on processes of dispossession by differentiation, in the sense that their current landholdings consist of plots gradually bought from their neighbours, many of which sold in distress following the initial intervention by Total and the army. With considerably less land than the large landholders, but still hiring in labour, you have a group with land over ten acres. Estimated by the village administrator to be around 20 households, this group consists of people that might have lost land to the pipeline, but managed to either sustain enough land to continue accumulating or attain a level of compensation that they could either use to buy more land or make investments that allowed them to move beyond the agricultural sector. The last group of landholders are the smallest, with below ten acres relying on a mix of wage employment for larger landholders and self-exploitation in their own plots. There are around 300 of these households in the village. Finally, you have the landless people in the village. The village administrator estimated this group to be about 300 too. Many of the people in this group lost land as a result of the military and gas company's land grabbing. Those that didn't lose it all, were forced to eventually distress sell in subsequent years. This group is differentiated according to whether or not it has been possible to attain stable employment in rubber production for neighbours, or – the most precarious – left to do what is referred to as "odd-jobs", i.e. around processing of other cash crops (notably beetlenut), construction and whatever income they are still able to get through small-scale mining and other occasional wage labour. Table 2 gives an overview of these differences that are elaborated in the following sections.

Table 2
Overview of differentiation of households in village according to landholdings and subsequent role in rubber production

Landholding households (approximate number in village)	Size of landholdings	Compensation	Role in rubber production	Non-agricultural wages/profits
5	>/= 100 acres Not affected by any of the historical land grabs and they have in subsequent years managed to accumulate land buying up from their distress selling neighbours	N/A	Hiring in of labour for agricultural production Merchant role, buying up rubber from smaller-scale landholders and selling on to either Dawei or Mawlamyine	Typically only engaged in agricultural production
20	> 10 acres Impacted by the historical land grabs to some degree	Managed to receive compensation and access non-agricultural sources of profits or wages	Hiring in of labour for rubber production or other business (e.g. bus line) Selling of rubber to regional or village merchants	Using compensation money, have managed to transition out of purely agricultural production with this non-farm source accounting for significant part of overall profits/wages
300	< 10 acres Impacted by the historical land grabs to significant degree	Maybe managed to receive compensation, but did not manage to acquire new means of production (agricultural or otherwise)	Self-exploitation in their own plots and whatever work they can find in addition hereto	Whatever activities are available to boost their income from agricultural production though all unstable (small-scale mining, seasonal processing of other cash crops than rubber)

Landless households (Approx. 300 in total)	Compensation	Role in rubber production	Non-agricultural income
Either lost their land entirely or were left with too small plots to uphold their production and were hence forced to distress-sell in the subsequent years	Maybe managed to receive compensation, but did not manage to acquire new means of production (agricultural or otherwise)	Stable Fixed wage according to how many rubber trees you work on	When employed on these terms, usually only engaged in rubber production
		Unstable Maybe occasional work ("odd-jobs") helping with cutting of undergrowth or the like, but not tapping and processing.	Small-scale mining, seasonal processing of other cash crops, construction – but all occasional "odd-jobs"

This current situation differs markedly from the village prior to the arrival of the military and the gas companies. Historically, villagers were engaged in three activities to sustain themselves: fishing, small-scale mining for tin and tungsten and shifting cultivation for own consumption. This production system in the village was based on a very different relation to land than what is found today. Prior to the pipelines, land across Yephyu had not been enclosed to the extent that it is today, where as one interviewee put it, "we are like fish in a fish grill, squeezed between mining, the military and the [gas] companies grabbing our land!" (Interview 27, 27.11.2017).

With plentiful opportunities, particularly in small-scale mining, holding land was not necessary to survive or even accumulate. Rather, "you could go mining in the morning and make enough money – people did not think about tomorrow, because mining was easy" (Interview 34, 10.12.2017). As discussed above, at this point different Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) were in control of the area and, as a result, controlling the vast illegal border trade. With bad road connections to Dawei to the South and Mawlamyine to the North, let alone Yangon, which was a "once in a lifetime trip" (Interview 34, 10.12.2017), the main trade route was towards the Thai border to the East – patrolled and guarded by the KNU that would take their cut of the trade at the border. Tin and tungsten would flow from the mining site in Ohn Pin Kwin (and a larger one in Kanbauk, with production dating back at least to the British in the 1920s (Chhibber 1934; Gardiner et al. 2015)) through traders, who on the way back would bring commodities from Thailand, otherwise inaccessible on the Burma-side. This would involve a full day walk from Kaleiaung, just to the East of Kanbauk. As the current Village Administrator reminisced gleefully of his own involvement in this illegal trade: "One trip when I was 19, I carried 20 vis [about 30 kg] of tin and tungsten to the border. When I was on the other side, I spent all the money buying jeans, shoes and other clothes. I spent all the money!" (Key Informant Interview, 10.12.2017). This means of survival and accumulation, however, was closed down with the arrival of the military. A key part of the campaigns waged against the KNU was closing off their financial sources, herein the illegal border trade and as a result, the small-scale miners lost their market. In conjuncture with this, the mining spot itself – like that in Kanbauk – was privatized, relinquishing it from government control to a private company. With this privatization came a reworking of the access, so that small-scale miners simply did not have the same access they had enjoyed until then and therefore, "tin and tungsten became more rare … before you

could just get it in waterways and in rainy season you could pick it off the ground" (ibid).

The opportunities provided by small-scale mining meant that agricultural production had mainly been for subsistence consumption through shifting cultivation. At this point, forested lands in Ohn Pin Kwin and across Yephyu were therefore used for shifting cultivation, some permanent crop farming – particularly rice – and the collection of forest products, e.g. for building material (see also Lundsgaard-Hansen et al. 2018). Up until some 25 years ago then, it was still possible to demarcate an area of land (what interviewees called "virgin land") and begin to work this plot without necessarily having to ask permission or coordinate with anyone. This not to romanticize the past, or make claims of a precapitalist situation around land, but to emphasize the mix of property regimes that existed at the time – in contrast to the current situation. These regimes entailed some private property, particularly over rice plots that had been spurred on by the rice procurement policies in the 1970s, communal lands used for grazing and then basically a land frontier, where people could stake out their claims on new lands through continuous production in an area. Like the situation described by Colonel Ardagh some 100 years earlier, these frontier lands used for shifting cultivation were not considered permanent property and often shifted ownership depending on changing production patterns and priorities with no money transaction involved. With the privatization of the mining area and the concomitant processes of land enclosure at the hands of the army and Total, however, the remaining land moved to the centre as the key means of production as people attempted to shift strategies towards sedentary agriculture on individually owned plots of land that were increasingly bought and sold through market transactions. The market transactions were further fuelled through the compensation process that Total initiated, which, in turn, further eroded the mixed property regime in place: in order for people to receive compensation, prices had to be assigned to individually owned plots. As the below sections detail, these dynamics coalesced into a complete enclosure of land, an explosion in the price of land and an increasingly capitalist model of agriculture based on the production of commodities (particularly rubber) and an exploitation of now free wage-labourers – local as well as migrants from Central Myanmar.

This pattern of a slowly booming rubber production from the late 1990s and early 2000s onwards, mirrors dynamics across Myanmar (and Southeast Asia), where the steady rising price of rubber turned it into a cash crop for smallholders as well as one of the crops that the military regime would sign off large land concessions to (Kenney-Lazar et al. 2018). Table 3 gives an

overview of the ensuing structure of the national rubber sector. As this shows, Ohn Pin Kwin's handful of landholders of around 100 acres are nationally significant.

Table 3
Structure of the national rubber sector by size of landholdings (Source: Adapted from Myint 2013 & Kenney-Lazar et al. 2018)

Size of holding (acres)	No. Of Holdings	%	Planted Area	%
< 5	22,423	40.2	62,778	8.6
5 – 20	28,052	50.3	242,828	33.3
20 – 50	3,971	6.8	109,442	15.1
50 – 100	950	1.7	59,700	8.2
100 – 500	419	0.8	99,872	13.7
500 – 1000	65	0.1	52,560	7.2
> 1000	31	0.1	101,169	13.9
Total	55,731	100	728,329	100

In Ohn Pin Kwin and across Yephyu township, this incipient boom was further spurred on by Total's CSR-project that actively encouraged the planting of rubber through technical assistance around planting and harvesting (Interview with former CSR-employee, 09.02.2018).

The accumulating large landholders

The life story of one of the largest land holders in the village today captures these dynamics of gradual enclosures of the fisheries and land frontier and rubber crop boom. Kasauh, in his early 50s, is originally from Mon State. Here, he remembers, he "grew up in rubber gardens" (Interview 36, 11.12.2017), where rubber is the second most important crop after rice (Woods 2012) and has a long tradition stretching back to the colonial era (Keong 1973). As a teenager, he was involved in the illegal trading of rubber plates to Singapore and Malaysia by sea with his father. This practice was brought to an abrupt end when their boats were seized by the military. Consequently, in 1986, he and his parents moved to Daminseik. Daminseik village, they heard through their trading networks, had opportunities in the fishing business.

With money capital from the former trading business, they set up a commodity store selling nets and other basic household goods and he quickly got involved in the trading of shrimp. Gradually, through this trading relationship with boat owners, as also discussed in the previous chapter, he began issuing advance money to some 30 boats in the village. In 1991, he bought his first plot of land of 25 acres and planted rubber trees. A few years later, he bought six more acres with rubber trees ready for production. Still mainly relying on the fisheries side of his business for accumulation, in 1995/6

he began working for the Myanmar Sunrise exporting company, where he became the company representative in the region. This meant sourcing high quality fresh fish and selling it on to Dawei. He stayed with the company until 2005. Over the years, however, catches became more and more meagre. Eventually, it was no longer profitable for the company and he transitioned entirely into rubber production. One year before leaving the company he had bought another 20 acres of land – also producing rubber. In 2006, he bought an empty plot of 30 more acres, which he planted rubber on and in 2010, he bought another 15 acres of land. This last plot had cashew nut trees on it at the time, but he cut them all down and planted rubber here too. Finally, in 2016 he bought another 10 acres which had palm oil trees on it, but he cleared them and planted rubber. Today then, through these different plots, he has over 100 acres of land – all of which has gradually been converted to rubber production. In these gardens, 10 families live today – with approximately 25 workers in total. These workers receive 270 kyats pr. tree pr. month. The interview takes place on the plot of 20-acres that he bought in 2005 (see Figure 16) and on here he has a family of seven living – of which six of the family work in the garden.

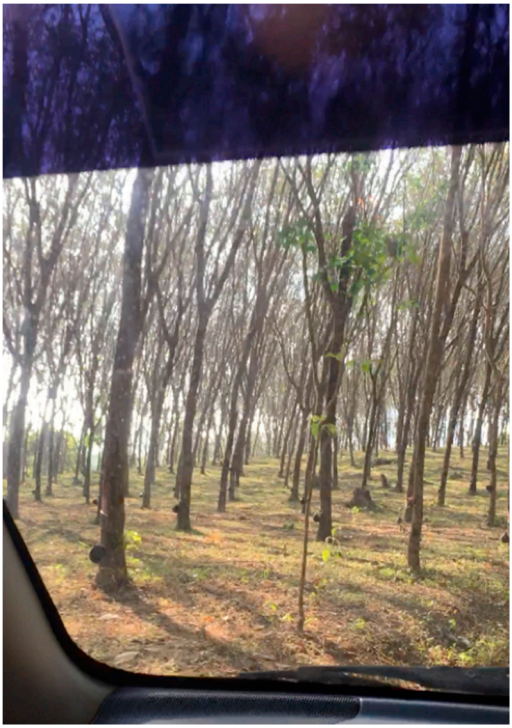


Figure 16
A snapshot from the car of the rubber trees in part of Kasauh's 100 acres

In addition to his own rubber production, he has continued in the role as a merchant capitalist by buying up rubber from small holders not just in Ohn Pin Kwin but also surrounding villages. This partly happens through debt relations to small land owners (under 10 acres) that he loans money to. He estimated that he was in this relation with over 200 households, but emphasized that these were just small amounts – 300 lakhs in total. In terms of acreage, this ensured him rubber from 500 acres. Additionally, through regular trading relationships, meaning not a debt-relation, he buys up from an additional 500 acres. He was not sure how many this was exactly, but explained that their holdings varied from 50 down to 2 acres. He gathers all these rubber plates together and sells them to Dawei (see Figure 14). Here it goes through an upgrading process (cleaning), before it is sold to another trader in Shan State and eventually to China, where the majority of Myanmar's smallholder production is exported to (Kenney-Lazar et al. 2018). His own production, which he emphasized was of higher quality than everyone else's, he sells to Mawlamyine at a higher price

than what he can get for the sourced rubber in Dawei. He receives a commission from the company in Dawei at 5-10 kyats pr. pound of rubber, which with the 100,000 pounds pr. month that he sells nets him 5-10 lakhs. In typical merchant fashion, characterized by extraction through terms of trade, his actual profit rate, he explains, lies in a slight difference in prices from Dawei to the village. Asked about this, he smiles as he exhales smoke from his cheerot, but declines to answer. In comparison to other people in the village, however, Kasauh is doing well.



Figure 17
Kasauh's storage of rubber plates of varying quality bought up from smallholders

Compensated and accumulating through non-farm income

U Myint Thai's story is a testament to how some have benefitted from the opening up of Ohn Pin Kwin and the surrounding area. Today he lives on the main street in the village in a two-storey house with a commodities shop in the bottom floor. He takes us upstairs for the interview, where we sit in his sofa arrangement consisting of former seats from his minibus organized around a

TV. He's talkative and as a former Village Administrator (2012-2015) has clearly formulated opinions about the state of the region and the country more broadly that he is eager to share with Ko Aung Lwin and I.

In his late 40s, he is born and raised in the village and back in 1987, he managed to take eight acres of land at what he notes as the entrance to the village (when approaching from Kanbauk to the East), which was "virgin land" at the time (Interview 33, 10.12.2017). After what he describes as "tending the garden", meaning clearing the land and planting cash crops, ten years later in 1997/1998 he is able to sell the land for 40 lakhs on the land market that had developed in the same period (ibid). Also in 1997, he got married and in wedding gift he and his wife received seven acres of cashew nut garden from the wife's side (as is typical to give as part of wedding presents) and on top of that, his parents in law received 13 lakhs in compensation from Total, which they also received a part of.

With this money from selling his land and the money they received from his parents-in-law, he and his wife start up a bus business in late 1997. They set this up together with a partner, splitting the 80 lakhs that it costs to buy a van. The partner withdraws their share already two years later though and since then it has been him and his wife running things. In 2003, using this "bus money", they buy the land and house that our interview takes place in and in 2006 they buy 15 acres of land – 10 acres with rubber trees for 12 lakhs and five acres of land with mixed coconut and durian. He sells all the rubber to Kasauh, the large landholder mentioned above, but when the price is higher in Mawlamyine, he tries to sell it here directly, avoiding any middle-men by transporting it in his van. He stresses that its hard today for rubber garden owners because of the low rubber price at merely 780 kyats pr. pound. He sells 70-100 pounds pr. day to Kasauh earning him about 24 lakhs pr. month. His workers, as he calls them, is a family of four that lives in the rubber garden that came down from Irrawaddy delta after Cyclone Nargis in 2008. The lion's share of his income today then remains from the non-farm side of things: the commodity shop and the bus business.

Reflecting on the impact of the pipelines in Ohn Pin Kwin, he sees both positive and negative things. For him, as he points out, the compensation process was good, because the money that his parents-in-law received helped him setup the bus business and with the roads that Total built the area became more "open". This opened up "communication" as he says and brought in new money to the area, which in turn gave business opportunities (ibid). On the negative side, he points to the navy. "They grabbed a lot of our land", he notes, and with reference to the plans of enclosing some 80,000 acres in the

Northwestern direction from the village, he exclaims "they want even more!" (ibid) This fundamentally changed the role of land in the village. Before the military and the gas companies came, he explains, "we never saw land as a business" (ibid). There was buying and selling of land, but this was always for the sake of setting up a garden, now "buying and selling is a business" (ibid). This didn't only concern land as such, but also the forest that they used to have access to. Attesting to the increasing penetration of commodity-relations, "if you wanted to build a small house, you could just collect, but nowadays everything is money." Based on these developments and referencing the already unjust distribution in land – both within the village, but most notably between the military and gas companies vis-à-vis the village – he expresses concern over the plans for the new Liquified Natural Gas power plant that he, as one of the few in the village, has heard about, "and now they will extend their business. Of course, we need electricity, but how will you solve existing and coming problems around land!?" (ibid)

The squeezed small landholders

The two above groups are a small minority in the village. The vast majority face a much more precarious situation – this includes the 300 households or so that are small landholders. Daw Shwe Win and her husband U Naing Oo in their late 40s and early 50s represent some of those that are struggling to make ends meet. She grew up in Ohn Pin Kwin and today they live on land that they inherited from her parents together with their six children from the age six to 20. It is a narrow stretch of land with rubber and some coconut trees, squeezed in between the Total operation centre and the Yetagun pipeline. When she took it over from her parents, it was about eight acres of land, initially based on a paddy field downhill, where they had started up rice production and then a slope (see Figure 13), where they had practiced shifting cultivation. Four of these acres were taken over by Total for which her parents received 24 lakhs of compensation. The subsequent stretch taken over by Yetagun, they received eight lakhs for. In addition to this plot, they have five acres of land nearby where they used to grow rubber trees. However, four of these acres were destroyed by the mining company in 2009, for which they finally received compensation of 70 lakhs in 2012. On the remaining acre, they have 100 rubber trees as well as some coconut and beetlenut trees. They are ten lakhs in debt to one of the handful large landholders in the village and therefore sell their rubber to him. With this small amount of land and the costs involved of living and notably having their kids in school, life is difficult. When she can find the time, she also engages in small-scale mining to make some extra income, but

this has gotten difficult as she explains, “before there was no private company and we could do as much mining as we wanted to” (Interview 25, 27.11.207). On a given day she’ll make between 3-20,000 kyats from this, but it is unstable, she notes.

Despite the several rounds of compensation that they’ve received then, the shortage of income opportunities in today’s Ohn Pin Kwin means that things are much worse than they were before. Looking over in Total’s operation centre, a patroller walks by the barbed wire fence in an orange jumpsuit and she says with reference to the companies: “For them, it’s just another story – for us, it’s our lives!” (Interview 25, 27.11.2017)



Figure 18
Under the cleared area in the foreground the Yetagun pipeline flows and in the background, where the rubber tree lines stop to the left, Total’s operation center lies. Squeezed in between and mongst their rubbers trees in the centre lies the house of Daw Shwe Win. Source: Author

A similar sentiment is expressed by Daw Mya Wia. In her late 60s, she is born and raised in the village. Her six children are all married today. Two of her grandchildren still live with her though – one set of parents are in Thailand

for work, while the other set passed away. On paper, she is one of the beneficiaries of the compensation process. In 1967, when she was 18, she inherited three acres with cashew trees planted from her parents. In 1983, she bought five acres of paddy fields for 250 kyats. By the time the military and gas companies arrive, she had gotten two further plots of ten acres each attained through shifting cultivation. On these two plots she had planted cashew nuts as well. In the subsequent years, she loses one of the 10-acre plots to Total's Yadana pipeline and then the other ten-acre and five-acre plots to the Yetagun pipeline. She first receives 11 lakhs from Yadana and then later 27 lakhs from Yetagun.

When her land was grabbed, she didn't receive any warning from anyone. One day, a bulldozer simply arrived and destroyed her garden. Shaking her head, she recounts how when she had protested, the soldier who accompanied the bulldozer had called out, "don't worry, you will be compensated!" (Interview 27, 27.11.2017). Upon payment of the compensation, Total had said that the compensation would last for 30 years, but in reality, she explained, the amount they received lasted 5 years at the most. As she puts it, "it is good having big money, but it is also gone quickly – it is not like having land. Some people lost all their land and they are now in a very difficult situation" (ibid).

She and many others in the village were terrified when the grabbing began and they had no choice but to give up their land, "We had to give, if they wanted the land … We were very afraid in those days" (ibid). This also went for the people that didn't receive any compensation at all and this, she emphasizes was the situation for a lot of people. Still to this day, a lot of land from subsequent pipelines has not been compensated. Similar to Daw Shwe Win and her husband above, one of her daughters lives on land between the pipelines and she and her family "is in a very dangerous situation" (ibid).

Despite these difficulties, she emphasizes her situation is better than for the most part of the village. With the money she got from the second round of enclosure by the Yetagun pipeline, she bought 14 acres of land, where she – spurred on by the regional boom in prices – planted rubber. She passed this land on to her children, who split the produce among the six of them. To work the land, they have hired the labour-power of a migrant family that came down after Cyclone Nargis that simultaneously lives in the rubber garden. Today she lives off the three acres that she inherited from her parents. As she notes when thinking about the past 30 years of transformation in the village, "Thank you for leaving my three acres, if not for these, I would be a beggar!" (ibid).

Differentiated labourers

The direst situation is for the completely landless in the village – differentiated into two groups: a very precarious life doing odd jobs and more stable work in rubber production. Where villagers managed to receive some form of compensation from the companies, the money was often spent within a few years and itself fueled further strife within the village and individual families. It is in this sense that Daw Mya Wia notes above that she is better off than most.

By contrast, U Myint Sein and his wife, Daw Than Htay, are in a tough situation. They are both born and raised in the village and today have six children aged between 7 and 28 years old. Before Total came to the village they had seven acres of land that they had inherited from his parents. Three of these seven acres were enclosed for Total's operation center and they receive three and a half lakhs for this land. Yet, they receive the money "piece by piece", which makes it difficult for the family to manage it (Interview 8, 27.11.2018). Had they received it all at once, he reflects, they might have been able to buy some land. They eventually distress sell their remaining three and half acres for "quick money" to survive (ibid). What ends up impacting the family's trajectory more though happens on the wife's side. She joins in the interview some 10 minutes into it, just finished with the day's small-scale mining. Through her parents, she and her 8 siblings stood to inherit a large area of land. The most of this plot was taken over by Total for the operation center. In compensation, the nine siblings receive 100 lakhs in total. Once the money was paid out though, a bitter struggle ensued over how to divide the compensation money between them. Two of the siblings forgave the money and instead divided the remaining land that Total had not taken between them. In the end, the seven remaining siblings settled in court, but the amount of money divided between them only just covered their court costs. Consequently, today, the family lives in a shack on her younger sister's plot of land – one of the two that forgave their part of the compensation, choosing the remaining land instead – next to the sister's brick and concrete house.

As a result, with no land, the only source of income for the family today are the meager opportunities through small-scale mining in areas that are still occasionally accessible to villagers. The 'catch' of the day that Daw Than Htay brings home during the interview, she says, amounts to about 14,000 kyats, which is a high amount. "Sometimes we get 8000, sometimes we get nothing", she explains. Aside from this, the only opportunities for wage-labour is in the processing of beetlenuts or odd jobs they can get in rubber gardens. During the interview, the wife and husband get visibly emotional and emphasize how the

pipeline and compensation process has "split the family! If the pipeline had not been here, the land could've been divided more fairly. Before there were few conflicts over land, the price was low and there were mining opportunities" (ibid). As our interview is about to round up, Total's private jet flies by overhead and lands on the runway that has been built inside the operation centre (see Figure 19). The jet flies back and forth between Yangon twice a day they explain.



Figure 19
The runway from Total's private jet within their Operation Centre as seen from outsice the fence that has been erected around the centre. Source: Aung Lwin

Daw Khin Nye and her husband, both in their mid-40s, have managed to gain stable employment, working in a rubber garden. She is from a neighbouring village, but her husband is from Ohn Pin Kwin – born and raised. She was 20 when they got married. With no land and all the disruptions happening in the following years, they just went for whatever odd jobs they could – especially working on seasonal cash crops, like beetle nut and cashew nuts as well as in vegetable gardens. In 2006, however they managed to gain stable employment in one of the rubber gardens that by then was ready to produce. The rubber trees take eight to ten years to mature, before harvesting can begin and since most in the area only started planting in the late 1990s, these years were when new labour opportunities began to arise. From 2006-2011 their whole family – herein their at the time 16 year old son – was

engaged in this production, working on 1500 rubber trees. By 2011, however, her husband got pain in his legs and they had to stop. In the subsequent years, from 2011-2015 their main source of income was what the husband could get as a motorcycle taxi driver. Since 2015, they have begun working in a rubber garden again. This covers 2200 trees and in contrast to the otherwise typical remuneration according to how many trees worked, they have setup a share-cropping model with the owners, where they receive half of the produce. The harvesting season starts in the dry season (around late-October) and continues until the rain starts again around May. With the warm day temperatures, they work during the night, starting at 23 and working until 4, tending the garden and carving circular rings up the trunk of the trees. The trees then exude the white latex, which is collected in small buckets that are placed around all the trees. At seven in the morning, they return once the rubber has been collected. They pay two people to do this collection. All the latex is then gathered and pressed together into rubber plates that are then hung up to dry. In front of their house, where we sit for the interview, the rubber plates from their morning work criss-crosses on poles hanging above our heads, leaving a dense rubber smell in the air.

In this year's production, they have managed to sell two batches of plates, earning 11 lakhs in the past month and half. This they sell to one of the other large landholders combined merchant's, through a relationship they describe as "fair" – that is, they do not have any debt-relation to him. Despite this relatively good labour situation, they explain, "to have a sustainable life, you have to have a garden" (Interview 40, 11.12.2017). Their share-cropping agreement with the owners is a rarity. For the most part, the labour arrangement in rubber is a certain amount of kyats pr. tree – as with Kasauh's arrangement with his labourers – where labourers are paid a fixed wage according to how many trees they tend to, irrespective of the production rates.

Legalising the squeeze

A year after Thein Sein had assumed power in the transition to a civilian administration (see Chapter 4) two seminal land laws were passed. The Farmland Law and the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land (VFV) Law. The Farmland Law opened up for a system of granting Land Use Certificates (LUC), known colloquially as Form 7, to people recognized as farmers by the government. In contrast to the former situation under the Land Nationalization

Act under which exchange of land was formally not allowed, the Farmland Law allows LUC-holders to sell, exchange, inherit, mortgage and lease land. In this manner, the law seeks to formalize and institutionalize a land market. In conjuncture, the VFV law follows up on the long legacy of laws dating back to the British colonial period that seeks to put wasteland into productive use. Through this law the government can identify and categorize land that has not been registered and certified under the farmland law as vacant, fallow and virgin and consequently (re)distribute it to other users. Where this clearly echoes SLORC's land reclamation program from 1991, the scale was significantly increased through the VFV law allowing for up to 50,000 acres being deemed vacant and subsequently leased for up to 30 years (TNI 2013).

Both laws have been met with fierce resistance from civil society groups across the country, particularly for undermining the parallel peace negotiations between the government and signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, where the question of land remains key. The fear is that the law aims to centralize power over land by coercing smallholders to register their land with the government – or face dispossession. This is especially a concern in the minority-ethnic states, where government statistics locate 75 per cent, or 35 million acres, of the country's VFV land (Htoo & Scott 2018).

This is most certainly a cause for concern, yet dynamics in Ohn Pin Kwin, underline the dilemmas of the dual laws even in an area where the government is in full control. With the pipeline-legacy in mind, current landholders are of course eager to register their land. This has been further exacerbated by subsequent vast concessions, e.g. an oil palm concession for the military-linked company Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL, see Chapter 4) to the East of Ohn Pin Kwin and an announced 80,000-acre grab by the Navy to the Northwest of Ohn Pin Kwin (see Figure 1 above for overview). Production has already begun on the several thousand-acre oil palm-concession granted to MEHL by the Forest Department (as it was located within a Forest Reserve). The 80,000 acres announced by the navy has still not been fully enclosed. Part of it has however, in order to expand the historic naval base that has been in place since the early 1990s in the Heinze river system. Today the area, which used to be villagers' lands, includes a golf course for the navy employees, barracks and a school (see Figure 20).



Figure 20
Picture from moving car looking into the Navy's golf course. Soutce: Author

Particularly in response to the announced navy grab, local CSOs have been giving support for landholders in and around the area to pre-emptively apply for Form 7 – if nothing else as a defensive strategy to secure grounds for future compensations, in case villagers are thrown away from their lands (Interview with CSO, 09.02.2018). Yet, in Ohn Pin Kwin, the only landholders that are in the process of applying for land use certificates are the large landholders that have managed to accumulate and consolidate over the years. This also reflects the difficulties and hassle of going through the process of application effectively prohibiting smaller landholders from applying. Applications are sent to the township-level Farmland Administrative Body (FAB), which subsequently weighs the application according to the conditions under which people are categorized as farmers. This whole process is shrouded in lack of transparency and FABs have been described as lacking independence (Scurrah et al. 2015). Both Kasauh and the second largest landholder interviewed (Interview 1, 26.11.2017) were in the process, with the second largest

landholder having received direct support from one of the local CSOs to pursue his land registration.

Like under Total's compensation process where particular people in a particular moment could claim ownership over land, initiating a first round of inequalities concerning land use and control, the process set off by the dual land laws are formalizing the current inequalities of land distribution within Ohn Pin Kwin and many other villages. While much of the advocacy by local and international CSOs is understandably oriented towards protecting current landholders against the pressing and immediate more large-scale land grabs that the dual laws have also set off,[30] the danger is that the majority of people that have already been dispossessed through earlier rounds of enclosures are not considered. Simultaneously, government policies for the agricultural sector also do not consider the plight of the rural landless, but instead assume an undifferentiated rural populace of smallholders, ready to be integrated into global value chains (Bello 2018; Belton & Filipski 2019).

Yet, in Ohn Pin Kwin and Yephyu township as such as a former warzone, the perils of the landless is becoming increasingly acute. Since the KNU's ceasefire with the government in 2012, increasing numbers of internally displaced peoples as well as people from the Thai refugee camps are returning to what they consider their land. What are these people to do when, they upon return find out that their land has either been doled out to cronies, like the MEHL-concession, turned into a protected area (see next chapter) or taken over by relative smallholders? With the assumed transition in Myanmar "from the farm to factory" (Li 2011, 281) still wanting, the current situation in Ohn Pin Kwin lends credence to Joan Robinson's provocative statement that the "misery of being exploited by capitalists is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited at all" (quoted in Vorburgg 2019, 14).

Conclusion

> [A]s the economy develops, enclosure can never really be isolated from the mainstream of land improvements, of changes in methods of production, of price-movements, and of those more general changes in property relationships which were all flowing in the same direction: an extension of cultivated land

[30] A Forest Trends report (2015) estimates that land allocated to largescale agricultural concessions in the period from 2010-2013 increased by 170 per cent.

> but also a concentration of ownership into the hands of a minority (Williams 1975, 97)

Current discussions around land and the agricultural sector in Myanmar centre around a "giant land grab", particularly with the National League of Democracy government's amendment of the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VFV) law in October 2018 that set a deadline for the registration of land in March 2019. As this chapter has shown, however, these eventful processes of (formal) enclosure that such legislative changes attempt to institute need to be seen in the long run struggles over the production of space, whereby many have in fact already been dispossessed. Despite the attempts already by the British during their rule, to institute market dependent social relations to land, this only really began happening in Northern Tanintharyi from the early 1990s onwards, when the landscape was violently transformed through dispossession by enclosure to accommodate the gas pipelines. The transformation of the landscape through enclosure was constituted by and constitutive of the confluence of interests between SLORC, the Thai state and the transnational gas corporations involved – with benefits accruing to some of what would become Myanmar's crony class.

The integration of Ohn Pin Kwin into Myanmar's rubber boom, on the other hand, was driven through a process of dispossession by differentiation, as remaining landholders after the round of enclosure converted existing plots into rubber production, some of which were aided by Total's CSR-program. A select few that managed to either accumulate lands and furthermore assume a merchant role or transition out of agriculture altogether have benefitted from this transformation of the landscape. For the vast majority in Ohn Pin Kwin, however, things are difficult. Struggling merely to get by already, for them the current giant land grab through the amendment of the VFV law is merely a "formalization fix" (Dwyer 2015) for already very real social relations: namely the formalization of the already existing unequal distribution of land and the "vernacular market" (Bernstein 2010) that emerged following the pipeline. Moreover, for those that have already lost their land, potential new grabs such as that for the building of the LNG powerplant in Ohn Pin Kwin, rather than presenting a threat, provide at least in theory an opportunity for some kind of wage employment that is currently hard to come by for many in the village. Importantly, this reveals the limitations of the current CSO's strategies that narrowly focus on protecting current landholders, while overlooking historical injustices and on the ground realities of landlessness. Moreover, it speaks to the limitations and implications of the current development model pursued by the NLD-government.

7. Enclosing the forests: from extraction to conservation in Mi Chaung Laung

> We have been taking care of forests for thousands of years. Then development comes and all of a sudden everything is destroyed. And they blame our shifting cultivation! (Naga People's representative, conference on green grabbing and conservation, Yangon, 26.01.2016)

Colonial struggles with free enterprise in Burma's forestry

By the early nineteenth century, gaining access to new teak resources became an urgent imperial priority for the British. With a naval fleet in 1809 with a combined tonnage exceeding four million, high quality teak was needed to sustain and expand the fleet and uphold the British hegemony of ocean space, ensuring the empire's position within a nascent commercial capitalism (Campling & Cólas 2018). With disruption in their hitherto sources of teak in Europe, they initially shifted their sourcing to Southern India. Already by the 1820s however, high quality teak in the forests here had been depleted. While there at this point was some teak trade with the Monarchical Burma, the flow of teak was erratic. Hence, "the acquisition of the Tenasserim teak forests in 1826 was crucial to wider British imperial interests" (Bryant 1997, 23). This acquisition took place though the first Anglo-Burmese war lasting from 1824-1826. Subsequently, what at the time was considered Northern Tenasserim (covering contemporary Mon and Kayin States – see Figure 21 and compare with Figure 4) was turned from an economic backwater into a major regional centre, where "the timber industry became for a time the most profitable source of wealth" (Cady 1958, 84). As a testament to the export-oriented nature of the

timber industry, relatedly, "[s]hipbuilding at Moulmein developed into a sizable industry" (Cady 1958, 84).

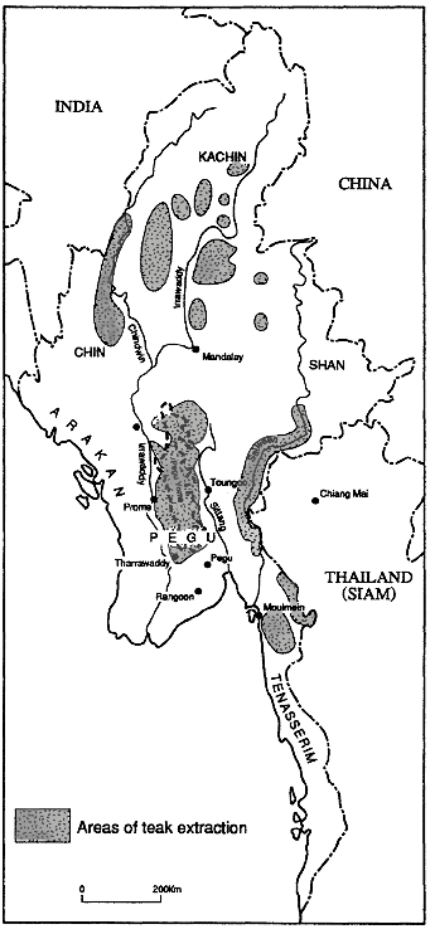


Figure 21
Sites of teak extraction during British rule. Source: Adapted from Bryant (1996, 171)

As the first Anglo-Burmese war was still unravelling, the Government of India instated the first superintendent of Tenasserim, Anthony Maingy, in 1825. On orders from India, Maingy initially dabbled with a monopoly over the teak trade. However, following both pressure from merchants that had expected fewer regulations from the British than under the former Burmese powers, as well as the increasing influence of economic liberalism across the

empire in the early nineteenth century, the teak monopoly was ended in 1829. Maingy, himself heavily on the side of a "free trade" approach to the timber industry, consequently pursued a vision of minimal intervention into the teak trade by the colonial state (Bryant 1997). With this minimal intervention and better opportunities for linking up to markets in Calcutta and Europe, teak extraction expanded significantly in the subsequent years. Already by 1833, teak exports to India had reached 7309 tons and three large teak vessels had been built. In this period then, "[m]any timber merchants prospered, especially those who were affiliated with the large Calcutta firms and who enjoyed influence in government circles" (ibid, 24). As would come to characterize the colonial economy more generally, the division of labour in the burgeoning industry was clear-cut: while it was non-Europeans that stood for the extraction, a significant part of which were the Karen ethnic group, it was European merchant capitalists that controlled the subsequent marketing arrangements. The labour regime was based on a share-cropping model, whereby the "natives" were allowed to keep one half of the amount ordered by the merchants based in Moulmein. This trading was, at least in theory, controlled by the colonial government and "designed to meet the government's financial and military needs while permitting the freest possible exploitation" (ibid, 28). The government's control focused on a set of rules concerning minimum requirements regarding girth of the trees felled, a licensing system to uphold these basic rules and duties levied on the trade. In practice though, the government was not in control and although it had managed to secure higher tax rates of land and the people than the precolonial state had, it didn't in the case of the teak trade (Bryant 1997). As a result, "[b]etween 1829-1857, private firms in Tenasserim were essentially free to extract teak as they wished. Forest rules were few in number and limited in scope. In any case, they were ineffectual in the absence of a forest service entrusted with their enforcement" (ibid, 22).

Upon receiving reports throughout the 1830s of how the current extraction regime was undercutting the long-term sustainability of the teak supply, the Government of India reacted by introducing the position of a superintendent of forests. In 1841, the first to assume this position, Captain Tremenheere, introduced stricter rules to the timber industry. Despite these attempts at asserting stronger control over the timber trade, not least for the purpose of ensuring state revenues from the growing trade, it increased only marginally. Politically significant though, the position of a superintendent of forests entailed the preliminary steps towards a colonial forestry policy and Tremenheere used this position to highlight rule breaking as it was happening.

Eventually frustrated with his lacking ability to challenge the industry, however, Tremenheere and his successors eventually "turned their attention to a weaker foe: the hill Karen" (Bryant 1997, 34). Subsequently, for the British, "shifting cultivators, not timber traders, were the 'greatest cause' of teak destruction locally" (ibid).

By the mid 1850s, the targeted teak forests had been so depleted that the small amount of felling that was happening legally was halted, with leases for logging being abandoned by their owners. Instead, teak extraction moved to the center of Burma, not so incidentally, coinciding with the second Anglo-Burmese (1852-1853) war that brought the central area of Burma under British control. However, the colonial government took the lessons from Tenasserim around the implications of a free trade approach to forestry. This led to the setup of an actual Forest Department in Burma that would give shape to the whole colonial approach to forest management with ramifications up until today.

The rise of Burma's Forest Department

The Forest Department, set up in 1856, became "part and parcel of the establishment of a functionally defined state in Burma in the nineteenth century" (Bryant 1997, 43). The Forest Department was a direct response on behalf of the colonial government to the rapid teak depletion in Tenasserim. Similar departments were setup for a range of other resources (agriculture, mining, fisheries) all oriented toward maximizing commercial production. Of course, this political-administrative divide did not map neatly on to the biophysical landscape and in many ways the ensuing conflicts between the different departments and their mandates that was set off back then, continue today (Woods 2015).

The forest department was established to facilitate "scientific forest management in the Pegu teak forests" (Bryant 1997, 44), while simultaneously expected to generate revenue through the subsequent teak extraction. Not wasting any time, already in 1856, forest rules were proclaimed over Pegu, revised in 1859 and extended to Tenasserim. The rules were, in turn, incorporated into India-wide legislation through the India Forest Act of 1865. The Act consolidated the agenda for the Forest Department of ensuring long-term teak production and this was to be done through the expansion of Reserve Forests.

The emerging forest revenue gathered from the timber industry by the Forest Department at first accrued entirely to the Government of India. In the 1870s, however, the financial and administrative power began a process of decentralization, in order to incentivize the provincial governments, such as in Burma, to "increase revenue and curb expenditures" (ibid, 50). As a result, in 1882 the provincial government of Burma was given one half of the forest revenue – a rate at which it remained until the early twentieth century. Concomitant with the decentralization of revenue accruement, the Burma Forest Act (1881) was put in place to revoke the India Forest Act, devolving control of forests to the Department of the Chief Commissioner (Bryant 1997). Despite this delegation of control, the overall parameters for forest administration remained set in India and ultimately, Britain. This was because of the crucial role that Burma's teak forests continued to played in the empire as such, "[w]ithout a doubt, [the province's teak forests] were the jewel in the crown of Indian forestry, and revenue derived from their exploitation formed the largest share of the imperial forest surplus" (ibid, 57).

The beefing up of the Forest Department's financial and administrative powers took place in the context of the advancement of an export-oriented agrarian economy feeding into the regional food trade in the British empire, noted in the preceding chapter. The civil and forest officials in charge of developing the agrarian economy and the forest economy therefore had the dual challenge of "allow[ing] agricultural expansion in selected areas, but not so as to damage the residual forest" (ibid, 52-3). Thus, the forest rules that set the parameters of access to forest areas sought not to curtail the use of forested lands for the purpose of sedentarised agriculture, but vehemently challenged what was demonized as the unproductive and wasteful practice of shifting cultivation. As argued by one of the former directors of the Forest Department in 1876, in his suggestions for the new forestry act, the Forest Department should be allowed to takeover "all valuable forest tracts, provided no actual settlements are included … deserted toungyas … may be taken up without prejudice to anyone" (Brandis, quoted in Bryant 1997, 60). Finally, when the 1881 Forest Act came into force, it clarified that shifting cultivation was not a right and restricted the toungya-practice – a shorthand for shifting cultivation.

A core clash therefore began to emerge, concerning the use of Burma's vast forest landscapes. For the colonial state, it was a crucial source of revenue and therefore had to be managed according to the emerging scientific principals concerning forestry. By contrast, for the Karen and other indigenous groups across the territory, teak and other forest species, were viewed "as the sources of nutrients for agriculture. Such perceptual [and material] differences were at

the heart of conflict between Karen shifting cultivators and forest officials during the colonial era" (ibid, 68).

The territorial jurisdiction of the Forest Department was further extended with the Third and final Anglo-Burmese war from 1885-6. This war annexed Upper Burma and the Shan States bringing under British rule the entire territory that today is formally encompassed by the Myanmar state. This greatly expanded the area that became reserve forests, as Upper Burma was particularly targeted. As the Burma Forest Act of 1881 did not set upper limits regarding the amount of territory to be designated as reserve forests, the burgeoning conflict between competing land uses of different Departments continued, as the Forest Department had an inherent expansionary drive towards the "systematic elimination of all natural hazards to the development of teak" (ibid, 87).

While this expanded the size of territory under the purview of the Forest Department, the 1902 Burma Forest Act, was designed to consolidate the control of the Forest Department over this vast territory. Yet, the overall priority for the Department remained the same, namely "the long-term commercial development of Burma's teak forests" (ibid, 107). This entailed an increasingly lenient and favourable approach towards a handful of European timber traders at the expense of their Burmese counterparts and the extraction that had been contracted through the Forest Department. Thus, in 1907 long-term renewable leases were allocated to five companies that would subsequently dominate the teak trade until nationalization of the industry in 1948. Simultaneously, attempts at eradicating the practice of shifting cultivation continued with diverse hill peoples' equally diverse agro-forestry practices and tenure systems being lumped together and blamed for everything from erosion to flooding and landslides (Springate-Baginski 2018).

Following the first world war, the Forest Department was at its pinnacle. The size of the department had grown threefold from 1893 to 1923, at which point there were 160 officials working on forestry management. The Department "had created an extensive network of reserved forests in which intensive management was being practiced. Growing cooperation between the Forest Department and the European firms was the basis of a prospering timber industry, and both teak production and forest revenue were at an all-time high" (Bryant 1997, 127).

Conflictive forests and war

From this high watermark, however, the Forest Department's power significantly waned in the following decades as Burma's forests became imbued in struggles over the nation as such. Beginning in the 1920s and then furthered with the Government of Burma Act in 1937, control of the Forest Department was relinquished from the British to the Minister of Agriculture, Excise and Forests – a position held by one of the elected members of the Burma Legislative Council. Yet the de facto power of this position remained curtailed as decisions around allocation of teak leases as well as personnel management within the Forest Department continued to be in the hands of the British (Bryant 1997). The formal signs of the British relinquishing power unfolded in the midst of strong nationalist movements challenging British rule. An alliance between these groups and the Japanese, cut the formal devolution process short in 1942, when the Japanese invaded Burma (Callahan 2003). For the forestry sector, the subsequent occupation and ousting of the British until 1945, facilitated the timorous attempts at self-management. For the forest officials, this meant restoring order in the forests, along the lines of colonial management practices, because while "[t]he British may have gone … their practices were to continue" (Bryant 1997, 148). Upon the brief return of the British from 1945 to 1948, the expectation was that the Forest Department would once again be built up and brought to its former commanding heights. Yet in the context of strong independence campaigns and uprising across the country against British rule, no such order was in sight. Consequently, "[a]t independence, the British thus handed over to their Burmese counterparts a Forestry Department whose effective remit extended little beyond the city limits of the national capital, Rangoon." (ibid, 148)

In the turbulent and chaotic years following independence the main aim for the newly independent Burmese state was to gain and ensure access to the main teak forests concomitant with a process of Burmanization of the forest sector and Forest Department. Yet, despite changes in formal political circumstances, the approach towards the forests remained largely the same. As is explained in Prime Minister U Nu's first two-year plan for economic development "the policy of Government in regard to the exploitation of the Forests shall be directed towards optimum economic development consistent with proper and scientific conservation" (quoted in Bryant 1997, 163).[31] Any such plans for

[31] Adopted in conjuncture with the Land Nationalisation Act noted in Chapter 6

proper and scientific conservation became impossible to follow through. In the following years, state space unraveled as many of the diverse ethnic groups – historically at the receiving ends of the colonial government's antipathy towards shifting cultivation – joined with the KNU in the struggle against the Burmese central state. Subsequently, the country's forest landscapes came under the control of different insurgent groups. In the ensuing civil war following General Ne Win's seizure of state power in 1962, "forests were often not only the site of conflict between government and insurgent forces, but also the subject of conflict as rival armies fought for control over commercially valuable forests" (Bryant 1997, 164).

Initially, this struggle played out in the central areas of the country – the Irrawaddy Delta and the Pegu Yoma. With the gradual extension and consolidation of the Burmese state's control of this area though, the insurgents were pushed back into the more heavily forested peripheral areas of the territory. Once pushed back here, from around 1975, particularly the Karen National Union (KNU) developed forestry operations competing with the Burmese state. Ultimately, as the KNU had done in fisheries (see Chapter 5), this was a contest as to who could assume the role of modern landed property in relation to the Thai capital that began flowing into the forests. Indeed, the forests of Kawthoolei, the name of the Karen state located along the Thai border, became a key source of revenue for the KNU, gradually displacing tin and small commodity trade (Falla 1991). As evocatively described by Jonathan Falla, by the late 1980s a shift in scale of extraction had taken place where local Karen no longer played any role in the process. Rather, "the once essential Karen have been cut out of forestry altogether. Every aspects of the operation – felling, hauling, sawmills, middle and senior management, and all the capital behind it – is in Thai hands. A few Karen military commanders are said to have a stake. To take cuts. The forest people have no part in it any more" (Falla 1991, 354). By the 1990s, in the years preceding their territorial decline from 1995 onward, forest earnings stood for the lion's share of KNU state revenue (Bryant 1997).

In conjuncture with the forest warfare, the military regime's General Ne Win amped up the attempts at nationalizing the forest sector. This involved the take-over of the teak leases hitherto dominated by the European timber trading companies and the creation of the State Timber Board (STB). The STB expanded significantly from the 1960s onwards, as part of Ne Win's broader nationalization-drive, leading it to takeover "extracting, milling and marketing of all kinds of timber. The end result of this process was an agency increasingly able to pursue its mandate to exploit the forests commercially" (Bryant 1997,

173). This put it at odds with the Forest Department, whose mandate was correspondingly curtailed to exclusively focus on the conservation of forests. In this manner, the state's management of forests significantly changed, putting the two institutions, formally under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, at loggerheads over the use of forests. Yet the scales were weighted in favour of the STB as the military rulers prioritized extraction over conservation. By the late 1970s, the Forest Department was in crisis with no real power.

As under colonial rule, teak became a key export earner for General Ne Win's regime. Despite significant expansion in rice production, it was not possible to restore the pre-war levels of production. Consequently, the share of teak in export grew following independence and became crucial towards the end of Ne Win's rule: from 4 per cent in 1951-2 to as much as 42 per cent by the late 1980s. When Ne Win assumed power in 1962, teak production was at 262,361 tons. Over the years, the figure rose to 435,592 tons in 1981-82 (Bryant 1997). The significant rise in teak's share of export earnings despite the relatively meager doubling of production, thus also alludes to the tendency of absolute export earnings to fall under Ne Win's program of a Burmese Way to Socialism. As a result, by the 1980s the exchange earnings from timber exceeded that of rice for the first time (WRI 1998).

Strategic plunder under SLORC

As with fisheries and land, SLORC's takeover in 1988 ushered in significant changes regarding the use and control of forests. Not that the overall approach to forests as a source of revenue so much changed, but it was significantly consolidated and increasingly in the hands of the military regime, rather than the ethnic insurgents. In the period from 1988 to the Southeast and East-Asian financial crises in 1997/8, deforestation rates doubled (WRI 1998). As with marine resources, this was facilitated by regional geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts – particularly the shifting allegiance of Thai capital in the spaces that had hitherto been under control of the insurgents.

With the spiralling growth rates noted in Thailand in the 1980s, so too the timber production had been rising steadily in the same period. Yet, this production was abruptly put to a halt when in November 1988, floods and landslides killed hundreds of people in Thailand. A budding environmentalist movement pointed to the large-scale felling of the country's forests as the main

cause of the environmental upheavals. Subsequently, a ban on all logging concessions was instituted, stepping into force by January 1st 1989 (Hirsch 2009). To solve this issue for Thai timber capitalists, on the same visits in December 1988 that secured access to Burma's fisheries, 42 five-year logging concessions were granted to 36 Thai companies (Kramer 1994; WRI 1998). All of these concessions were, quite deliberately, located in insurgent-controlled territory. Aside from providing an urgent fix for Thai capital in spaces across the border, the concessions provided inroads for the military regime into these territories that had hitherto been out of reach. These inroads should be understood quite literally, in the sense that actual roads were constructed to transport the logs that had until then been transported by elephants out of the forests and then floated along rivers. Thus, the Thai firms that had gained the concessions built a network of roads with the Burmese army ensuring their security – moving progressively deeper into especially KNU-territory (Kramer 1994). This whole strategy was largely drawn from the Thai military's experience with the Communist Party of Thailand, where a similar approach was adopted – particularly from the early 1980s. Where the forested landscape for centuries had provided cover for Karen and other ethnic groups against varying lowland powers (Falla 1991, Scott 2010) this spatial tactic undermined this source of cover. In this manner, the road network allowed for the Burmese army to advance rapidly and more so than ever before (Kramer, Interview 18.10.2018).

While, as noted, extraction of timber had already been taking place in these zones under the KNU, this had all been illegal. With formal concessions granted by SLORC, timber extraction became legal and the rate of extraction increased. This immediately boosted SLORC's coffers. Purportedly with reserves only of USD 28 million in 1988, the teak concessions alone provided an estimated USD 112 million a year, thereby "bail[ing] out SLORC in its hour of need" (Smith 1991, 409). On the Thai side, the concessionaries were all closely connected to high-ranking military officials or the two prominent coalition parties in Thailand under Chatichai's government – one of the protagonists behind the shift in the Thai state's foreign policy of turning battlefields to marketplaces (see Chapter 4). In this manner, the concession-based timber extraction shifted control away from the more small-scale illegal timber companies based on the border that until then had dominated the trade through nurturing ties to the different ethnic armed groups and local Thai military, towards the new Bangkok-based concessionaries. This shift contributed to the new scale of extraction that was dependent on higher scales of capital and a formalized relation between the Thai state and Myanmar

military regime. Nonetheless, the emerging "marriage of security and business interests" (Christensen 1990, 201) was a fragile one. The KNU contested the marriage, where SLORC assumed the role of modern landed property towards Thai timber capitalists. Similar to the struggle around appropriation of rent in fisheries, the Thai concessionaries found themselves paying the KNU between USD 40 – 80 per cubic metre of teak, while simultaneously paying SLORC USD 80 per cubic metre for the same timber (Bryant 1997). In the chaotic early 1990s of what Woods (2011) has called the emerging ceasefire capitalism, everyone was taking their cut. Caught in between these rapacious processes were villagers on the ground.

Despite the lucrativeness of this formalized plunder, the relation between the Thai state and the Myanmar military regime was tumultuous and, in light of the revenue streams also flowing to the KNU, not a resounding success. Once the immediate bailout of SLORC had been secured – and other much larger projects like extraction of offshore gas were in the making – SLORC announced in July 1992 that the logging concessions would not be renewed. Hence, the legal trade ended by December 31, 1993 (WRI 1998). The illegal trade, however, continued to flourish both along the Thai and Chinese borders further North.

While the legalized plunder stopped, SLORC simultaneously tried to beef up its environmental credentials internationally. The Minister of Forestry later in 1996 remarked that the attracting of Thai capital through extraction of timber had been a "foolish mistake" (quoted in WRI 1998, 17). As part of this attempt to rebrand Myanmar's international standing, SLORC introduced a Forest Law in 1992 and a Forest Policy in 1995. In the years since then, conservation, rather than extraction, has become a prominent tool in SLORC's spatial strategy – with the Forest Department's role significantly strengthened through cooperation with Environmental NGOs and funding from foreign donors.

Coercive conservation

The forest law (1992) finally repealed the 1902 Forest Act, discussed above, that had been in place since the British colonial regime. This became the basis for the Forest Department's new mandate. While the law "replicates much that is in the old colonial law, it goes beyond its predecessor as it links forestry management explicitly to social and environmental considerations" (Bryant 1997, 181). In this manner, the basic principles of the law are filled with

contradictory statements. On the one hand, it aims "to contribute towards the food, clothing and shelter needs of the public and for perpetual enjoyment of benefits by conservation and protection of forests", "to prevent the dangers of destruction of forests and bio-diversity" and to carry out "conservation of natural forests". On the other hand, it should also aim "to develop the economy of the state", move towards "the establishment of forest plantations" and "to contribute towards the fuel requirement of the country" (SLORC 1992). In tune with the latter principles, of the following 13 chapters, 7 of them relate to the licensing industries and how extraction from forests is to take place (see also Gutter 2001). Yet, the reserved forests that were created under the British regime following the 1902 Forest Act were also recognized in the Forest Law. Significantly though, in terms of the new revenue streams conservation would subsequently provide and the Environmental NGOs that were on the cusp of swooping in, the law also notes the principal that all this was to be carried out "in accordance with international agreements relating to conservation of forests and conservation of environment" (SLORC 1992).

The Forest Law was followed up with the Protection of Wildlife and Conservation of Natural Areas Law (1994) and the Forest Policy (1995), designed to complement the forest law and set broader principles for conservation. The means through which to do this, involved the expansion of reserved forests from 14 per cent to 30 per cent of Myanmar's landmass. In this manner, the Forest Department could return to its historical role of restricting popular access to forested areas, while not disturbing timber or agricultural concessions. Importantly, the forest policy was prepared with the assistance of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and therefore in tune with the global conservation discussions at the time. The policy expands beyond the concept of reserve forests that until then had been the main form of forestry conservation, to also work towards "the establishment of a network of national parks, wildlife reserves and sanctuaries" (SLORC 1995). These Protected Areas (PAs) that are designated with reference to the 1994 law on wildlife and conservation, have even more strict requirements than those of the reserve forests – that is, PAs are not to be enforced in the pursuit of growing timber, but to protect the enclosed areas for their own sake. The policy aims in the first instance to expand protected areas to five per cent of Myanmar's land area, but ultimately to ten per cent – although no timeframe for this goal was given immediately (this has subsequently been set for 2030, see below). This goal, a significant impediment to the extractive industry, needs to be seen in the context of a broader shift within the political economy of conservation at the global scale.

In 1980, IUCN, UNEP and WWF took it upon themselves to put forward a World Conservation Strategy. The report set out a bold vision for expanding protected areas in parts of the globe with high rates of biodiversity that were considered of global importance. There was a significant spatial politics to this vision, in the sense that the areas to be protected were for the most part located in the Global South – herein Myanmar, which was identified as a "priority" (IUCN et al. 1980).

Yet, the vision laid out received significant pushback from governments across the Global South. With large swathes of their territories to be taken out of production, the vision was criticized for dismissing their developmental aims (Dempsey 2016). A decade later though, after this pushback, the IUCN ganged up with a different crew, this time consisting of the four Washington-based organizations: World Resources Institute (WRI), Conservation International (CI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the World Bank (WB). Together they published what would become the landmark report (1990) *Conserving the World's Biological Diversity*. Adapting to critique, the publication – that would subsequently shape the discussions around the Convention on Biological Diversity – sought to resolve the contradiction between extraction in the pursuit of growth and conservation. As Jessica Dempsey (2016, 42) explains, "ecosystem conservation – which is often understood as a constraint on economic growth – is positioned instead as a stimulus to national economic development, albeit managed, sustainable growth". In this manner, environmental protection was sought tied together with the pursuit of development, entailing a shift in both rhetoric as well as political economic practice. Conservation was now to be tied directly to new institutional setups to funnel development aid from the North to the South. The report set the frame for the negotiations convened by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for an international agreement covering biological diversity conservation. Following several rounds of negotiations, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was opened for signatories at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and proclamations of the end of history, the CBD was launched in the midst of rampant geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts that consolidated a resurgent neoliberal capitalism. Accordingly, the CBD espoused what Kathleen McAfee (1999) calls a "green developmentalism", whereby environmental concerns, were not just compatible with, but a core part of economic growth all organized around an alleged sustainable and green market economy. With the CBD, this approach to conservation was bolstered economically through the Global Environmental Facility. Signatory governments to the CBD would be able to

apply and secure funding for their efforts in living up to the requirements of the CBD – herein the expansion of protected areas – through the Global Environmental Facility (GEF).

In November 1995, as part of broader efforts to gain currency (figuratively and literally) in international circles, as well as in line with the new Forest Law and Policy, SLORC signed Myanmar up to the CBD. Not so coincidentally, the areas that became targets of the ensuing expansion of reserve and protected areas were all in the border regions from the North to the South that SLORC had still not managed to conquer fully and that the Forest Department neither under British nor BSPP rule had successfully managed to turn into reserves. Thus, in Myanmar, as indeed in many other places (Bocarejo & Ojeda 2016), the lofty liberal environmentalism of the Rio-crowd turned out to be quite compatible with the spatial strategies of a brutal military regime.

Already in 1989, as SLORC was opening up the teak forests to Thai concession-holders, a review by the IUCN showed that Myanmar was one of the few countries in Southeast Asia that did not have a functioning system of protected areas. Should the trend of unchecked logging continue, IUCN concluded (quoted in WRI 1998, 6),

> it will constitute a major threat to the survival of Burma's forest ecosystems and their irreplaceable genetic resources, including wildlife. At the same time the preponderance of aid channeled to the State Timber Corporation for logging operations has drawn national personnel and material resources away from the Forest Department, and thereby greatly reduced its capacity for effective forest management.

The military regime did not manage to access funds through GEF until 2006. Nonetheless, bolstered with arguments like those noted by the IUCN, a vanguard group of actors' interests coalesced with the military regime's and steps towards the first and, as of yet, largest protected areas were taken in Northern Tanintharyi in the years following the Forest Law and Policy in the 1990s.

New actors in Myanmar's forest politics

The US-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) was the first to swoop into Myanmar with a mandate to 'protect and serve' biodiversity. Indeed, upon arrival, the executive director of WCS' Science and Exploration Program noted

that there turned out to be certain benefits for Environmental NGOs working in a context like Myanmar: "[i]t's much harder to get conservation done in democracies than in communist countries or dictatorships; when a dictatorship decides to establish a reserve, that's that." (quoted in Noam 2007, 275). Wasting no time and with support from WCS, SLORC gazetted a protected area in Northern Kachin State, a marine national park off the coast of Southern Tanintharyi division, but most significantly was what was initially conceived as the Myinmoletkat Nature Reserve in Northern Tanintharyi. This reserve was in fact not initially proposed by WCS, but by the gas company Unocal (WRI 1998; Woods 2019). In response to the international outcry at the human rights atrocities resulting from the offshore gas project noted in the previous chapters, the consortium of gas companies launched a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program. The CSR-program initially intended to provide the funding for the creation and management of the Myinmoletkat reserve, covering some 2.7 million acres (Woods 2019). The reserve would cover an area North of the pipeline and several hundred kilometers South from there along the Thai border. As with the area that the pipeline itself traversed, this vast territory to the South was as of yet not under the control of SLORC. Rather, it included NMSP and KNU rebel bases, Mon and Karen villages and a KNU-administered forest reserve. With the creation of a protected area, all of these became illegal and hence had to be removed – forcefully so. As a result, "[t]hose familiar with the project and territorial politics in the area believed that the proposed reserve was advanced by the consortium and accepted by the military government because it would secure the wider pipeline area from rebels" (Woods 2019, n.p.). Despite these bold intentions, the reserve was eventually downscaled to the still massive 420,000 acres and came to be known as the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve (TNR). In response the KNU released a statement in firm opposition to the park: "the KNU does not recognize the superimposition of biosphere reserves or wildlife sanctuaries by the SLORC or foreign companies, whose intentions are questionable, dishonest, and only face-saving, and whose actions are devious and oppressive toward the Karen people and the proper aims and methods of ecosystem management" (quoted in WRI 1998, 9).

Yet, at the time, the TNR remained a "paper park" (TRIPNET, 2016). It would take a further round of brute military intervention, this time under cover of conservation, for the park to be established. Following a breakdown in ceasefire negotiations between the KNU and SLORC, and in a context where the NMSP and other ethnic armed groups had entered into ceasefire agreements with the regime, the military seized their opportunity. In early

February 1997, from their newly established bases around the pipeline, the military launched what turned into a devastating offensive against the remaining KNU 'liberated zones' further South in Tanintharyi. From then on, the vast contiguous zones that once made up Kawthoolei were lost and as a result through 1997, "the numbers of Karen refugees had increased to 71,000, further rising to 91,000" by the end of the year (BERG 1998, 31). Following the offensive, the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve (TNR) eventually became the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve Project, supported by the gas companies (from 2005 onwards) and with technical support regarding the setup, management and surveillance of the protected area to the Forest Department coming from WCS. Nonetheless, as a review of the TNR Project from 2014 notes, "[t]he major impediment to conservation activities is the security situation. Karen National Union control some areas and greatly limit access to significant portions of the TNR" (Pollard et al. 2014, 10).

In these circumstances, the Forest Department, bolstered with revenue streams amounting to USD 4.2 million since 2005, has been at work trying to enforce the rules on the villages found within or on the border of the protected area. The management pursued by the Forest Department in the TNR follows that set out in the Forestry Law from 1992 noted above. Crucially, this entails a banning of the shifting cultivation production method still prevalent in this area to sustain villagers' food consumption – particularly rice. Instead, sedentary agriculture has to be practiced through so-called community forestry. The next section turns to one of these villages caught between these two competing state space strategies.

Mi Chaung Laung

Mi Chaung Laung is a Karen village located where the pipeline intersects with the TNR. In the 1990s, the entire village was relocated as part of the military's securing of the area for the pipeline. The military unceremoniously first showed up in the village in March 1992, ordering the villagers to leave within 6 days. Fearing the ramifications of not following these orders, villagers packed up whatever they could carry and were faced with the options of either relocating to a government-controlled strategic village or fleeing across the border to refugee camps that were springing up in Thailand in tune with the military's ramping up of campaigns against the KNU. For villagers in Mi Chaung Laung, the relocated village was a few miles back toward the Ye-

Dawei road in a village that came to be known as Mi Chaung Laung (new). As noted in the preceding chapter, such relocation of villagers out of insurgent-controlled "black" areas into government-controlled "white" areas was a core part of the military regime's Four Cuts strategy of starving the insurgent groups of links to food, funds, information and recruits. Relocation in no way guaranteed security however, as even when relocated for the purpose of cutting ties to the insurgent groups, particularly Karen men were still blamed for ties with the KNU and often summarily killed based on such charges.[32] For the people that were able to, the aim was therefore to also escape from the relocated villages as quickly as possible. To ensure that villagers did not return to their former houses, the leftover ghost villages were often burned to the ground as part of the Four Cuts strategy. As one relocated villager from Mi Chaung Laung recounted to the journalists of Earth Rights International upon fleeing to Thailand,

> Just before we came here, SLORC burned so many houses in Mi Chaung Laung. Pan Polo's house and Kyaw Shin's. I saw the ashes of Tharamu Ye Yta and Shaw Htee Day's houses. They burned the houses because no villagers were living there. They said the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] was there. … In the new village, you know, we have nothing. We have no farm, no crops, no house. In the new place we were not allowed to plant or grow. We lived in our old village since we were born. Our old village was perfect for us if there are no soldiers. (ERI 1996, 43)

Today, heading North on the Ye-Dawei road you pass the Total-built junction leading West to Kanbauk and the rubber-dominated landscape there and instead follow the road for a few kilometres farther North. Reaching a small gravel road, you head East towards the vast Tanintharyi forests that to a foreigner like me tower majestically ahead. However, while the landscape on this side of the road remains forested, my Karen interlocutor explains that it is a far cry from how things used to be. That is, we are not entering the famed "old growth" teak forests heralded by the British almost two centuries ago. Following the narrow unpaved road, you eventually get to the Tanintharyi river. On the other side of the river, is the original Mi Chaung Laung (old). No cars make it over to the village at this crossing. At the close of the rainy season, it is a wide meandering river that has to be crossed by a paddling boat (see

[32] E.g. for a store from a Mi Chaung Laung villager about how this happened to his friends, "They did not do anything, they are just farmers. SLORC arrested and killed them on their farms." (ERI 1996, 23)

Figure 22). Later on, in the dry season it is possible to walk through the shallow water combined with negotiating a makeshift bridge by foot, which is basically just a few conjoined logs (see Figure 23).



Figure 22
Crossing the Tanintharyi river to Mi Chaung Laung in late October 2017. Source: Author



Figure 23
Crossing the Tanintharyi river to Mi Chaung Laung in early February 2018. Source: Author

Smirking kids enjoy the sight of me balancing in flip-flops across it. The skilled scooter drivers and their amazingly sturdy bikes do manage to traverse the stream a couple of months into the dry season, carrying sacks of rice up to the village – evidence that this basic staple is no longer produced in the village. Attesting to the contested spatial politics, the first time we cross we are met by a KNU soldier in uniform on the other side. He smiles and lets us pass, after Ko Aung Lwin greets him. From here we walk a few minutes up to the village.

The river is used for bathing and washing of clothes, so the couple of times when we manage to arrive early enough in the morning, we are met by groups of women that are on their way down to do the washing. The first sight that meets you in the village is a big open space that houses the school, the church and a space for the men to play chinlone (the remarkably acrobatic game that is akin to kick volleyball). From this open space houses are found along two pathways stretching further East into the forest (see Figure 24).



Figure 24
The open space in Mi Chaung Laung with the school to the right in the picture. One of the pathways to the left of the house in the centre of the picture, the other behind the school. Source: Author

As opposed to the very direct physical squeeze in the other two villages, the sense of the vast forest beyond the village weighs upon you. As the following sections elaborate, this is also to some degree the case. Where in both Daminseik and Ohn Pin Kwin, people's lives and livelihoods were physically being squeezed into smaller and smaller spaces – fighting for the leftovers after the military, the fishing, mining and gas companies had all taken a share. In Mi Chaung Laung, the land and forest frontiers are in some ways still open –

yet the terms of access have changed. In 2006, after money began flowing from gas companies to the Forestry Department, a visit was paid to the village by TNRP employees announcing to the villagers that shifting cultivation was hereinafter illegal due to the protected area. Instead, villagers would be given the opportunity to start up sedentary agriculture on 20-acre plots through so-called "community forestry". A similar top-down approach was taken in the other villages located on the border of the TNR (Key informant interview, 06.02.2018). Despite this early proclamation, nothing really happened in the following years, until eventually the TNRP community forestry program was set up in Mi Chaung Laung in 2009. As the current chair of the Community Forestry (CF) program explained, "CF should be seen as a tool to promote sedentary agriculture" (Key informant interview, 30.01.2018). This has significantly impacted on villagers' production opportunities. Within CF plots, for every acre of rice production, 100 to 150 different forest plants also have to be planted. Through the CF-program, households in the village, once they have been recognized as such by the General Administration Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs, in theory have access to 20-acre plots each. These 20-acre plots are parsed out in the so-called buffer zone of the TNR, that extends one mile from the villages into the TNR. This buffer zone is distinguished from the core zone of the TNR, where access is restricted – meaning no villagers, roads or any activities at all are to take place here. In reality, things look quite different though.

As the chair of the CF-program readily concedes, "land on the other side of the river is controlled by KNU" [his office was on the westside of the Tanintharyi river] (Key informant interview, 30.01.2018). On the other side of the river in Mi Chaung Laung, KNU grants certificates to villagers that want to start up production as part of their counter-strategy to the government's CF-program. These certificates cover use-rights for the land with the only requirement being that you have to have set up production within three years. If not, the certificate is withdrawn. If, on the other hand, you successfully initiate production, it is "guaranteed that it belongs to you", as one certificate-holder put it (Interview 9, 31.01.2018). Once a certificate has been assured after three years, the landholder is allowed to sell it on, but it has to be within the village and only to other Karen people within the village. As a result, the chair laments, "there is lots of money to preserve forests [through the TNRP], but it does not seem like its progressing" (Key informant interview, 30.01.2018). This is due to both Tatmadaw and KNU-logging activities and continued hunting across the different 'zones' in the TNR: "Hunting is illegal,

but wild animals are always in the markets. … The rules and regulations are excellent, but they cannot control illegal logging and hunting" (ibid).

The seemingly ample opportunities for expanding agricultural practices notwithstanding, many in the village are struggling. Despite the precarious authority of the TNRP, the combination of the *de jure* criminalization of shifting cultivation, the requirements around cultivation on Community Forestry plots that de facto inhibit rice production and the time, money-capital and effort required to clear out and initiate production in the forested landscape on KNU-granted plots has made bare survival increasingly difficult for the majority in the village. Rather than producing rice themselves, as villagers have done historically through shifting cultivation-methods, and ensuring other reproductive needs through the forests, the villagers have become dependent on the commodity shops in Kaleiaung and hence need money for ensuring their household's reproduction. For those that are not successfully producing enough to make a profit by selling cash crops like beetle and cashew nuts in the market, they are forced to turn to wage labour whenever possible, but the opportunities in the village are scarce. In effect, only a handful of the 100 households that currently live in Mi Chaung Laung are managing to accumulate some money capital, but only small portions of this are reinvested directly in production, otherwise it goes into reproduction of their households, particularly investment into their children's education. Everyone else in the village is "barely surviving" as they put it.

The few accumulators

Naw Htoo, her husband and six children are one of the very few (three-four) households that have managed to come out of the disruption of war, displacement and conservation somewhat unscathed – at least relative to many of her neighbours. Currently in her late 50s, she remembers April 1992, when the military came. After some months in the relocated Mi Chaung Laung (new), they were able to move on. With money gathered from selling their 5 buffaloes that they had managed to keep, in spite of the military (which was otherwise infamous for confiscating anything and everything they could from villagers), they relocated to the bigger city of Dawei to the South of Yephyu township. Back in Mi Chaung Laung (old) they still had a beetlenut garden and before leaving they had agreed to lease out the use-rights to this plot, to gain some more money before heading to Dawei. Remaining villagers in the strategic village were then allowed to travel to Mi Chaung Laung (old) on daily permits issued by the military. Using this money, upon arrival in Dawei she initially started up as a vegetable merchant in the local market. Coupled with

the task of rearing the children, however, this was too tough and she instead moved into a business of rearing chicken. Her husband performed odd jobs in construction in the city. Based on the money they were managing to get from this as well as a loan, they eventually built their own house. By 1997, following the offensive towards the South, the military loosened its grip on the village. From 1997-2000 they shifted between temporarily returning to Mi Chaung Laung (old) in order to tend to what remained of their gardens and back to Dawei.

Then, finally, in 2001 they were able to move back permanently to the village. Where they 30 years back had had access to over 25 acres of productive land, upon returning only a plot with 2 acres of beetlenut was still productive. In contrast to many of the others that returned – only half of the original 200 households – this at least provided some basis for survival. Upon arrival, they boldly took a 4 lakh loan, at 10% interest, and used this money to support part of the costs for the eldest son's travel to Malaysia from 2002-2010. With the remittances that he sent back, they had repaid the loan after two years, and following the same model their oldest daughter moved to Thailand from 2005-2009. With a combination of the Malay and Thai remittances, they bought 40 acres of land for 7 lakh in around 2006 from the KNU, where they started planting beetlenut trees. In 2010, they sold their house in Dawei, which since building it had appreciated greatly in price, earning them 100 lakh. With his money, they built their current house, which lies on the westside of the river, before actually crossing over into Mi Chaung Laung (old). Also, in 2010 they applied for 20 acres through the Community Forestry program, but as of yet they have not planted anything on these lands. In 2015, they started replanting on the 25-acres of land they still had from before the conflict 30 years ago. She has KNU certificates for both non-CF land-plots that are both on the other side of the river, amounting to around 65-acres. Last year, based on the production from these – in addition to supplying themselves with food – they earned 70 lakh. To tend to these different land plots, they mobilize both family labour that were at work as we were talking with her and in the rainy season (May-September) they employ at least 5 workers pr. day at 9000 kyats each.

In marked contrast to the majority opinion in the village, she emphasized how things were much easier now. Most notably, she emphasized that the community forestry program was a success, because already after 5 years, "you will get benefit" from the 20-acre plots (Interview 43, 30.01.2018). As later interviewees emphasized however, waiting 5 years for these plots to become productive is not an option for most.

Getting by with non-CF land or non-farm income

Naw Was Tstee, in her mid-50s, lives on the other side of the river in the real Mi Chaung Laung in a two-storey wooden house that looks out to the main opening. She has five children of which two are still in school. The three that have graduated are all married, but one of these – a son – lives and works with her. She fled with the rest of the village in 1992, but went to a refugee camp, where she lived for one year. In 1993 she then came back to Mi Chaung Laung (new), where she lived until 1997. For the first two years after returning to Mi Chaung Laung (old), she, her husband and family were forced to live in the open space in a makeshift hut that they managed to put together using materials from the forest.

Today, they have 30 acres of land: 20 acres that was granted to them through the CF-program and ten acres that they took gradually through shifting cultivation. Upon application in 2004, a land certificate was issued to them by the KNU for these ten acres (see Figure 25).



Figure 25
Land certificate issued by the KNU

On this plot, they planted cashew nuts, which have been producing since 2008. The income from the selling of these cashew nuts is today the main source of

income for the household – earning them 50 lakhs pr. year. Additionally, they have coconuts in the land immediately surrounding their house, which secures them around 2 lakh pr. year. This was made possible through the microfinance loan opportunities in the Yadana CSR-program. All the while, the 20-acres they have through the CF-program lies idle. With their family labour – encompassing her husband, herself and the son – going into the production and selling of the 10-acres of cashew nuts, they cannot spare the labour required to start up production in the 20-acres – and hiring others to do it is too expensive. Rather, she stresses, the money they are making is going into the education of their children – aside from this they are "only surviving" (Interview 44, 30.01.2018).

She has one lakh in debt at the small commodities shop in Kaleiaung, where she goes once a week to buy rice and basic foods spending between 10-20,000 kyats. This, she laments, is different from the old days, where they grew their own rice and vegetables and could freely collect forest products.

San Ngwe and his wife face a similar situation. In his early 30s, he was a young child when the villagers were forced to relocate their lives. Upon moving to the relocated village, however, his father was arrested by the military regime and jailed in Dawei for suspicion of working together with the KNU. In this precarious situation, he and his mother fled to a refugee camp on the Thai border, where they stayed for a year. Eventually, by way of Mon State, they came back to the village a little over a year later and then stayed in Mi Chaung Laung (new) until his father joined them again and they eventually were allowed to return to the village in 1997. In the subsequent years, he did whatever odd jobs he could find. When he married his wife, they were given 3 acres of land from her parents producing cashew nuts and beetle nuts. As with Naw Wa Tstee, his CF-land is not in use and the income that they receive from the land therefore comes from the inherited plot. The beetle nut trees are not really producing anything though, so the only income is from the cashew nut trees, yielding about four lakhs pr. year.

In addition to this, as the only one in the village, he managed to get a job eight years ago through the TNRP, thus accessing a small amount of non-farm income. This involves what he calls "patrolling" on behalf of the TNRP. This concerns the wildlife within the reserve, where he is tasked with tracking their movement – herein setting up cameras to monitor wildlife, which he collects data from and changes the batteries on. His trips into the forest typically last three-four days and he performs these trips two-three times a month. They involve travelling all around the TNR – occasionally all the way to the Thai border. Attesting to the still contested nature of state space within the TNR

though, the KNU will sometimes block him from going into certain areas. He does not want to talk about why, but he explains that he on these trips sees lots of logging activities and that he is powerless to do anything about it. The KNU supports it, he is sure. He explains how one of his colleagues has been beaten up by KNU soldiers, as they had suspected that he was critical of the logging activities and would try and "make noise" about KNU activities (Interview 1, 30.01.2018). The "TNRP-people", that is the Forest Department, knew about this, he explains, but they didn't do anything about it, not even paying the man's medical bills, which were substantial.

They spend these two income streams on their own reproduction – particularly the children's education and medical bills for their 11-year old daughter that has some kind of "regular illness". They are not managing to build up any savings, but on the other hand they also don't have any debt and so are "free", as he puts it (ibid).

Landed labourers

Free is not what comes to mind for Naw Thelar and her family. She has four children aged between nine and 21. In her early 40s now, she moved here from Myeik in 2000. Upon arriving, she married her current husband, who at the time was doing odd jobs in other people's shifting cultivation practices – meaning, helping to clear out the undergrowth away from planted crops. Today they have two plots of land. Four acres of coconut and beetlenut plantations that they inherited from the husband's parents, but the beetlenut trees are still not producing anything. In addition, they have a 20-acre Community Forestry plot that they planted four acres of cashew nut trees on this year. She emphasizes there is plenty of land available. The KNU regularly organizes meetings in the village, where "if you want to cultivate, you can apply" (Interview 6, 31.01.2018). However, without any more money to invest in land and as long as their gardens are not yet producing income for them, at the moment they are doing "daily labour to live" (ibid).

In pursuit of this, the year before they sold two piglets for 3 lakhs, which meant they could buy two "cutting machines" (ibid). Since becoming accessible some ten years ago in the village, owning these machines are a prerequisite for attaining the 8-9000 kyat salary working in landowners' gardens (that is, those landowners that are able to hire in labour). If labourers bring their own fuel for the machine, they get 12,000 a day. Yet, this is a difficult life. Between months, their income varies greatly – sometimes managing to get three lakhs, but other times only one lakh. And it is physically

tough labour, “everything depends on your physical strength. To maintain our health is the biggest thing in our family.” (ibid)

All their money is currently being spent on their own reproduction, entailing food, education for the kids and health, for which they have to go to Kaleiaung. So, today they have no savings and occasionally have to take loans to survive. These loans are taken through Total’s CSR-program. For example, in September they borrowed 2 lakhs to which they have to pay 5000 in interest each month. These loans have to be paid back by August, otherwise they incur a fine. They are expecting one of their pigs to give birth to a drove of piglets and with the money she can get from selling them, she will repay their debts. But it’s a tough situation, with “5-6 years before the land can produce, who will pay the interest on the loans until then!?” (ibid)

Naw Hsar Dar and her family of four children still living with her and her husband face a similar situation. Following the relocation of the village, both her parents were imprisoned by the military – her mother for a month and her father for three years – and she consequently ended up in a refugee camp on the Thai-border. Her parents returned to the village in 1998, but she didn’t return until 2005 with her husband, whom she met in the camp. When they initially returned, they did shifting cultivation in an area in the hills that belonged to her parents. However, at this point in the village, you needed money to survive and “invest” in your children, as she puts it. They therefore started trying to get work for neighbours doing odd jobs in their gardens whenever they could.

Today, they still have 30 acres of land that they inherited from her parents. There used to be cashew trees that were growing well, but the area has basically become forest again. At the moment, only one acre of the plot is successfully growing vegetables for their own consumption. Consequently, their main source of income is through odd jobs. This entails cleaning the gardens of others, which during the rainy season (May-September) secures them work every day usually around 9000 kyats pr. day with use of their cutting machines (yet with one of them broken at the moment, it is only her husband working currently). During the dry season this is much rarer with owners typically working with harvesting in their own gardens. In this period, they at the most mange to get work 3 times a week. When they don’t secure day work they might try and do work in their own garden, but with no immediate income flowing from it and with little opportunities for investing in the garden, they don’t see any point in doing so. As she says, “Land is available, but it does not solve the problem” (Interview 7, 31.01.2018).

While loans are accessible through the village as well as the CSR-program, she does not want the family to obtain any debt, as she is afraid that they won't be able to pay the money back. Reflecting back on what the village was like, when she fled at 17, she laments how "there is no way to compare before the and the present. Before it was very peaceful, people had animals and gardens. Today, we maybe have land, but it is not producing anything" (ibid). As a result, they too rely on commodity shops in Kaleiaung, where she spends between 10-20,000 kyats a week for basic commodities – significantly eating into their income, particularly in the dry season.

TNRP and Myanmar's expanding Protected Areas

Despite the precarious situation created for villagers as well as the seeming failure of the TNRP even on its own terms of ensuring protection of the forests, as a Protected Area in Myanmar "in a very bad situation, it's a good case!" (Key informant interview, 06.02.2018) This evaluation by an interviewee that has worked in several of the influential ENGOs in Myanmar, is based particularly on the funding model, whereby all the costs related to the protected area are financed by private companies. In this manner, it is viewed as a model for other protected areas across Myanmar and as a way to make up for the gradual outcompeting of the Forestry Department's clout compared to the interests of other departments and ministries, notably within agriculture. At its core, this conflict goes back to the colonial-era clashes, discussed above, concerning the role of land more generally – should it be set aside for conservation or should it be used for extractive purposes? Rather than being at odds, however, these two spatial strategies are increasingly accommodating each other.

With the concurrent developments in Myanmar, new revenue streams have opened up for the Forest Department and its parent Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC). As noted in the above, Myanmar signed up to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1995. Yet, it was only from 2006 onwards, following a memorandum of understanding between the military regime (SPDC) with the United Nations Environmental Program's office in Bangkok that the work with Myanmar's National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan (NBSAP) began. Such a strategy, is a prerequisite for unlocking funds from the Global Environmental Facility. From the outset of this process though, confrontation with the existing

extractive interests and industries in Myanmar was avoided, "[w]ith the NBSAP we are obviously not going to touch the sensitive issues like logging, mining and hydropower" (UNEP, quoted in Noam et al. 2007, n.p.). In the subsequent years, protected area expansions across the country, but particularly in Tanintharyi, have created conflicts between the union government and the KNU, since proposed protected areas almost surgically target those areas, like the TNRP, that have historically not been under central state control.

With different international Environmental NGOs (ENGOs) flanking the Forest Department in these new projects, conflicts are emerging with the ENGOs and the Union Government on the one hand and Ethnic Armed Organisations and ethnic CSOs on the other – with GEF and other donor money flowing to the former. Ethnic CSOs are especially antagonistic towards the approach of the foreign ENGOs, which they see as accommodating business interests (p.c. with environmental activist, November 2016). Indeed, this is often quite explicitly the approach, as a WCS employee explained, "[w]e have to remember the business perspective on this, which is profit-maximisation. We should avoid holding them for ransom, [so] there have to be limits [on community rights]. Conservation is first and foremost a good thing, right?" (p.c., 27.01.2016) As such, current ENGO interventions are in line with the approach expressed by the UNEP employee about not going against logging, mining and hydropower.

The problem for villagers on the ground, like in Mi Chaung Laung, is how they are increasingly squeezed between these spatial strategies – with extractive zones snuggling up to conservation zones in the landscape. While ENGO representatives do acknowledge these dilemmas of the squeeze, their approach in Myanmar so far seems to reflect a ruthless pragmatism towards working with the government and getting the job – that is expanding protected areas – done: "We either do what we can and work within it or we do nothing at all!" (Interview with WCS, 08.12.2017)

Conclusion

Myanmar's forests have for centuries been contested spaces and remain so to this day. Northern Tenasserim's fabled teak trees were part of what initially attracted the British to Burma. As these were depleted, the British roamed farther North in their hunt for more teak, eventually coercing together the entire

territory now known as Myanmar under their formal control. Upon independence, the Burmese state inherited this massive territory. As for the British though, attaining control of this vast territory for the independent state was a struggle – and a violent one at that. Once the ethnic insurgents had been quelled and pushed out of the central regions of the Lower Delta and Dry-Zone under Ne Win's BSPP, the long-running civil war increasingly turned to the peripheral zones, with forests being the site and subject of conflict. As with Myanmar's ocean space, particularly in the later struggle between State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and Karen National Union (KNU) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the battle concerned which of the state-like entities could assume the role of modern landed property and appropriate rent from the incoming Thai capital, that was seeking to evade environmental regulations on the Thai side of the border. Using the Thai loggers' roads, the expanded extraction in KNU-territory initially provided the means for a series of assaults by the Tatmadaw against the ethnic insurgents. Following these rounds of assaults, and once SLORC had been financially bailed out, the strategy towards the forests gradually shifted towards one of using conservation and the new financial sources made available through global conservation processes, rather than extraction, as a means to extend state space into the forests.

As the case from Mi Chaung Laung has shown, however, despite recent characterizations of a resulting "green territoriality" (Woods 2019), the central state's control even in what is seen as a best-case example by conservationists remains tenuous. As overt violence between KNU and the central government in Northern Tanintharyi – for now – has subsumed, villagers have become enrolled in the making of state space, as they from below facilitate territorialisation through their claiming of community forest plots, recognizing the central government's authority and/or through their receiving of land certificates in the same areas through the KNU, recognizing KNU-authority. Despite these opportunities for land, the most part of the village remains *de* facto landless, as they are unable to initiate production on the plots that are otherwise available to them. As a result, the villagers are struggling. For the moment, only 100 of the original 200 households have returned to Mi Chaung Laung. Yet following the signing of a ceasefire agreement between KNU and the Union Government in 2012, Karen villagers are beginning to return to Northern Tanintharyi. If more return to Mi Chaung Laung, under the same precarious situation that people returned to the village in 1997, what are they to do upon arrival? Meanwhile, largescale logging by both the Tatmadaw and KNU continues within the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve.

Despite the failure of the Protected Area (PA) model on both social and ecological terms, the National League for Democracy-government is entrenching this approach to conservation. The new Protection of Biodiverstiy and Protected Area Law from 2018, further engrains the principles in the SLORC-era laws discussed above – most notably an increasing penalization of "trespassers" and shifting cultivators and a concomitant expansion of PAs. The targeted areas for this new law, again, centres on the peripheral zones, now defined as Key Biodiversity Areas. For villagers on the ground that end up being the ones most impacted by the ensuing rules and regulations – while crony concessions continue to be granted – the persistence of the PA-model is puzzling. As a villager living in the Hukawng valley in Kachin State, site of the world's largest tiger reserve initiated by the Wildlife Conservation Society that is now set to be expanded, noted "they say they like to conserve tigers, but the tigers have all disappeared! Why are they doing this?" (workshop-participant, Kachin State, 15.10.2018)

8. Landscapes of dispossession: summing up

> Capital strives to produce a geographical landscape favourable to its own reproduction and subsequent evolution. … How the landscape evolves affects capital accumulation as well as how the contradictions of capital and of capitalism are manifest in space, place and time. (Harvey 2014, 146-147)

In Lefebvre's (1991, 324) critique of contemporary social science scholarship, he notes that in their schema, "the space of social practice is imperceptible." For this dissertation, Lefebvre's contention still holds true for the most recent wave of dispossession studies framed in terms of a global resource rush reviewed in Chapter 2. This dissertation therefore contributes an analysis of one of the hotspots in today's global resource rush based on a Lefebvrian emphasis on the production of space, in combination with a multiscalar class analysis. It has sought to embed particular instances of dispossession by enclosure within a much broader analysis of the underlying political economic processes that constitute such phenomena. Thereby, the analysis demonstrates how any "grab" is just one particular moment in an ongoing process of the production of space. Momentarily striking occurrences of dispossession by enclosure have to be grasped in relation to the more mundane, but no less crucial, processes of dispossession by differentiation. Such an analysis has practical and political implications in struggles against resource grabs in that it points to the common underlying dynamics and drivers of what may otherwise appear as separate and distinct phenomena. In this sense, the dissertation sought to shed light on the wider social relations of production, albeit with the Lefebvrian injunction in mind: that is, to explain how these social relations take spatial form, giving them a degree of permanence in the material landscape that is continuously produced and contested by diverse social forces across scales. The analysis, following the historical-geographical materialist approach outlined in Chapter 3, pursued a "detailed inspection of the individual

instance" (Harvey 2006b, 87) of resource appropriation, as it played out in Northern Tanintharyi in Myanmar.

Each of the preceding empirical chapters has been structured to address the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, but in this conclusion, I wish to revisit the questions sequentially: 1) *What are the relations between the production of Northern Tanintharyi and Myanmar's contemporary political economic transition?* 2) *How have forces of primitive accumulation and state spatial strategies come together in Northern Tanintharyi since 1988?* And 3) *are processes of rural class differentiation unfolding at village scale across Northern Tanintharyi, and if so, how?* The chapter closes by more explicitly integrating the dynamics from the three villages across Northern Tanintharyi to buttress the concept of landscapes of dispossession.

From 1988 onwards, the Northern Tanintharyi landscape underwent a profound spatial transformation that was constituted by and constitutive of Myanmar's state-mediated capitalist transition. This was part and parcel of broader geopolitical and geoeconomics shifts across Southeast Asia. After persistent failures at instigating industrial development through state-led import-substitution since independence and in the context of a wider political and economic crises, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) shifted towards a model based on rampant extraction of natural resources. Instead of mainly relying on taxation of the peasantry, as it had done until then, this ushered in a new model of revenue generation: welcoming in foreign direct investment. SLORC then appropriated a portion of the incoming foreign capital's profits from this extraction in the form of rent, assuming, in Marxian terms, the class function of modern landed property. In the Northern Tanintharyi landscape, this was achieved in the early 1990s firstly by fishing and timber concessions to Thai capitalists, which secured an immediate influx of foreign exchange to the regime. These concessions would subsequently be economically dwarfed by a much larger project of facilitating the development of three gas pipelines, slicing across the contested landscape into Thailand. All of this hinged on processes of primitive accumulation, leading to an uneven dispossession of villagers and an ongoing commodification of the social relations of production. This was accompanied by the formation of state space as Northern Tanintharyi had until then not been under control of the military regime. Furthermore, it implicated different resources in the landscape: fisheries, offshore gas, agricultural land and forests.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, ocean space became a site of struggle between SLORC and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) over who would assume the class function of modern landed property, vis-à-vis Thai fisheries

and transnational gas companies. Where the EAOs could initially challenge SLORC over the appropriation of rent from commercial Thai fisheries through their makeshift naval force, SLORC gradually outmanoeuvred them at sea and on land. Once insurgents had been crushed and the landscape secured, this made way for the subsequent gas pipelines linking offshore gas blocs with power plants in Thailand. After the first couple of years of its rule, SLORC was no longer reliant on the immediate influx of rent that the fishing concessions had ensured. It therefore shifted benefits from fisheries in ocean space away from the Thai fleet in order to support the development of what would become known as Myanmar's crony capitalists. For a few of these, fisheries provided a springboard into accumulation across a range of other sectors. In Daminseik village, these dynamics manifested themselves in a gradual reduction of available space for small-scale fisheries – as villagers would otherwise face demolition of their equipment by the encroaching large-scale fleet – as well as dwindling fish stocks.

For SLORC and the gas companies, the land that villagers had until then used for food production through shifting cultivation was of little worth itself, but control of the space was paramount to secure the flow of gas to Thailand. Prior to any such flow, however, EAOs had to be violently quelled and villagers had to be divorced from their means of subsistence and production. The initial influx of payments from the gas companies handily provided funds to greatly expand the size of the army and additional troops were freed up through ceasefires in the Northern part of the country meaning that the EAOs in and around Northern Tanintharyi – the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Karen National Union (KNU) – could be picked off in conjuncture with each other. As with fisheries, a few cronies also secured a cut in this process. Ohn Pin Kwin became the location of one of the key military bases, as well as all three gas company operation centres. Many of the villagers were recruited as slave labour in the building of the pipelines and related infrastructure. Today, a shift towards petty capitalist commodity production have left villagers to fight over the leftovers from the spoils of the gas companies and the military.

As elsewhere in KNU-territory, the forests in Northern Tanintharyi became sites of competing extraction projects between SLORC and KNU. However, once the pipeline project was planned, as with land, the forests were primarily something to be passed through by the pipelines. Eventually, spurred on by Unocal, the forested landscape became a site of conservation and enclosure, from which people and their former practice of shifting cultivation had to be removed. Following the pivotal offences against KNU in 1997, this led to the

Tanintharyi Nature Reserve (TNR) and the TNR Project, financed by the gas companies. The funds in the TNR Project were to bolster particularly the Forest Department's ability to assert control in the forest areas around the pipeline. Yet, in Mi Chaung Laung, while villagers certainly felt the wrath of the military in the 1990s, the state space of the union government through the TNR remains tenuous. The state space of the Union Government is significantly curtailed by the competing and countervailing spatial strategy of the KNU. Nonetheless, following the first round of violent primitive accumulation that Mi Chaung Laung villagers experienced in 1992, when villagers were relocated and dispossessed of their historical access to the forested landscape, things have been difficult upon return – for those that have managed to return, that is.

This violence-imbued production of space in Northern Tanintharyi under SLORC was therefore part and parcel of the regime's spatial strategy to outmanoeuvre the KNU and the NMSP, while simultaneously, in landlord fashion, facilitate an expanding accumulation of capital from which the state could appropriate rent. After decades worth of failed industrialization attempts and a stagnant agricultural sector that had been strangled over the same period, SLORC had few other options, if the regime was to economically survive. These connected political and economic goals dovetailed with the Thai state's regional geopolitical and geoeconomic "fixes" that were sought in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s on behalf of Thai capital. As Arrighi (1994, 35) poignantly remarks, "[h]istorically, the capitalist and the territorial logics of power have not operated in isolation from one another but in relation to one another, within a given spatio-temporal context." Additionally, this reordering of space also facilitated the symbiotic relation between the state and the emerging crony capitalists in Myanmar, which were enlisted in the state's spatial strategy.

Resonating with calls to challenge the myth of undifferentiated local communities, the dissertation's second sub-research question sought to unravel how these acts of dispossession by enclosure were mediated through and interacted with existing social relations of production and hence intersected with processes of rural class formation and differentiation. In Daminseik, a gradual squeeze on boat owners' profits was generated by ocean space enclosures combined with new flows of capital and labour enveloping the village. This drove boat owners to institute a new hiring and wage system that was formalized through contracts. The contract system set in place a tiered and gendered wage remuneration and consolidated a gendered and generational division of labour. While this has made it difficult for labourers, boat owners

for their part struggle with indebtedness to merchants and a steadily dwindling catch. Consequently, all boat owners that are able to, are transitioning out of fisheries into rubber production.

This response of transitioning from fishing to petty capitalist rubber production, however, intersects and interacts with dynamics further inland. In Ohn Pin Kwin, people have been differentiated according to their access to the main means of production: land. With the enclosure of significant tracts of land and the tin and tungsten mining site, people were differentially forced into petty capitalist agricultural production, which all of the remaining lands has become oriented towards. Consistent with developments across Myanmar in the 1990s and 2000s, the crop of choice was rubber – further spurred on by the technical support that Total's CSR-project offered in the 2000s. The subsequent proliferation of rubber gardens across Ohn Pin Kwin has led to a significant differentiation, where a handful have over 100-acres of land and have become regional merchants in the rubber trade. Another group of 20 or so households that have above ten acres, hire labour and/or have transitioned out of agriculture through other businesses, as a network of new roads opened up Ohn Pin Kwin. However, the clear majority of smallholders with less than ten acres and the landless are struggling to make ends meet. The small landholders are clinging on to their land, but with the decline in rubber prices, the future in Ohn Pin Kwin may hold yet more concentration of land if the small landholders are forced to distress sell. Amongst the landless labourers, the big source of segmentation is whether or not they have managed to gain stable employment in rubber plantations, or if they are precariously left to do odd jobs, usually related to other cash crops, in combination with what small-scale mining they can still manage.

Finally, in Mi Chaung Laung, the intra-village class differentiation was less clear-cut than in the other two villages. Nonetheless, a notable differentiation process is whether or not villagers are able to benefit from the land that is physically and *de jure* still accessible to them through either the government-led community forestry program or through land concessions given by the KNU – both in the TNR. A few of the hundred households in the village have managed to accumulate some capital by accessing non-farm income in combination with attaining lands for production in the years when they returned to the village after 1997. This was prior to the community forestry program setting in, where there was still no TNR authority and the villagers could practice shifting cultivation and access forest products for their own reproductive needs. For the most part though, now that villagers are not able to access the forest to the same extent to produce for their immediate own

consumption through shifting cultivation, they rely on nearby shops for their basic commodities. Today villagers therefore need money in their hands. For those not able to benefit from the *de jure* access to land, this necessitates wage labour. Despite the land being accessible in a way that it is not in Ohn Pin Kwin, the majority in the village are *de facto* landless, and with wage labour opportunities still scarce, they are barely surviving.

The dynamics across these villages are part of a broader struggle over the shape and structure of Myanmar's political economy,

> [T]he sociospatial relations of contemporary society are produced and transformed through a perpetual, conflict-laden interaction among opposed spatial strategies. Whereas the state and capital attempt to 'pulverize' space into a manageable, calculable and abstract grid, diverse social forces simultaneously attempt to create, defend or extend spaces of social reproduction, everyday life and grassroots control. (Brenner & Elden 2009, 367)

Taking the sociospatial transformations in the three villages together and revisiting Figure 1, it becomes clear that the dynamics in each of these settings are not merely manifestations of disparate processes. Rather, they need to be understood in relation to each other as part of a remaking of the entire landscape in Northern Tanintharyi that was constituted by and constitutive of the state-mediated capitalist transition that unfolded from 1988 onwards. This transition implicated actors across scales from the state to villagers in a distinctly capitalist production of space through combined processes of dispossession by enclosure and dispossession by differentiation.

Through *dispossession by enclosure,* the landscape underwent a systematic reconfiguration in terms of its control and use. The landscape became increasingly oriented towards facilitating the capitalist extraction of a range resources – particularly fish, gas and timber (the latter later deemed the object of conservation). In this manner, the Northern Tanintharyi landscape gave spatial form to new capitalist social relations as the landscape and the people herein became differentially integrated into Myanmar's extractive form of development and broader regional and global circuits of labour, commodities and capital. Across the three villages, the period from 1988 onwards was characterized by a series of interventions at the hands of the military regime seeking to "pulverize space", as Brenner and Elden evocatively put it, by violence and force. These interventions were aimed at producing state space in areas that had hitherto avoided state control. In the context of the noted economic crises in 1988 as well as the regional geopolitical shifts that were unfolding towards the end of the cold war, this control was an imperative for

the military regime in order to mediate productive capital's access to means of production. Moving concretely through distinct yet related sociospatial processes in Northern Tanintharyi, allowed for an empirical analysis of the role of the state from the colonial period up until today. Particularly from 1988 onwards, the state commanded a fundamental role in processes of surplus accumulation and appropriation by delivering use-values to capitalists and charging ground rent from them for doing so.

This role ushered in new scales of extraction and relations of production regarding a number of resources. However, dynamics around each of these resources, only make sense when they are understood in relation to each other and as constituent and constitutive parts of Myanmar's capitalist transition. Through continuous struggle with various ethnic armed organisations, the military regime came to assume the class function of modern landed property vis-à-vis foreign and local capital in relation to ocean, land and forest resources across the landscape. The chapters uncovered the conflictual relations and shifting allegiances between the military regime and various scales and organizations of capital (e.g. from transnational gas companies to Thai fisher and timber companies to Myanmar's cronies) in the post-1988 period. The history of this process was written in "letters of blood and fire" (Marx 1990, 875) in that it relied on violent extra-economic and state-enforced means leading to a form of accumulation from above where the immediate beneficiaries were the military-linked cronies and a host of foreign capitalists. Simultaneously, peoples' lives and livelihoods were transformed as the villages were increasingly penetrated by capitalist social relations of production. Analysed in these terms, the dynamics outlined in each of the three villages add up to a profound production of the entire Northern Tanintharyi landscape. The landscape thereby gave phenomenal form to the capitalist transition giving it a degree of what in Chapter 3 was described as "structured permanence" through the landscape. Capital locked into the landscape – spanning vastly different scales of capital from pipelines to rubber trees – exercises a coercive power on the landscape as it becomes increasingly geared toward the realization of value. This process serves to lock in the capitalist transition, making struggles to challenge this development model all the more difficult (if not impossible, see Borras (2019)).

In conjuncture with these eventful grabs through dispossession by enclosure, each of the chapters also showed how processes of class differentiation unfolded within and between the three villages leading to *dispossession by differentiation*. One of the defining interventions in the literature on the global resource rush by Borras and colleagues (2012) excludes these mundane and

everyday processes of dispossession by differentiation and instead hones in on dispossession by enclosure. This research however has sought to show how new inequalities have arisen across sectors, also at the village scale. This is in keeping with what Li (2011, 285) describes as "the 'everyday' processes of accumulation and dispossession among smallholders that roll on relentlessly". The particular moment of grabbing related to the building of gas pipelines, intermeshed with centuries long processes of gradual commodification of the social relations of production. With the socio-ecological impacts of the enclosures of different resources, the role of the market for villagers across Northern Tanintharyi is gradually moving from an opportunity to an imperative, signifying a new "historical dynamic" (Wood 2009, 52) for the increasingly differentiated villagers. In this manner, the chapters sought to show the analytical importance of not just the particular instance or moment of grabbing, but both what came before and after that moment, as part of the production of the landscape over time and across scales.[33] This is critical to understanding the multiscalar functioning of capital in the global resource rush from the international through the national down to the village and household scale.

These dynamics at village scale, presented by sector consecutively through the chapters, should also not be seen in isolation from each other, but through relational, processual and historical analysis uncovering cumulative and interacting dynamics across the landscape. Displaying some of these dynamics, a merchant capitalist engaged in the fishing sector in Daminseik in the 1990s, has today become one of the largest landholders and rubber merchants in Ohn Pin Kwin. Or how, in the face of plummeting fish stocks, anyone who can is fleeing the fisheries sector in Daminseik in order to buy land and pursue rubber production instead. Similarly, as opportunities to survive in the forested areas of Northern Tanintharyi become more and more difficult with the spatial expansion and more rigorous enforcement of protected areas, what are differentiated villagers to do but stake out new claims for land to the West, where the Karen villagers were otherwise pushed out by the military from the early 1990s? Indeed, news reports are already coming out about such trends being exacerbated by the return of internally displaced Karens as well as Karen refugees from Thailand (Frontier 2019).

These everyday processes of accumulation and dispossession – in relation to the profound reordering of space by state and capital since 1988 – are

[33] This is, moreover, also consistent with the basic principles that Oya (2004, 289) outlines for a "sensible treatment of the agrarian question and processes of rural class formation".

therefore also critical in order to understand the production of landscapes of dispossession. Differentiated people become implicated in this production, as they "struggle to produce 'spatial fixes' more aligned to their own interests, needs, and desires" (Mitchell 2012, 168). By grappling with the complexity of the ensuing social relations of production in the villages, the preceding chapters have uncovered the multiscalar and uneven nature of this reordering of space. The analysis therefore challenges the myth of homogenous peasantries (see Chapter 2) that pervade contemporary policy and political debates in Myanmar. Even across this relatively small geographical space of Northern Tanintharyi, the whether and how of class differentiation varies significantly, clarifying the continued prescience of Mamdani's (1987, 211) point that "differentiation proceeds by multiple routes that are historically and socially specific." The multiple routes notwithstanding, the chapters showed that this onslaught of differentiation and hence dispossession across the landscape *is* the case.

This reality on the ground in rural Myanmar belies the promises that the orthodox development paradigm makes, whereby intensified commoditization of rural land and labour and the deepening of competition amongst rural producers is expected to lead to the "transition of the rural population into higher paying jobs" (World Bank 2008, 18). In the Northern Tanintharyi landscape of dispossession, previous modes of existence, where non-market forms of ensuring reproduction of lives were still possible, have been all but wiped out and yet the "higher paying jobs" are hard to come by. Unless, that is, through joining the legions of others in regional urban centres, where the dispossessed labouring classes are drawn into brutal and fierce competition for survival (Davis 2006). The relentless thrust of these forces implicating a myriad of different actors across scales, presents significant challenges to any type of political project striving for a more just form of development. Such projects must contend with and confront existing landscapes of dispossession and push for an alternative politics of geography that puts the lives of rural working peoples at the centre.

Epilogue: Revisiting the politics of geography

In closing, I want to reflect on what I see as the political implications of the analysis developed in this dissertation. So far, I imagine, it has not made for a particularly light or optimistic read. The Northern Tanintharyi landscape of dispossession poses considerable difficulties for any projects for political transformation.

While not providing a comforting read, understanding the complex realities for rural populations on the ground is axiomatic for any form of organized opposition and resistance that, crucially, is taking place. Faced with incredibly difficult circumstances, burgeoning social movements addressing questions of land, water, resource and conservation grabs are confronting elements of the implications of the current extractive development model across the country. The landscape approach deployed in this dissertation, however, challenges these movements to think beyond individual resources and sectors or individual localized cases and instead analyse the cumulative and interactive nature of different interventions into the landscape across scales. In other words, teasing out the relations and dynamics surrounding multiple sectors and resources spanning e.g. mining, conservation, agricultural production, fisheries and energy as they intersect in particular landscapes. Furthermore, beyond focusing purely on the momentous cases of grabs, though these are surely important, it is paramount to grapple with the more mundane processes of change taking place across rural Myanmar as well. In so doing, beyond fighting the cause of those small-scale (and not so small) producers that still manage to cling onto means of production, it is important to not lose sight of the many who have already been dispossessed and are perhaps in the most precarious position. Historically, they have accounted for up to 50% of the rural population in the central areas of the country and with the spread of the combination of eventful and mundane dispossession throughout the minority-ethnic areas particularly from 1988 onwards, continue to increase in numbers also there. This is particularly prescient in light of the influx of internally

displaced peoples and refugees from Thailand seeking to return to spaces that may since have been taken over – be it by crony capitalists, Environmental NGOs or their former neighbours.

As the dissertation has showed, different visions around who gets what, where, and why and who loses where – Neil Smith's "politics of geography" (2003) – have particularly in the twentieth century been paramount in contending political forces' approaches to development in the country. Under the frame of opposing different resource grabs, such questions remain pivotal today for civil society groups in Myanmar. Thus, a wave of impressive reports by local CSOs now waging contentious politics[34] within Myanmar have highlighted the impacts of *inter alia* coal mining, Special Economic Zones, coercive conservation, palm oil concessions and military grabs (e.g. DDA 2014, Tarkapaw et al. 2016, TRIPNET 2018). Especially in Tanintharyi, initial steps have been taken to foster dialogue amongst groups working across these seemingly separate issues – that is, initial steps toward thinking in landscape terms.[35] The challenge, of course, is to organize and mobilize rural peoples differentiated into classes of labour along lines of gender, generation and ethnicity and finding the right scale at which to do so. The perils of not doing so are becoming increasingly clear. The issue of energy – also forming a backdrop for the politics of geography in Northern Tanintharyi – is instructive.

One of the foremost struggles and successes of the emerging CSO-driven contentious politics in recent years, revolved around the controversial megaproject of a series of dams financed by Chinese capital along the Myitsone river in central Myanmar. Following civil society campaigns and concerns around relations to China, the quasi-civilian government of President Thein Sein suspended the project in September 2011. This raised hopes of the increased responsiveness of the government after decades of military rule. However, the neoliberal development model that is being entrenched in these years has implications for any government in charge – democratic or not. Thus, while this particular dam project remains suspended, in the context of the rising demand for energy across the country – a corollary of the development model – new projects proliferate elsewhere. These are actively being spurred on by

[34] Here defined following Sidney Tarrow (2011, 4) as "what happens when collective actors join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents around their claims or the claims of those they claim to represent."

[35] While I was doing my fieldwork, this work was especially organized by local CSOs involved in the MOSAIC action-research project. For more on this, see: https://www.iss.nl/en/research-projects/climate-change-politics-land-grabbing-and-conflict-fragile-states

donor institutions as the prerequisite to enticing investment into the country. As the head of the World Bank's Myanmar Office recently put it, "[o]nly when the government can fulfill the electricity requirements can it practically invite foreign investors" (quoted in Thomas 2019).

Therefore, while the blocking of dams on the Myitsone river remains a key victory for civil society and an impressive campaign is consolidating itself to uphold the suspension ahead of the 2020 national elections, other dam projects are being implemented elsewhere (e.g. in the Tanintharyi river) with similar socio-ecological implications for people there (see Candle Light et al. 2019). Displaying the multiscalar intersections, several of the dams in the Tanintharyi river are to provide power for the industries to be located in the nearby Dawei Special Economic Zone, which is itself a driver of land grabbing. The Dawei SEZ is, in turn, to be a key node in the Southernmost economic corridor of the Asian Development Bank's Greater Mekong Subregion that is fuelling all manner of resource grabs across the region (Thame 2017). As has been touched on in the above, other energy sources – herein the Liquified Natural Gas power plants as well as new projects around solar energy – are now also being developed. These are explicitly framed as the solution to the increasing public awareness and resistance to the environmental, social and geopolitical consequences of hydro powered energy (currently accounting for two thirds of the energy production). In this manner, contemporary resistance campaigns are not adequately addressing the fundamental challenges (in this case energy) at the core of the particular struggles they are waging across the country (in this case specific dams). The successful blocking of the Myitsone project leads to new energy projects elsewhere. It is only by understanding the underlying drivers and their particular manifestations across multiple scales that an effective response strategy can be developed. These examples around energy also show how the politics of geography is deeply interconnected across time and space tying particular landscapes within Myanmar, across the region and globally to each other.

The implication is to rigorously think through the spatial dynamics of the political economy of capitalist development in Myanmar today and develop strategies accordingly. Particularly in Myanmar, where the politics of geography for decades have been front and centre in (violent) struggles over the shape and structure of the political economy, it is imperative that social forces claiming to carry forward the interests of rural people, think in terms of how space could be produced in a different way. Initial inspiring attempts at this are on the way – e.g. the Salween Peace Park implemented by Karen State-based CSOs and the KNU. Organised around a people-centered approach

initially to managing the Salween river, through the subsequent bottom-up process, it evolved into a much broader process "beyond mere management of resources, but to address issues of militarization, conflict, displacement, resource capture, and destructive development and through this contribute to conflict transformation." (KESAN 2019) The question is whether and how such struggles can be shared across currently prevailing ethnic divides, scaled up (or down), and inspire action in other parts of the country, avoiding the pitfalls of campaigns that even when successful merely shift resource grabs around to the spaces of least resistance.

It is my hope that the conceptual framework developed here and the empirical insights gathered through the analysis can contribute to the production of a landscape in Northern Tanintharyi and across Myanmar not just *by* the labour power of the people there, but also *for* them. A first step in that production, however, is clearly understanding the significant forces that any such project is up against. As noted by David Harvey some thirty-five years ago, such a people's geography, should not be

> based on pious universalisms, ideals and good intents, but [must be] a more mundane enterprise […] that faithfully mirrors the complex weave of competition, struggle and cooperation within the shifting social and physical landscapes … The world must be depicted, analyzed and understood not as we would like it to be but as it really is" (Harvey 1984, 7).

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