MOVING

AROUND

MYANMAR

Migration in, from, and back to Burma

edited by

Tony Waters
Ashley South
Chayan Vaddhanaphuti
Luke Corbin

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Foreword

This edited volume features nine articles, many originally prepared for the 2021 International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies (ICBMS 3), the latest of three Burma/Myanmar studies conferences co-organized by Chiang Mai University (CMU). While all three conferences, ICBMS 1 (2015), ICBMS 2 (2018), and ICBMS 3 (2021), constituted milestones in advancing knowledge on Myanmar's changing society, culture, politics, economics, and environment, each conference had a particular character, owing to the political circumstances in the country at the time.

ICBMS 1 was held in July 2015 at CMU and had as its theme, "Burma/Myanmar in Transition: Connectivity, Changes and Challenges", mirroring the country's increasing opening to the international community. Myanmar's transition from a military dictatorship to a civilian government was spurring hopes that democracy would be reestablished and the peace process would move forward. At this time, unprecedented social, political and economic spaces were opening up across the country. ICBMS 1 created opportunities for us to learn from Burmese academics and students about Myanmar's society, its efforts at democratization, ethnic politics, economic reforms, as well as its growing integration into the global world. For many participants from Myanmar, ICBMS 1 was the first time they attended and exchanged knowledge at an international conference. The event sparked national, regional and international networks and further academic collaboration, especially between CMU and the University of Mandalay.

ICBMS 2 was organized in February 2018 at the University of Mandalay, reflecting the growing capacity and competence of Burmese universities to arrange international conferences, to develop vibrant research communities, and to foster cooperation and exchange with foreign institutions. Under the civilian-led government in Myanmar, an encouraging academic environment with new research agendas and programs had emerged, and the university and education system

was steadily developing. A large number of Burmese scholars attended ICBMS 2, mirroring their great interest in research and academic exchange. The event highlighted the clear progress that Burma studies had made over the past years and contributed to an expanding body of knowledge on Burma-related topics. The event also fostered academic skills among young and mid-level scholars from Myanmar by encouraging interaction and discussion with international scholars.

ICBMS 3 in March 2021 was held despite unprecedented challenges. Both Myanmar and Thailand were hit by the global COVID-19 pandemic and its severe health and societal impacts. On top of that, the event was overshadowed by the 1 February 2021 coup d'état in Myanmar which prompted nationwide protests, brutal violence and repression, arbitrary detentions and the ongoing killing of hundreds of civilians. This tragic development posed and continues to pose a great threat to scholars from Myanmar and the new research collaborations that had started to develop over recent years. Most of the scholars from Burma decided to withdraw from ICBMS 3, while others still wanted to present their papers despite the dangers and risks. CMU as the organizing institution proceeded with the conference, as our responsibility is to affirm and support academic freedom, particularly in times of political crisis and violence, and to provide a space for academics and others to discuss emerging issues and voice their concerns. In the run-up to ICBMS 3, we had organized a pre-conference workshop (PCW) for junior and mid-career researchers from Myanmar to improve their papers with the support of experts and senior scholars. We had assured ICBMS 3 and PCW participants that we would look for opportunities for them to publish their research.

We selected outstanding contributions to the ICBMS3 and the PCW centering on different aspects of migration in, from and back to Burma for this edited volume. Mobility and its links to conflict and human rights abuses, economic factors, environmental change, and natural resource exploitation are central and timely issues in the context of Burma, where migration patterns are constantly evolving and changing, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and

the February 2021 coup. Through the efforts of this volume's Executive Editors, Ashley South, Tony Waters and Luke Corbin, we worked with our Myanmar colleagues, some of whom were unable to present at ICBMS 3, to deliver their stimulating papers to a wider audience. This book ensures their unique perspectives on migration choices, experiences and trajectories are honored and integrated into academic discussions and receive the attention they deserve.

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, PhD
Director, RCSD

Abbreviations

EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KII	Key Informant Interview
MMK	Myanmar Kyat
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
THB	Thai Baht
USD	US Dollar
WASH	safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
YED	Yadanasein Education Development

Acronyms

AAC	Aid Alliance Committee for Myanmar Workers
AASYC	All Arakan Students and Youths Congress
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ATIPD	Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division
ATP	Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law
ATTF	Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force
CPB	Communist Party of Burma

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DBA	Dear Burma Academy
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
HKACM	Hong Kong Association of Christian Missions
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KDA	Karen Dana Association
KMT	Kuomintang
KNU	Karen National Union
LEAD	Women's leadership, Empowerment and Development
LRPN	Labor Rights Promotion Network
LUC	Land use Certificate
MCDC	Mandalay City Development Committee
MOHS	Ministry of Health and Sports
MRCS	Myanmar Red Cross Society
MSWRR	Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement
MWAF	Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation
MYPO	Mon Youth Progressive Organization
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
PYO	Pa-O Youth Organization
TIPR	Trafficking in Persons Report
TRI	Transnational Institute
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Note on Terminology

Prior to 1989, the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia was exclusively known internationally as "Burma," the name that British colonizers used after they consolidated the central plains and previously autonomous mountainous regions in the mid-1800s in reference to the country's largest ethnic group, the Burman. The international use of "Myanmar" to refer to the country dates only to 1989, when the country's unelected military rulers of the time announced the change of the nation's name to *Myanmar naing-ngan*.

In addition, the official names of many ethnic groups, regions, cities, and villages were also changed, including that of the former capital from "Rangoon" to "Yangon."

The name changes were purportedly an effort on the part of the military regime to remake Burma into a more inclusive, multiethnic country, and to cast off vestiges of the colonial era. However, many critics pointed out that these changes failed to address the root causes of problematic Burman/ethnic minority relations, and historians have shown that both "Burma" and "Myanmar" were used prior to British administration. In addition, the use of "Myanmar" in English presents a grammatical challenge, as there is no conventional adjective form.

While international organizations such as the United Nations and Amnesty International have adopted the use of "Myanmar," journalistic, activist, and academic convention in much of the world continues to favor the use of "Burma," although usage patterns continue to evolve. For this volume, the decision of whether to use pre- or post-1989 "official" names has been left entirely to the authors, and in most instances the names are used interchangeably with no intended political implications.

Moving Around Myanmar:

Migration in, from and back to Burma

Tony Waters & Ashley South

1. Introduction

The chapters featured in this volume were originally prepared in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic but before the February 1, 2021 military coup in Myanmar, for presentation at the 3rd International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies at Chiang Mai University on March 5-7, 2021. At the conference, many of the sessions were held online via the Zoom platform, due to COVID-19 restrictions and the travel difficulties encountered by participants. Numerous panels and papers with sensitive political content were withdrawn. Thus, only half of the panel proposals and around one fourth of the individual paper presentations took place.

In the context of the coup, many people who submitted excellent papers were not able to formally present. In the end, two of the nine papers in this volume were actually presented and two were submitted but not presented. The other five were produced in the context of a pre-conference workshop conducted at Chiang Mai University earlier in 2020.

Holding much of the conference online allowed for more substantial participation from those in Myanmar and other countries around the world, albeit in a depressed situation. The papers were prepared by students, professors, NGO workers and researchers interested in Myanmar, with a majority of participants identifying as being from

Myanmar or from the Burmese diaspora. There were also several participants from Thailand and other Asian countries, North America, Europe and Oceania. As the February 1 military coup occurred just one month before the conference, it was front of mind for all participants who were able to attend, even though the papers presented were based on research from before the coup and the coup itself was not formally addressed outside of the plenary sessions.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the coup have caused massive disruption to the Myanmar state, its society and economy. These disasters occurred during a period when the country's education system was emerging from decades of state-led repression in which the universities were viewed with skepticism and starved of financial resources. Since around 2011 academic freedom increased in Myanmar and significantly more resources became available for scholars and research institutions, with many areas opening up for research by both domestic and foreign researchers, often for the first time since the 1950s or even before independence. The chapters presented here represent a sample of the rich and varied research undertaken on migration, a phenomenon of huge and growing importance in Myanmar, in the years leading up to the 2021 coup.

Although migration was just one topic among a diverse range of presentations at the conference, the editors thought it important to maintain a thematic focus in this volume of conference papers. In the wake of the coup, many tens of thousands of people in Myanmar were freshly displaced into camps or forests from fighting, fled their migrant labor jobs in cities to their homes in the countryside, trekked to areas under control of ethnic armed organizations for combat training, or moved abroad temporarily to foreign countries. The movement patterns of Myanmar people in this turbulent time are likely to continue changing and this volume of chapters researched during the COVID-19 epidemic, but before the coup, is a crucial barometer on the state of Myanmar migration, and research on migration, for scholars going forward.

In terms of the chapters' methods, there is an emphasis on ethnographic observation and writing, which was cultivated by faculties of the University of Mandalay and Chiang Mai University, the joint

conference hosts. Other papers demonstrated survey techniques and legal analysis. The field research was often undertaken in difficult contexts, such as among returnees from China who arrived in Burma at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March-April 2020; in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps located in Karen National Union (KNU) territory in the southeast; and in conflict zones in the highlands of Shan State.

Rereading the papers post-coup is a strange experience. While previously the trajectory for scholarship in and on Myanmar appeared bright, it is now faltering. The period of 2011-2021 was a time when hibernating Myanmar universities began to reopen and expand and new institutions were founded. Significant streams of foreign capital helped university departments revitalize their faculties and led to new buildings, travel budgets, and other facilities. Many collaborative research projects with international scholars and NGOs were pioneered and "human research capacity" steadily improved. An influx of international NGOs took for granted that applied evaluation research was part of what they did-and took great interest in training Myanmar staff to participate.

This was a heady period in Myanmar academia, as graduate students and university faculty went into the field to systematically collect observations about Burma's peoples for the first time in half a century. They did this in both their own home regions/villages and also places in which they were the classic ethnographic outsider-including IDP camps in KNU territory, on the border with China in Muse, in highland villages, on the shores of the Ayeyarwady River in Mandalay and on remote tea plantations. Impressive research programs were established to encourage and mentor Burmese scholars in Yangon, Mandalay, Chiang Mai and elsewhere, and while less support was provided to institutions in ethnic nationality-populated areas of Myanmar, this was discussed and hoped for. The fruits of these developments are found in this volume.

2. Understanding Migration in Myanmar

There was a surfeit of impressive papers on the environment, religion, politics, and other subjects presented to us for consideration at the 2021 Burma Studies Conference, and as a result, this volume's focus on migration and ethnography is inevitably a compromise. However, migration is particularly interesting in a place like Myanmar. For centuries laws, regulations, and fears meant that the peoples in Myanmar were often fixed in place. During feudal times, the colonial period, and during the decades of military dictatorship, physical movement often required special permission, and in the case of international migration, difficult-to-obtain passports and visas. Movement certainly occurred, but it was often risky and clandestine, whether inside the country or outside. Since 2010 however, robust patterns of legal movement emerged, even as extra-legal movement continues. These papers cover a range, though certainly not all, of such circumstances.

The chapters in this volume mostly focus on push-pull theories of migration, an approach taught at programs in Myanmar and Thailand. This is indeed a good starting point for framing why people leave a place and where they go. Push-pull theory reflects the self-evident idea that migrants leave because problems emerge at home, and they move to places which offer employment opportunities for economic migrants and safety for refugees. For the vast majority of Burmese migrants during recent decades, this has meant leaving crowded rural areas where subsistence farming is no longer possible and human rights abuses are often widespread, and moving to urban areas where there are labor markets offering jobs as factory workers, service workers, and domestics.

Although push-pull theory is indeed an excellent starting point, there is also a broader demographic story going on. Demographic Transition theory, emerging from the writings of Professor Kingsley Davis after World War II, is used to describe well the relationship between falling mortality (i.e., rising life expectancy) with remaining high rural birth rates. In most countries there has been a period of rapid population growth in the countryside, with a result that agricultural land for

subsistence agriculture became scarce. In response, as the chapters in this book describe, migrants seek other work opportunities.

According to statistics by the United Nations, life expectancy in Myanmar increased as child health care improved, but before rural women stopped having as many children as in the past. This resulted in a surge in population growth which peaked in the 1970s. Women in Burma in the late twentieth century averaged 4-6 children per woman (United Nations Population Division, 2019). During this period, rural populations grew rapidly because women had more children that survived to adulthood. Only in recent years has population growth slowed down. The Demographic Transition in Myanmar is the wider context behind the urban migration that underpins many of the papers presented in this volume.

Myanmar has also developed rapidly economically since the 1990s, and especially after 2010, with its expanding population finding work in factories, the service sector and other areas. This occurred not only in Yangon and Mandalay but also in rapidly growing cities in neighboring countries. The push came from the countryside as arable land became insufficient to sustain large families using traditional subsistence agriculture. Nyunt Nyunt Win's article about rural Magway Region, Chapter 5 in this volume, illustrates this process most directly.

The beneficiaries of such rapid growth are the factories of Yangon, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, and other cities. There, the population began doubling every 20 years or so as the cities engaged with the global market economy, evidenced by the readily available population statistics of most Southeast Asian cities found in various national censuses. In this context, the young men and women coming of working age in rural Myanmar sought cash incomes that subsistence agriculture was not providing. In such a context, Southeast Asian cities began to absorb Myanmar's "excess labor" into their factories, as domestic help, and into enforced servitude.

In addition to these factors, the difficulty of maintaining basic human security in many parts of Myanmar has long been a driver of migration. In some parts of the country armed conflict became less widespread after 2012 and especially following the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire

Agreement. Nevertheless, particularly in rural areas, human rights abuses (including but not limited to land confiscation by well-connected individuals and companies) remained widespread, up to and beyond the February 2021 coup. Historically, such land confiscations, taken at the expense of subsistence peasants, is one of the great drivers of migration in Myanmar.

Over the past six decades, millions of people were forced to migrate within and from Myanmar in contexts of armed conflict and for basic human and economic security. Some remain within the country as IDPs, as per the United Nations' *Guiding principles on internal displacement* (Deng, 1998); others fled to neighboring countries as legal or de facto refugees. This includes at present over 100,000 ethnic nationality refugees spread along the Thailand-Myanmar border who live in camps and extra-legally in Thailand. Also following under the label "official refugees" are about one million Rohingya who fled Rakhine State for Bangladesh after 2011, but especially in 2017. Following the February 1, 2021 coup, at least a quarter of a million more people have been displaced, most of them remaining inside the country as IDPs (some fixed in place due to restrictions on entry to Thailand because of the COVID-19 pandemic).

In the macro-sociological story of the Demographic Transition are embedded the difficulties, moral dilemmas, anxieties, and legal difficulties that migrants experience and which are highlighted in these papers. Migration typically occurs in a context of inequality, in which the impoverished new immigrants seek to establish a place for themselves in an unfamiliar area. As noted above, these issues are exacerbated by the lack of opportunities (and often abuses) experienced by rural communities, especially in conflict-affected areas like much of Myanmar.

The urban factory owners and middle classes take advantage of this situation by hiring cheap factory and household workers. Brothel owners do it too. Ironically, such developments are often accompanied by a degree of xenophobia in the destination country, which frames the "outsiders" as posing a threat to social order and national identity, particularly in times of tension. The logic of xenophobia is embedded in the papers published here, including the accounts of "wife"

trafficking to China written by Nita and the accounts of Bangkok factory workers by Robinne. These narratives are of course much more poignant than just abstract stories of "push and pull" or "demographic transition." They are stories of how individuals deal with the vagaries of international and national legal systems designed not just to create order, but to protect the preexisting rights of the powerful.

3. The Nine Chapters

The first chapter by Aryuwat Raruen is about refugees and how they made decisions to "return" (or not) to Myanmar from UNHCR-sponsored refugee camps first established in Thailand in the early 1980s. As the chapter describes, the camps were in practice managed by refugees themselves, with a consortium of international NGOs providing food, shelter, education and other forms of assistance. It was only in the new millennium that the Thai authorities allowed UNHCR to become involved beyond occasional visits. Nevertheless, the UNHCR tripartite typology of "durable solutions" provides context. The UNHCR asserts that under ideal circumstances, refugees return voluntarily to their home countries where citizenship rights are restored; acquire residency rights in the country to which they flee; or are resettled in a third country. Under this UNHCR doctrine, 'Local Integration' in Thailand was rare because of the reluctance of the Thailand government to grant official residency.

UNHCR did however facilitate the official voluntary return of a very small number of refugees to Myanmar. As Raruen describes, voluntary return is in fact a surprisingly complex decision, much more complex than is assumed by the official UNHCR programs. Voluntary return is hemmed in by the norms of International Refugee Law, UNHCR's tripartite "durable solution" straitjacket, the international borders between Thailand and Burma, and most importantly the frustrations of youth who grew up in refugee camps unprepared for life in contemporary Myanmar. In this context a de facto fourth "durable solution" emerges, at least for the refugees in Thailand, which is shaped by the refugee youth themselves. For example, Raruen relates how youth in the camps are concerned about the problem of receiving

accredited education. This is difficult in the Karen refugee camps in Thailand as the local education systems (under the KNU and other EAOs) provide child-centered education in Karen languages that is unrecognized by the Thailand and Myanmar government accreditation regimes. In addition, many areas for potential refugee return are not even controlled by the Myanmar government, but by the KNU or other EAOs, and are often contaminated with landmines. The theoretical portion of Raruen's paper is interesting too: the author writes in the tradition of philosopher Giorgio Agamben and others who write about the inherently liminal status of refugees.

The second chapter by François Robinne is about the Bangkok neighborhoods where Burmese migrants/workers/refugees live in ethnic enclaves of the massive metropolis. The essay is a meditation on the precarious situation of the people Robinne met there. He seeks to explain how they understand their situation and adapt to the legal and economic conditions there. This paper is more theoretical in its ethnographic approach, reflecting on how such territories socialize and de-socialize the migrant Burmese. A strength of the paper is its use of French-language sources, which provides a different perspective for English, Thai and Burmese-speaking scholars. Robinne also includes glosses of relevant Thai and Burmese words that migrants use to describe the liminal position in Bangkok. This is a welcome perspective in a discipline in which English is the dominant language.

Chapter 3, by Lei Shwe Sin Myint and Sandar Aung, is about the high mobility of women in the Ta'ang areas of Northern Shan State. The dynamic is peculiar: Ta'ang (Palaung) women of Kyushaw Village who would traditionally participate in the annual April tea harvest leave the region to pursue year-round wage labor. Some engage in work like charcoal making in northern Burma but most go to China where higher wages are available in factories and other workplaces. The jobs in China provide year-round cash, while labor on the family tea farm is for just a few months, after which daughters are engaged in housework for the rest of the year. In the traditional economy, this labor is unpaid. The result is that there are few young adults, male or female, in the village because most have left to seek cash wages. But how is the tea to be harvested? There is still an intense demand for labor during the months of the tea harvest, which - at least during

times of peace (which sadly has been absent from most Ta'ang areas for many years) - is filled by Burmese women from the lowlands. Ironically, the Burmese women are not paid in cash for their labor, but with a share of the harvested crop and with food. They then sell the tea on the open market for cash. Much of the explanations offered by the Burmese migrant women refer to the need for cash - just like the sons and daughters who went to China, and whose jobs the Burmese women are picking up. The end of the article leaves us wondering how long the traditional system of tea cultivation will last-will it wither due to the declining access to skilled tea picking labor?

The fourth chapter by Nita is about the trafficking of women from Myanmar to Thailand and China. Nita teaches at the law school at Dawei University and as a result there is an emphasis in this article on relevant statutes governing labor migration. Nita reviews the grey literature, international conventions and Myanmar laws and policies with respect to human trafficking. She compares such laws with traditional law/norms of the Myanmar highlands for marriage, as well as the laws in China which do not recognize the nuances of international law against trafficking. It is a complicated legal question. In the case of Myanmar women, the biggest traffic seems to be for "brides" in China, followed by women trafficked in to sex work in Thailand. Much of Nita's information comes from the Women's Development Center in Yangon, where she did interviews with the supervising staff, and others. In particular, she shares the stories of two returned Myanmar women who were trafficked to China as brides. They worked through a Chinese legal system which saw them as illegal migrants, managing to be finally returned to the Center in Yangon. The overview of the literature, including the emphasis on law, provides an important context for understanding how trafficking and the control of trafficking work on the ground.

Chapter 5 by Nyunt Nyunt Win is about the macro-processes of agrarian change. This process is observed from a small place - Kyaw Village Tract (since classified as a Town), Gangaw Township, Magway Region. The area is in the highlands, with hillside swidden rice cultivation being the traditional means of production, along with livestock and forest products. Ownership rights of land, hunting rights, etc., were all informal, and unregistered in any formal central

office. The Yaw population there also speaks a different version of the standard Burmese dialect. The traditional economy began changing only in 1992 after roads were built, and the government decided to develop the area. Perhaps the most important innovation was the demand that the farmers formalize land tenure arrangements. This led to the elimination of upland shifting agriculture, which has created greater pressure for agricultural land, and a land shortage for farmers now engaged in paddy agriculture for cash markets. A strong point of this paper is that the data collected (and translated from Burmese) comes from local and Land Office records. Survey data from the villagers is also included. The result is a rigorous look at a small place as the forces of modernization sweep in from the broader world.

The sixth chapter, by Sai Phyoe Zin Aung, asks why people living in Mahaungmyay Township of Mandalay left Northern Shan State to move to Mandalay City. The reasons seem to fit well with standard push-pull theories of migration. The pushes were especially the ongoing fighting in Northern Shan State, which meant that young men in particular were subject to conscription by EAOs that controlled or patrolled parts of Northern Shan State. The threat of conscription directly contributed to their departure. The pull though was economic: the opportunities for education and work were greater in Mandalay than in the north. In particular, the informants told the author that there were few opportunities for higher education in Shan State, compared to Mandalay.

Chapter 7 by Sandy Moe is also about migration from a 'sending' village - Kan Village, Myingyan Township in Mandalay Region, which has traditionally been a tobacco growing area. She explores how the village is affected by the departure of young people seeking jobs in Myanmar's cities as well as abroad in Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Japan. What are the push and pull factors and how do they affect the local sending society? The author found that, as with many such villages, there is a hollowing out of the youth population who for the last twenty years have been leaving for Myanmar's cities and abroad. This economic migration leads to remittances, which are often used by family members (often parents and grandparents) back home to purchase consumer goods. But there is a cost: the traditional tobacco crop is faltering in large part due to the declining availability of labor.

The eighth chapter by Stephen Zau Zin Myat has a more critical approach, analyzing the resistance of slum dwellers as they deal with displacement and urban poverty. *Theh Seik* (သဲဆိပ်) means "sand-docks" in Burmese and the paper studies an area on the Ayeyarwady River in Mandalay where sand dredgers work. The slum itself emerged in the 1970s to serve the dredging companies and included migrants from outside Mandalay. The work was originally done by hand but has since been mechanized. The Theh Seik area developed a reputation as "dangerous" as slums often do. The author characterizes a culture of *kine kyun hmi, kyun kine hmi* (ကိုင်းကျွန်းမှီ၊ ကျွန်းကိုင်းမှီ i.e. mutual dependence) in the community, focusing on the interdependence between slum dwellers, sand dredging entrepreneurs and formal residents outside the slums. This interdependence exists outside formal structures, including the formal titling of lands. In this context, the government, which would periodically organize evictions, has been viewed with hostility. Getting past this sense of liminality is what permitted some slum dwellers to join modern mainstream urban life in Mandalay. The author provides this analysis in the context of a nuanced understanding of the word "resistance", which is used to explore the interdependent relationships within The Seik and with the larger Mandalay municipality.

The ninth and final chapter by Thin Thin Aye raises the issues of national security and the role of migrant workers who returned to Myanmar following COVID-19 lockdowns in March-April 2020. This resulted in an influx of returning Myanmar people from Thailand in particular, but also from China and other countries as far away as the Middle East. The author was able to collect data as masses of Myanmar people returned from China into Muse District in Myanmar. There, the government authorities were challenged with providing the "COVID returnees" with housing and food, not to mention the need to move returnees back to their homes in the context of quarantines and other pandemic response measures. The paper that became this chapter was written in the immediate aftermath of these dramatic developments and as a result it has a more journalistic feel than the other chapters.

4. Conclusion

Most of the impressive chapters presented here emerged from a national university system with immense challenges. From 1962, and especially after 1988, universities in Burma were frequently closed and access was highly restricted. This changed a decade ago, when the Thein Sein government of 2011-2016, and then the National League for Democracy government of 2016-2021, had the confidence to begin reforming the education sector (including universities). These reforms encouraged faculty and students to pursue the postgraduate level inquiry that made books like the one you are holding possible.

Following the February 1 Myanmar military coup, and in the context of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, what will happen to the research careers of these chapter authors and their important research agendas? Myanmar's university sector is in a precarious position at the time of publication - both in relation to freedom of thought and study and also in relation to access. In this context, Chiang Mai University's ongoing support to scholars from and of Myanmar is particularly valuable. We trust that this volume will contribute to the dissemination of this support.

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The Camp and Refugee Agency: Repatriations on the Thailand-Myanmar Border

Aryuwat Raruen

Abstract

Refugees living in refugee camps possess a diverse set of experiences and skills and live in starkly differing socioeconomic situations. These experiences impact on their choices of destinations and strategies when refugees consider repatriation to their home country. This chapter discusses the agency of Myanmar refugees living in Thailand refugee camps when they consider new repatriation opportunities. The chapter is based on one part of the author's master's degree research project and employs interviews and participant observation. Based on preliminary findings, the study finds that refugees and refugee groups dealing with the question of repatriation have different backgrounds and face different situations when choosing to return: for example, some did not receive citizenship documents on their return. Other refugees remain undecided but are not just waiting for help in the camp - they are proactively working to find alternative ways to make their lives secure. Some refugees who repatriated to Myanmar in accordance with the UNHCR's durable solutions found that the skills they learned in the refugee camp were unsuited for their new living conditions. Some areas have limited work patterns, meaning limited options in the type of work they are able to find after return. This study

demonstrates that refugees cannot be conceived as a homogenous group. There are various factors that influence each individual case of repatriation such as adaptation and responses to the process of re-migration.

Keywords: refugees, returnees, livelihoods, borderland, Karen, Myanmar, agency, repatriation.

1. Introduction

I spoke with a refugee[1] youth Zaw Oo[2] (ဇော်ဦး) about his decision to continue his education at a high school in Mae Sot District (แม่สอด), Tak Province (ตาก), Thailand, where he hoped to pass and then be admitted to a university (Zaw Oo, personal communication, September 12, 2020). The education received in Thailand's border refugee camps is not recognized by Thai or Burmese education systems; it is ostensibly an obstacle, rather than pathway, for refugee students to continue into higher education. After spending more than 18 years in his camp, Zaw Oo, who is ethnic Karen (ကရင်), looked for ways to further his education by asking friends in and outside the camp. He realized he had to attend a school accredited by the state, so the General Education Development school program seemed to be his only path.

When I had the opportunity to sit and talk with Zaw Oo for more than half a day, he shared that he arrived at the camp with his parents at the age of seven because of conflict between the Burmese military, the Tatmadaw (တပ်မတော်), and Karen fighters in his village. During his early years in the refugee camp, most of the refugees were well-cared for regarding food, healthcare, and education. With a slight smile, Zaw Oo also said that his school in the camp had a foreign teacher who taught English. However, with growing numbers of refugees and a lack

1. This chapter refers to its study participants as refugees to reflect their self-definition. The State of Thailand refers to these people as "illegal aliens". The Thai government has not joined the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees.
2. Pseudonyms are used for study participants in this chapter to protect their identities. The names of the villages inside Myanmar referred to in this chapter have also been changed.

of funding, the situation in the camp changed. The political changes in Myanmar since 2010 led to a dwindling of direct aid to the camps on the Thai side of the border as some donors moved their operations inside Myanmar. Zaw Oo understood that this resulted in reduced levels of aid being distributed among all the refugee camps in Thailand.

In 2015, Zaw Oo recalled that there was an organization offering an option to return back to Myanmar, along with providing subsistence equipment and training to help prepare returnees for life there. At that time, Zaw Oo's parents said they did not want to return since the situation was still unstable. "There are still patches of fighting, and most importantly, there is no place to make a living. Even after we became refugees, we must always be prepared, listen to the news a lot, and think a lot", Zaw Oo's father said. The family decided to stay in the camp until 2019. By then, Zaw Oo had graduated from the camp's non-accredited post-ten school.[3] Even though he wanted to go for further studies, there were no accredited university options within the camp for him to pursue. As a result, Zaw Oo had to leave the camp to find a way to pursue a college education, even without any official identification documents.

The situation of people like Zaw Oo illustrates the dynamism of refugees and demonstrates that the refugee camps on the Thailand-Myanmar border are not merely places of temporary refuge from disasters and war. As the philosopher Giorgio Agamben points out, refugees that are outside of the nation-state become people without any legal protection or identity (2005). For Agamben, the 'camp' is a special area, a space of exception, where emergency rules are forced from outside on people who are seen as deserving only the barest of life. This means refugees are denied citizenship and membership in the larger politico-national project that is the nation-state. They are instead kept in vulnerable conditions without protection by any government.

Many Karen immigrants fled from their homes in Myanmar to live in another country (Tangseefa, 2003). After moving into a refugee camp, such people are stereotyped, becoming people without a name, people

3. Post-ten schools in the camps take different forms. Some are similar to Matthayom 5 and 6 in Thai schools, others specialize in a diploma level course.

who have lost their identity. Their individual sense of identity is no longer important to those outside the camp - they are simply a "refugee", not a political being with a bundle of rights and responsibilities. They are invisible outside the camp. This stereotyping prevents many refugees from reaching out for help.[4]

In this way, refugees in the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands are often perceived as passive, lacking potential and having no benefits to offer to Thai or Myanmar society. This perspective inhibits understanding the dynamics of being human, which is not solely defined by the confining structure of the camp. People are compelled to break the rules to seek a better way of life. In Pattarada Rittang's research at the Lee Saw Shee College,[5] a school in one of the camps, she points out that before the college was established, a strong sense of Karen nationalism was instilled into the young people at the school (2014). But when the teaching methods were modified in response to the requirements of the funding organization, there was a reduction in nationalist teaching because of the school's need to maintain good relationships with international Christian organizations. This shows that the camp area is a special area that does not have any one jurisdiction holding absolute power in it over time.

Instead, the camps are in constant change. For example, even under the pressure of eliminating the teaching of nationalism, some teachers from various schools find ways to build up allegiance to the Karen nation in the lessons depending on their experiences in the camp. In a similar vein, Jiraporn Laocharoenwong sees border areas as places where interactions take place between countries, people and networks, and reflects that refugee camps and border areas do not stand still, nor are they limited to a specific state (2016). Rather, the areas are flexible and dynamic causing competition and power struggles. Although the nature of the refugee camp is a confined area, it is always moving, connecting with people outside and across borders. This does not make refugees completely 'naked' as Decha Tangseefa claimed (2003),

4. See Turner (2016) for a full description of how refugees living in encampments in Africa reflect Agamben's ideas about "states of exception". This is also discussed briefly in the context of the Karen by Yeo et al. (2020).
5. Not the institution's real name.

but rather people are able to transform, move and integrate networks of power into refugee camp areas.

Using Anthony Gidden's theory of structure and agency (Puanghut, 2005), this paper focuses on the refugees leaving the camps who expressed a sense of agency to change their circumstances. The concept of agency cannot be separated from structure. There is an interplay between agency and structure in society, in which both structure and agency continuously and reciprocally interact with each other. Agency may lead to large structural change; a sense of agency can be achieved by causing minor changes of the prevailing structure to allow for identity to persist. As Kultida Niwitkulnipa explains (2017), Karenni, or Kayah (ကယား) refugees living in camps in Mae Hong Son still maintain and develop their knowledge of cultural practices under constraints. For example, they are prohibited from causing deforestation, yet they still cut trees from the surrounding countryside as part of an annual festival to erect the traditional *E-Lue*. This specifically violates camp rules, but the camp authority seems to turn a blind eye to allow this cultural practice. This case illustrates the way the prevailing structure of the camp is adjusted to allow individuals to maintain important cultural practices. This chapter explores the complex interaction between agency and structure to explore how refugees are motivated to act in the manner they perceive best for them, within the bounded structure of the camps and society. When the prevailing structure forces refugees to return to their home country, how refugees retain a sense of agency in their decision-making about shaping their future within this new context is important.

The objective of this chapter is to present and explore the complexities of decision making for refugees who resist the oppressive structure of life in refugee camps. It is based on field data gathered through interviews with refugees who decided to leave the camp in pursuit of self-realization and social and financial security. The chapter is based on fieldwork for a master's degree thesis at Chiang Mai University, "The Imagining Community of Refugee Repatriations in Karen State, Myanmar," based on a case study of Wa Hmee Aye Village. This thesis looks at refugees opposed to the negative stereotypes put upon them, such as their being perceived as constant assistance-seekers; connotations

that are dominant in Thai society. It aims to depict the complexities of refugee decision-making processes in an unbiased fashion.

2. Origin and Importance

Despite the political changes beginning in 2010, Myanmar continues to be embroiled in the world's longest civil war which has escalated since the latest military coup d'état in February 2021. More than seven decades of internal conflict between the Tatmadaw and non-Bama ethnic minorities has defined the country's modern history. Following Myanmar's independence from British rule, domestic power struggles caused widespread political conflicts, often taking the shape of armed combat between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed organizations. The many ongoing conflicts have resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of civilians, leading many to seek refuge on the Thai side of the border, especially since the late 1980s (Kasetsiri, 2001; Rittang, 2014; Trichote, 2004; Vaddhanaphuti & Sitthikriengkrai, 2016). Beginning in the early 1990s, the Royal Thai government requested the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to consolidate temporary shelters in nine locations for effective management and protection.[6]

In recent years, some conflicts in Myanmar have eased because of transformational political changes, but others have restarted or newly emerged.[7] The government of Myanmar, together with some ethnic armed groups such as the Karen National Union (KNU), signed a National Ceasefire Agreement on October 15, 2015. Due to these changes, more than one hundred thousand people who fled to Thailand because of war and economic instability were given options to return

6. Refugee camps in Thailand are officially referred to as "temporary shelters" because Thailand did not join the party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. There are nine official "temporary shelters" in four provinces along the border in Thailand: Tak (3) - Ban Mae La, Ban Umphiem, Ban Nupo; Mae Hong Son (4) - Ban Mai Ni Soi, Ban Mae Surin, Ban Lamaluang, Ban Laon; Kanchanaburi (1) - Ban Ton Yang; and Ratchaburi (1) - Ban Tham Hin.
7. This research took place in 2020 - prior to the military coup d'état of February 2021.

to their country of origin. The ceasefire agreement was unexpected and caused uncertainty for many refugees' futures. In response to easing tensions in Karen State and widespread optimism about Myanmar's future governance, international donations for refugees in the border camps began to decline. Whereas prior to the ceasefire agreement refugees received food, oil, charcoal and other supplies that adequately sustained their daily life, rations are now managed by a "cash card transfer system" administrated by The Border Consortium. A monthly cash transfer is made each month, the amount of which is determined by the category of household (from self-reliant to most vulnerable), the number of people in the household and the price of principal commodities such as oil and rice in the camp location. Camp residents can choose their own food purchases using the card at approved vendors located inside the camp (The Border Consortium, 2019). There are mixed reactions to this change with most camp residents stating that the amount is not enough for their daily needs and that they are forced to leave the camp illegally to seek alternative means to earn additional income (Perkins, 2019). The refugees in the Thai-Burma border camps have arrived at a crossroads – to either stay in the camps with reduced support or return to their original but estranged and uncertain home in Myanmar.

In 2015, the UNHCR in consultation with the Royal Thai Government and the Government of the Union of Myanmar strategized options for refugees to repatriate to Myanmar, the first of the UNHCR's three durable solutions.[8] From October 2016 to May 2018, over 200 refugees have returned to Myanmar via this UNHCR "Voluntary Repatriation Program" (Perkins, 2019), while the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center reports that between 2013 and 2018 more than 19,000 refugees have spontaneously returned to Myanmar by their own means (2019). This demonstrates the pattern of returning to the country of origin for

8. Once refugee status has been determined and immediate protection needs are addressed, refugees may need support to find a long-term, durable solution. UNHCR promotes three durable solutions for refugees as part of its core mandate: First is voluntary repatriation, providing information, advice, and facilitating return. Second, local integration: advocate for the advantages of integrating, advise on law and policies, and promote dialogue between countries of asylum to share good practices on local integration. Third, resettlement coordination, development, promotion, and secure emergency resettlement (UNHCR, 2003).

refugees is partially guided by the efforts of the UNHCR, but some of the refugees' motivation to return is due to the reduction in camp aid and food. Refugees' decision-making is not only influenced by the pathways UNHCR has proposed.

The following section is substantiated by the interviews with refugees, demonstrating how having agency over life choices contributes to an improved quality of life. Presenting refugees as persons who have agency and are not surrendering to the structure of incarceration, this article uses the interviews below to explain the true behavior of refugees and attempts to provide an alternative depiction to those that see them as merely passive victims.

3. Choices for Refugees Without Citizenship in the Country of Origin

Located about thirty minutes from the Thailand border, Wa Hmee Aye is one of the refugee villages created by the KNU in mid-2017. Before entering the village from the Thai side, one must pass through the KNU military checkpoint. The route entering the village is surrounded on both sides by cornfields two meters high. This corn will soon be providing crucial income for farmers who have tilled the fields for over three months. The income gained by farming is often sent to the farmers' children who are studying, but the majority of revenue goes into buying seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, or to repay debts before planting the next season of corn. If they are lucky, they may have some money left over. Unfortunately, income from the corn may not be enough to make a profit.

My eyes caught a "Welcome to Karen State" signboard, which indicated that I was entering the village of Wa Hmee Aye. As soon as the truck stopped at the entrance of the village, I walked to the football field in the middle of the village. I asked a child playing football in the rain where the headman's house is located. "The village headman is not here for the night, but the assistant village headman is here," said the boy, pointing at a two-story wooden house built next to the football field. Walking into the house, a thirty-year-old woman greeted me

while feeding a baby, and I asked about the assistant headman. She said that her husband went to a friend's house and would be back soon. While waiting, I introduced myself and talked to the village headman's wife, Naw Paw Wah, while asking permission to record the conversation. She asked why we were interested in this issue. What is the purpose of doing this research? Will there be any danger to them and the people in the area if she participates? I answered the questions truthfully and she told her life story to me.

Naw Paw Wah said she was actually from Karen State Brigade 3 (Bago Division), Myanmar. She escaped to a refugee camp with her sister. After that, she fell in love with the people in the camp. She said that the first ten years in the camp were not easy. Food security was an issue. Then, in 2017, her husband told her that they should leave that camp to find ways to make a living without having to endure constant poverty (Naw Paw Wah, personal communication, June 13-14, 2020).

They decided to take their two children to live in Wa Hmee Aye. In a low voice, she told me that she still retains refugee status in the border camp. She does this in order to get some help from the camp and keep the refugee camp as a lifeline in case life in the village does not work out. To improve their family income status, she is currently working as a teacher in the village. She earns 1,000 Thai Baht (THB, around 30 USD) per month and receives one sack of rice from the KNU bimonthly. "Of course," she said, "without help from the camp it wouldn't be enough".

Her husband is an assistant village headman; however, this is essentially a volunteer position that is unpaid. Besides this position, her husband works as a day laborer to earn income to support the family. Because Wa Hmee Aye is near the Thailand-Myanmar border, her husband can cross discreetly to work as a laborer in Thailand without having his documents scrutinized. His employment opportunities and income are unstable, work depends on the demands of planting and harvesting seasons.

Naw Paw Wah further explained the reasons for staying near the border rather than returning to a larger city. Her husband had to take up debt to survive, dodged bullets when he was young, and had

experienced the loss of family members from mistreatment, making him deeply distrustful of the Myanmar military government. She said she agreed with his decision to remain near the border. Furthermore, if she had returned to the central state's sphere of influence, she would be banned from teaching her children in the Karen language.

Because she and her family chose to return to the KNU-controlled village rather than a central government-controlled area, they are excluded from Myanmar citizenship. This repatriation without documentation is incongruent with the UNCHR's design. She said the lack of citizenship does not have much of an impact on her and her husband's life because she never crossed into other Myanmar states, so she viewed the documents as unnecessary. She repeated to us that if there is a house to live in, food to eat, and a good job to do, other things are no longer important.

The interview with the assistant village headman's wife Naw Paw Wah in Wa Hmee Aye shows that the UNCHR's solutions which are intended to provide for refugees' needs are not always the best solutions for them. Governments and international non-governmental organizations that are involved in refugee matters need to hear their voices and let them be part of decision-making processes that have potentially transformative impacts on their lives. In this case, the assistant headman's family chose to return to KNU-controlled territory to evade the central government's exertion of influence. The act demonstrates the individuality of the actor whose behavior is not solely determined by institutions such as the UNHCR. In this case, the wife also explains about where the best solution is for her and her family by looking at her husband's past fleeing his hometown, losing his family, and suffering all kinds of mistreatment. All of this led them not to trust the Myanmar government and not to live in their home areas. Actually, it seems like they had no choice after the durable solution was announced from UNHCR, but they have tried to find alternative means for their safety.

4. To Return or not to Return to Myanmar

Uncle Idi's case is different from the choices of those who returned to Wa Hmee Aye. Some refugees were resettling to a place I will call Aesin, a large village in Myanmar that was built as an alternative to camps for internationally displaced people. I hailed a truck in Mae Sot, sat in the loading area and headed out there, getting covered in dust in the process.

When I arrived at the edge of the village, I stumbled upon Uncle Idi's birthday party. He invited the villagers to join his family in worship that day, giving me the opportunity to chat and interview attendees. Uncle Idi has a plump figure, dark complexion, and a smiling face. He is between 150 and 160 cm tall and gave the impression of being gentle and kind. I began by introducing myself and asked Uncle Idi to share his story. Prior to his arrival in the camp, Uncle Idi worked as an educational aid in Karen State Brigade 7, Hpa-an (ဘာအံ), from 1975-1984. Then armed conflict arose between the Karen National Liberation Army, the armed wing of the KNU, and the Tatmadaw. As a result, he and his family had to flee to the Thailand-Myanmar border in 1985. When the UNHCR took responsibility of camp populations in 1995, Uncle Idi and his family had to relocate to a larger camp as the UNHCR and Thai officials found it more efficient and safer to take care of larger agglomerations.

The new refugee camp was in the middle of a valley. Here, the family experienced strong winds and very cold winters. Their already trying situation got worse in 2010 when food rations were reduced from ten to eight kilograms per month and then again from eight to four kilograms throughout that same year. Although the situation in the camps was worse for refugees, they still endured due to a lack of alternatives (Sue Reh et al., 2013). Non-governmental organizations that were involved in the refugee camp advocated for improved diets to ensure refugees received nutrition and were healthy. Shortly thereafter, many refugees began to find their way outside the camps seeking day labor. Some helped grow cabbage, others were hired to collect chili, earning between 50 to 80 THB (around 1.50-2.50 USD) per day. Uncle Idi thought of sneaking out like the other refugees. He got out once and wanted to go see how it was outside the fence. But

when he did go out, he was arrested, and his wife had to pay two thousand THB, around 60 USD for his bail. The soldiers who arrested him said that if he did not pay, they would send him back to Myanmar.

In 2017, the refugee camp where Uncle Idi was staying started to use food cards, which he could only use at designated stores. Money from the food cards was not enough to buy food for the whole month. Fortunately, Uncle Idi's son and daughter would send money occasionally from a third country to which they had resettled some years earlier. However, people not as privileged as Uncle Idi had to find another method to survive. The hardships of life in the camp were largely the reason why Uncle Idi decided to return to Myanmar in 2019. At this point in Uncle Idi's story, I realized that his journey did not fit within the UNCHR's established repatriation framework. Uncle Idi said he still kept his refugee status in Thailand. Most of his returns to Aesin were informal, as he had not decided yet whether or not to relinquish his refugee status.

There are two major groups of refugees who have resettled in Aesin. The first group returned on the "upper bridge", meaning they returned to Myanmar officially, losing their UNHCR refugee status immediately when they crossed back to their country. This group receives some help from the UNHCR. Adults aged 18 and over receive a one-time payment of 9,300 THB, around 275 USD for resettlement and parents of children receive a 7,500 THB, around 220 USD one-time payment per child. These repatriated refugees received Myanmar nationality after their arrival. The second group returned on the "lower bridge". This refers to the group of people who have returned to Aesin Village but have not informed the UNHCR - they periodically return to the refugee camp to avoid suspicion (Karen Human Rights Group, 2019). Uncle Idi chose the "lower bridge" as he was not sure about his future options. If he decided to return via the "upper bridge", he is not sure how to survive or whether life will be more difficult than in the camp. But if they stay in the camp only, they can hardly live because aid is being continually reduced. For example, the refugee camps have a program that allows very sick people to go to the hospital outside the camp. However, refugee camps and aid workers limit this access to only four people per month. "Mostly they choose young people to get

treatment at the hospital. I am already old, they do not even care", Uncle Idi said.

During my talk with Uncle Idi, there were times when he would sigh deeply before continuing his story. In a situation like his, no one would be able to stay still. The circumstance compels taking the initiative in order to survive. Refugees must always be prepared in the event of unexpected situations. In a context outside their control, they may be forced to leave the refugee camp overnight or their aid may be suddenly reduced. Uncle Idi was constantly reviewing his options in the camp. People in the refugee camps had to continually look for alternatives to find agency and choice in the face of an ever-changing situation. In Uncle Idi's case, it shows that if the situation in the country of origin worsens, Uncle Idi and his family will still be able to return to the refugee camp. Meanwhile, if one day the country situation deteriorates, Idi can still return to Aesin Village. This example explains more about the dynamics about refugees, which is to say that they do not only wait passively for assistance, but they try to find a sustainable life by making choices.

5. When Refugees Return and their Skills (do not) Generate Income

I had the opportunity to get to know a young person through a fellow student's relative. This youth is named Zaw Ae (ဇေါ်ဧအေး) and he is 21 years old. Zaw Ae and his family had lived in refugee camps for more than eight years after being displaced by the conflict in Karen State. Zaw Ae said that before his parents lived in the refugee camp, they worked as shifting cultivators. After their village was attacked and destroyed by the Tatmadaw, they were forced to flee to a refugee camp for their safety. They entered the refugee camp in 2008. At first, refugees received adequate assistance in terms of food, health, and education, but since then, aid has reduced steadily. In 2014 and 2015, there was a rumor that the refugee camp might be closed due to deteriorating financial support. This prompted Zaw Ae's father to sneak out of the camp to find daily farm work labor such as chili picking or growing vegetables, earning 70-100 THB, around 2-3 USD

a day. Zaw Ae's family then heard the news that housing and citizenship options were being prepared to accommodate the return of refugees. This would be done with the leadership of the KNU, the NIPPON foundation in Japan and the Myanmar military government. Zaw Ae's family signed up to receive a home and citizenship status (Zaw Ae, personal communication, September 19-20, 2020).

After their house was built, Zaw Ae's family informed the UNHCR that they were ready to return to Myanmar and provided detailed information to return that year. In 2016, Zaw Ae's family returned to a village I will call Kata Kee Village. The UNHCR confirmed that assistance would be provided during the repatriation of the refugees so families could start their new lives with sufficient means. However, for the first few months after returning, Zaw Ae's family had a lot of career problems. In the village and the surrounding area, there were no jobs to generate income in order to support the family. Before returning, Zaw Ae's father had attended a training course in motorcycle repair. But this profession could not be used to generate income in Kata Kee where most villagers did not have motorcycles. "You cannot tell me, to repair vehicles to earn money… No one has a vehicle to fix," said Zaw Ae's father.

The area of Kata Kee is about 40 kilometers from the nearest city. Zaw Ae said that in the beginning, his father worked as a mechanic's assistant in a car repair shop in the downtown area. Each day he worked from 7am to 5pm, using a bicycle for transportation, meaning that he had to leave the house an hour earlier to get to work. The daily wages were 3,500 Myanmar Kyat (MMK) or 88 THB, around 2.60 USD, depending on how many customers came to receive service. If only a few people came to receive service, he would only receive 1,500 MMK or 38 THB, around 1.10 USD. After working for almost two months, he saw that his income was not enough to support the family, so he decided to quit his job. He began to work in the cornfields near the village, receiving a wage of 4,000 MMK or 100 THB, around 3 USD per day.

The example of Zaw Ae and his family shows limitations to repatriated refugees applying their occupational skills in their new villages. Although people try to work outside the village in order to utilize their

professional skills, it is not worth the time and wages. Often, these jobs fail to cover household expenses. This limits options for returning refugees, especially when repatriation processes do not include a long-term plan for refugee incomes. As Naw Su Wah's research found, the returnee livelihoods are severely hampered by a lack of job and other income-generating opportunities, a lack of land for agriculture, and insufficient water, education, and healthcare (2020). Even as the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement has opened supposed opportunities to return, to achieve freedom of movement, self-identity, sense of belonging, children's education, and a better future, the lack of sustainable livelihoods in repatriation areas is a major obstacle. Aside from choosing a place to return to, refugees must also search through the scarce options available to make a living there.

6. Conclusion

The refugee camp is a space of exception but it is not static for refugees. Refugees must adapt to survive many restrictions and interrelated hardships. These restrictions are most pronounced in the form of a reduction in aid for refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border. These circumstances have led some refugees to make the decision to return to their home country. Indirect pressure on refugees in various areas such as a lack of health care, a lack of options to find work after finishing education in the camp and decreasing food rations all affect refugee decision-making. At the same time, the situation in the refugee camps is not conducive to sustainable livelihoods. Difficulties concerning income opportunities, mismatching skill sets, and a hostile environment cause a number of refugees to find alternate living situations under this pressure. They are living in a permanent "state of exception" which is imposed from the outside (Agamben, 2005) and in which refugees must recreate social life.

This article presents the various decision-making influencing the return of some refugees to their country of origin, both formally and informally. Interviews were conducted with refugees who chose different routes of return, not only in spatial terms, but also with regards to the regional regimes chosen such as Uncle Idi who is not

certain if he and his family will remain in their relocated village in Myanmar because of the uncertainty of the situation. When Zaw Ae's family returned to Myanmar, they encountered limitations on livelihood and income opportunities. In Wa Hmee Aye they opted not to accept any documents the Myanmar government offered because lack of citizenship does not have much of an impact on their life and they feel safe under the supervision of the KNU. In contrast to the UNHCR's proposed options, there is not much choice for refugees. They often struggle to exercise agency in making a decision that will benefit their lives, families, and future; they live in a state of exception. The context in which refugees must make these difficult decisions is in large measure determined by the area of return, economic opportunities available, and instability in Myanmar. Accounting for how the prevailing structure constrains returning refugees' decision-making along with how these individuals still attempt to negotiate a sense of agency within this structure approximates a more nuanced, complete picture of securing a living in uncertain, trying exceptional circumstances.

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2

Urban Enclaves: New Forms of Precarity for Exiled Workers in Bangkok

François Robinne

Abstract

Corrugated iron barracks, hosting migrant workers and others in precarious conditions, are common in Bangkok. The forms of social organization in these urban enclaves seem entangled with many of the major issues related to contemporary migratory flows. None of these issues, however, is sufficient to define the intrinsic specificity of the enclaves, especially when compared to other forms of urban habitat where migrant workers reside.

It is elsewhere, towards other conceptual horizons, that we must turn to understand the modus operandi of the Bangkok enclaves, where a majority of inhabitants are migrant workers. We must turn to a multi-sited approach of social crossroads, from rural to urban, between autochthony and transnationalism. Especially since there is a shared cosmopolitan condition drawing a line of continuity between the villages of the highlands of Burma and these enclaves of the Thai megalopolis. This chapter highlights the very recent emergence and multiplication of enclaves in various districts at the center of Bangkok and outlines their geomorphology. The relationships of enclave-residing migrant workers with the associative environment is analyzed

to allow us to better understand these urban enclaves and their paradoxical status as territories of desocialization.

Keywords: Bangkok enclaves, transnational migrant workers, cosmopolitan condition, consistency of social crossroads, associative mediation, multiple mobilities, remittance, indebtedness, social distancing policy, territories of desocialization.

Figure 2.1: *Map of Bangkok annotated with areas referred to in the chapter, created by Jean-Luc Didelot*

1. Introduction

What forms of sociability persist in territories of desocialization? It is an understatement to say that the migrant worker enclaves at the heart of Bangkok gave me a hard time: both on a physical level, due to the difficulty of getting past the watchmen restricting access to the corrugated iron enclosures; and on a conceptual level, by dint of failing to decipher the modus operandi of the tens or even thousands of people who find residence there, all nationalities combined, but mostly from Burma, Laos and Cambodia. All the while wondering, what could possibly be the contribution of these urban enclaves in relation to what is already known and rehashed about migration? Especially since in appearance nothing seems to distinguish the enclaves from other more or less precarious forms of habitat studied thus far in the literature on migrant workers. Remittance strategies during family breakdown, gender perspectives in exile, transversal identities of refugees for the most part without papers, anxiety-provoking dimensions of multiple mobilities: these alignments of worker barracks in Bangkok and the forms of social organization that reign there do not at first glance escape any of the major issues related to contemporary migratory flows.[1] None of these issues, however, is sufficient to define the intrinsic specificity of enclaves. Although quite common in appearance, they have to my knowledge no equivalent.

It is to elsewhere, towards other conceptual horizons, that we must turn in order to understand the enclaves. This is the openness to which the social crossroads taken as the object of study lead; an approach that contributes to strengthening the multi-sited perspective (Falzon, 2009) of rural and urban areas, between autochthony and transnational, especially since I found a similar cosmopolitan condition in the villages of highland Burma and in the enclaves of the Thai megalopolis.[2] These enclaves only very recently emerged, appearing after the economic crisis of the 1990s, at the turn of the 2000s, with a strong

1. For example, those issues explored by Baujard (2009), Constable (2014), Cung Liang Hu Chin (2018), Fogel (2019), Hoang et & Yeoh (2015), Lindquist (2009), Piper (2008), Pollock & Soe Lin Aung (2010) and Roulleau-Berger (2010).
2. For a more detailed discussion on the problematic of the universality of the cosmopolitan condition, I.e., the cosmopolitan condition as the human condition, refer to Robinne (2021).

intensification in the wake of the *ASEAN Economic Development 2015*. This free trade policy between ten ASEAN member countries was accompanied by the establishment of highway, rail, maritime and air development corridors, the construction of deep-water ports and gas and oil pipelines. Although this policy of economic integration primarily concerns the movement of goods, it was accompanied by exponential intra-Asian migratory flows (Eng et al., 2013). In ten years, from 1995 to 2005, Thailand quadrupled its number of immigrants, making it the number one host country in Southeast Asia with 55 per cent of total migrants, ahead of Malaysia and Singapore (Testaverde et al., 2017, p. 2, 40).

Bangkok has become a megalopolis with a proliferation of construction sites, all pointing to the recurring question: When will the real estate bubble burst? In just a few years, the enclaves on Ratchadaphisek (ถนนรัชดาภิเษก) and on Asok Station (สถานีอโศก) (sites 4 and 3, figure 2.1) grew exponentially, consolidating a tangle of enclaves in which hundreds of migrant workers congregate. The surveys undertaken for this chapter were carried out between 2014 and 2019 and focused mainly on Burmese workers, in the broad sense of the term, all linguistic, cultural and religious affiliations combined. The cosmopolitan condition prevails in these enclaves including among people of Burmese citizenship. There is a majority of Baw and S'gaw Karen (ကရင်) speakers, also Pa-O (ပအို၀်း), as well as Austronesian Mon (မွန်), Tibeto-Burman Chin (ချင်း) and Kachin (ကချင်), in addition to Bama (ဗမာ). In this diverse linguistic context, Burmese and Thai are essential vernacular languages.

What appears to be part of a generalized process of globalization cannot be separated in the case of Burma from a certain form of continuity between the post-independence era, the successive dictatorships and the "democratic transition". That continuity is found in the process of ethnic reification in the wake of which the Rohingya drama is inscribed (Boshier, 2017; Robinne, 2019). Globalization combined with nationalism; everything is in place to precipitate transnational migratory flows. While the COVID-19 pandemic at first temporarily reversed the trend, the recent coup d'état has sparked new waves of cross-border refugees towards India and Thailand. Developing in the sprawling city of Bangkok is an interlacing of industrial zones,

workers' towns and corporatist districts that Pongsawat (2007) describes as "cities in the city" and precarious habitats of a new kind. Sieng-Kong Bangna (เซียงกงบางนา) in southeast Bangkok is just one example. This and the enclaves like it are unexpected consequences of geopolitics in motion. In what follows, I will show that their geographical position in the city center combined with the rules imposed by employer companies on residents constitute the main distinctive features of the enclaves.

Figure 2.2: *Enclave on Sukhumvit*

2. Geolocation and Morphology of the Enclaves

Four sites were selected for this chapter based on their configuration, respective dimensions, internal organization, variable hygiene conditions and accessibility. The central location of these enclaves has remained constant during the years, but one of them has since disappeared, that on Sukhumvit (site 2, figure 2.1), while another – in fact a very important complex grouping several enclaves – appeared in Ratchadaphisek (site 4, figure 2.1). Each of these sites consists of one to three adjoining enclaves with their own enclosures, each one belonging to different owners. Living conditions can vary greatly. The small, rather unsanitary structures on Rama IX (site 1, figure 2.1), the "historic" and dilapidated island at the foot of the Sukkhumvit (สุขุมวิท) towers (site 2, figure 2.1), the equally old enclave standing in the central district of Pratunam (ประตูน้ำ), the many two-level alignments drawn at the line of Asok Station and Ratchadaphisek (sites 3 and 4, figure 2.1): none of the living conditions of the chosen sites are directly comparable.[3]

In the precarious universe of corrugated iron that is the enclaves, predominantly male and relatively elderly people coexist. Estimated at around 30 per cent only, women are never independent residents in the enclaves; they are either wives - the most frequent case - or daughters of residents, and themselves holders of an employment contract. Contrasting with the newcomers, mostly teenagers between 14 and 20 years old, who usually frequent associations such as Yadanasein Education Development or the Dear Burma Academy (Robinne, 2021), the average age in the enclaves is much older. The average age is 30 years old: 30.8 years in the group of Rama IX (site 1 on the map), 26.7 years in the more recent settlement group of Ratchadaphisek (site 4 on the map), which is to say, the residents in the enclaves are both uneducated and adults in their prime. All of

3. Only four sites were selected. Despite the importance of certain groups, such as Asok and Ratchadaphisek, the number of enclaves scattered around central Bangkok is much greater, in particular along Sukhumvit Avenue. On *soi* 24, but also *soi* 17, 50, 71, 77: the streets perpendicular to Sukhumvit are a maze where the smallest vacant plot is occupied by an enclave, some of which, over time, are completely integrated into the district. The lack of studies combined with the constant displacement of urban enclaves makes it very difficult to estimate the number of people concerned, probably several tens of thousands in the four areas studied.

them left school very early, well before the tenth and final year of schooling in Burma. Significantly, children's education is an absolute priority for parents in exile. In fact, the Burmese context and the difficulties relating to remittances rarely make it possible to ensure education. Several reasons can explain the relatively high average which prevails in the enclaves, including the trying nature of the work in the construction sector, family fragmentation due to internal regulations, and the fact that finding residence in an enclave turns out to be a stopgap in an already long transnational journey. Unless you are a single man, this is rarely a first transnational job, as the de facto hindrance to family reunification contributes to making enclaves a default choice. Given the average age of close to 30 years, residents in the enclaves already have long transnational experience.

Some enclaves are owned by small independent entrepreneurs; one of them, the most dilapidated and least maintained among a group of three on Rama IX Rd (site 1, figure 2.1), belongs to a dentist who initiated the real estate project with support from local authorities. This is exceptional however, as most enclaves depend on large groups of buildings and public works for the implementation of safety, organizational and hygiene rules, in addition to the more or less loose compliance with the general migration rules defined by the Thai and Burmese state administrations. Enclaves vary considerably in size, with the smallest, and often oldest, enclaves hosting between 50 and 2,000 workers. The largest, usually more recent, settlements have up to 10,000-20,000 residents according to my estimates.

The enclaves occupy private real estate plots[4] in the very heart of downtown Bangkok, temporarily vacant, awaiting the start of some other construction project. They consist of rows of barracks of one or two floors, made of corrugated iron sheet, and surrounded by an enclosure, sometimes very high, so high it can take the appearance of an impassable wall. But even this imposing external wall is made only of light corrugated iron sheets, temporary materials, with shelter at the single entrance for the security guards who strictly control access.

4. "Plots" rather than urban "wastelands" because these private compounds are not abandoned lands despite their appearance; "plots" also rather than "interstices" because the enclaves are in no case the appropriation by locals of a vacant public space.

There are five constant markers across the enclaves: 1) The companies and businessmen legally responsible for the enclaves organize their administration based on the state's changing migration laws and norms – a sort of administrative labyrinth in permanent recomposition[5] – therefore, the management teams within the enclaves (watchmen, cleaning staff, shopkeepers, pickup drivers) are exclusively Thai citizens, the only people in the space with permanent employment; 2) The cosmopolitan condition reigns, as residents come mostly from countries bordering Thailand with their access to community reunification challenged by the predominant recruitment and work conditions; 3) The ubiquitous "one job/one room" regulation, according to which no unemployed person can stay in an enclave long-term, with consequent impediments for families, for example preventing unemployed de facto spouses from residing with their partner and preventing young children from residence once the weaning period is finished; 4) Retail shops trade inside the enclosure alongside evening outdoor markets, encouraging residents not to go out of the enclave to meet daily needs; and 5) Multiple mobilities affecting both infrastructures and people which adds to the anxiety inherent in exile contexts.

The location of the enclaves are not proximate or linked to that of the construction sites where most workers are employed. Proximity of construction sites and enclaves is even an exception. Some workers, such as those working in Ratchadaphisek District on the three twin towers or on the site of the metro terminal under construction in 2020, do have the opportunity to be able to walk from their respective enclaves to their place of work (site 4, figure 2.1). But this is far from always being the case. It takes an average of one hour by pick-up truck to get from an enclave to a worksite. The ephemeral nature of the plots destined to be built upon corresponds with the mobility of these people. As soon as a plot becomes constructible, the enclave erected on its site must be moved. In the same way, the conclusion of a construction project means for a particular category of workers - handlers, drillers of retaining piles, concrete screed installers, window

5. In his analysis of Thailand's immigration system, Pongsawat (2007) explains how it permanently places migrants in a "registered illegal immigrant workers" category. For a detailed description of the struggle for administrative documents by migrant workers, see Robinne (2021).

installers, painters, teams cleaning etc. – relocation to another worksite and enclave or even the loss of their job.

The criteria that originally governed the choice of these urban enclaves have generally remained constant from one year to the next. I say "originally" because between 2014 and 2019, a period corresponding to data collection for this chapter, things changed considerably, with an exponential increase in the number of enclaves and migrant workers.[6] This does not call into question the specificity of the enclaves, but a few material variants indicate a change of scale: the increasing number both of migrant workers and larger enclaves are taking on an industrial dimension. Alignments of superimposed containers have appeared. Compared to the corrugated iron barracks, the space allocated to the workers is a little larger, above all higher, but this does not translate into more comfort, rather the reverse, because the rooms in the containers become dormitories with only a single entrance and exit. The new presence of these container accommodations testifies to the structured mobility affecting the enclaves and their residents.

Figure 2.3: *Enclave on Asok*

6. The impacts of the pandemic combined with the 1 February, 2021 coup d'état unfortunately cannot be measured at the time of writing, in April 2021, due to current difficulties accessing the field sites.

3. Unfixed Vernacular Terminologies

Likely due to the recent emergence of this type of enclave, none of the vernacular terminologies are suitable for defining them. Oscillating between ideas of overcrowding, promiscuity, insalubrity, illegality – in the sense of encroachment on public space, which is not the case – and communitarianism, the discrete vernacular terms for the enclaves are not yet fixed.[7]

In Thai, the Anglicism *slam, (*สลัม), from "slum", is a generic term to designate any form of spontaneous habitat. Some, such as Ban Khrua, (บ้านครัว), have acquired the status of "ancient neighborhoods" or "urban villages" and are targets of speculation from real estate developers (Baffie & Fournie, 1992; Baffie, 2003; Baffie & Pichard-Bertaux, 2011). Other terms make their distinctions based on: 1) The tendency for communitarianism, I.e. *chumchon,* (ชุมชน), from *chumchon ae-at* (ชุมชนแออัด) meaning overcrowded community, contrasting with the actual cosmopolitan condition that prevails in the enclaves; 2) The "degradation of the site", i.e. *laeng sueam-som,* (แหล่งเสื่อมโทรม), or *laeng thrut som,* (แหล่งทรุดโทรม), contrasting with the actual rectilinear alignment of the barracks in the enclaves, most of them being well maintained; and 3) A parallel with the "camp", *khai,* (ค่าย), with associations of confinement or encampment. Actually, the enclaves cannot be compared with military barracks, *khai thahan,* (ค่ายทหาร), and not even with "refugee camps", *khai phulipai,* (ค่ายผู้ลี้ภัย), such as those on the Myanmar-Thai border (Vongrattanatoh, 2011, p. 140). Refugee status is by no means the primary claim of migrant workers established in the enclaves; it would rather be that of "citizenship" on condition of being able to prove twenty years of residence in Thailand, which is rarely the case and very difficult to demonstrate (Robinne, 2021).

The Burmese terminology to designate precarious habitats is also loose: 1) *sekhmu zone* (စက်မှုဇုံ) is a Pali-Burmese-English expression meaning "industrial zone" on the outskirts of cities; 2) *kyukyaw*

7. On this subject, see Vongrattanaroh (2011). For a more global approach to the terminology questions posed by contemporary migratory flows, see Calabrese & Veniard (2018) and Fogel (2019).

(ကျူးကျော်) refers to spontaneous settlements which "overflow" or "encroach" on public space and which are therefore susceptible to expropriation; 3) *dukhathee sakhan* (ဒုက္ခသည်စခန်း) with the word Pali *dukha, "problem, suffering", followed by Burmese word sakhan, "camp, lodging, place", refers to refugee camps; and* 4) *hkohlone* (ခိုလှုံ), this verbal or nominal expression means "refuge, asylum, to take refuge, to shelter", it also designates "squats". None of these terms are really satisfactory for describing the inner-city enclaves. A more appropriate term might be the Burmese expression *aloqthama tanlya* (အလုပ်သမား တန်းလျား) with its literal meaning of "alignment of workers", as one would describe an alignment of chairs in a classroom or of houses in a residential area.

More expressive than "alignment", it is ultimately the English term "enclave" which seems most appropriate for the idea of bounded territories at the very heart of a city, something geologists may call "fragments of rocks foreign to the mass in which they are included". In her work on gated communities in Dubai, Laavany Kathiravelu draws a distinction between "enclaves" - the rows of wealthy middle-class houses, also in Bangkok – and "camps" which she applied to the corrugated iron alignments reserved for migrant workers (2016). Beyond the fact that the corrugated iron alignments are located in one case on the outskirts of Dubai and in the other in the center of Bangkok, the qualifier of "camps" seems decidedly inappropriate because of its connotation of ghettoization, variable conditions of hygiene, privacy and security (Agier, 2013a; Bernardot, 2008; Dilger & Dohrn, 2016). Given the sites under definition are semi-landlocked territories included in a broader urban environment, with free though strictly controlled access, the term "enclaves" is retained. The qualifier "migrant workers" can be added to avoid any confusion with the gated communities of opulent houses as there are in Dubai and in Bangkok.

Faced with the vagueness of the related Thai and Burmese vernacular terminologies to designate this new cosmopolitan and transnational form of urban habitat, reference to exogenous terminology will help to distinguish the real estate enclaves in the city center from industrial zones of the periphery as well as more or less precarious forms of housing reflected in the vernacular terminologies. I selected five terms from a long list of possibilities:

"Ephemeral" is the first qualifier I use to describe the enclaves themselves as well as the life inside them, in contrast with the sustainability which characterizes the "urban villages" of central Bangkok and the industrial zones of the periphery as well.[8] "Ephemeral" is the vacancy of urban plots that real estate developers covet continuously; "ephemeral" are the enclaves themselves whose characteristic is precisely displacement, a displacement which further underlines the recent apparition of containers made by definition for travel; "ephemeral" is the material chosen for the barracks and enclosures, corrugated iron sheet as easy to dismantle as it is to transport and assemble elsewhere; "ephemeral" is the duration of the stay within the same enclave, from six to fifteen months on average; "ephemeral" are the work teams sharing a site, the principle of which is rotation from one site to another without the composition of a work team being necessarily the same from one site to another.

"Mobile" is second. One cannot imagine the ephemeral character of places without evoking the mobility of people. Not to mention the years of wandering, months or years after crossing the border, mobilities in the plural, from one city to another and between different employers in the same city. Or the displacement of the enclaves themselves, predestined as they are to be moved. Or the rotations and renewals of work teams according to the progress of the building under construction, moving from one enclave to another to join a new site, once a year visiting families during the Buddhist New Year holidays, with an irregular return to the border crossing point for a periodic check of formal papers at the place of first registration in Thailand. Mobility is certainly one of the dominant features of people in exile, but, in contrast to sedentary work in factories, it is even more dominant in the enclaves thanks to the rotation of construction sites; after thirteen years in Thailand, Soe Ta Oo (စိုးတာဦး), a resident of the Rama IX enclave, had gone through nine employers, not counting odd jobs at the border (personal communication, April 29, 2017).

"Stealthy" is third. Inside the enclaves, between the passageways, from room to room, from rooms to water reservoirs, to and from shopkeepers' stalls, there are punctuated, permanent comings and

8. On this subject, Baffie (2003), Baffie & Fournier (1992) and Pongsawat (2007).

goings; a silent anthill, day and night. This is an improbable silence compared to the promiscuity that reigns in the enclaves and the muting resonance of the corrugated iron sheets. The silence is even more improbable given the fact that each enclave or group of enclaves is located in the heart of the liveliest and often most upscale districts of Bangkok. The enveloping and exclusive silence of the migrants without their current administrative papers serves to keep them out of the limelight, the process of self-insertion into the megalopolis here being for the purpose to better disappear rather than to better integrate. Despite the adoption of the Thai and Burmese languages as an interchangeable vernacular, strong accents complicate this objective of blending into anonymity.

"Fragmented" is fourth. Under the "one job, one room" rule, only people with an employment contract are allowed to reside in the enclaves, a rule which de facto excludes young children as well as spouses not employed by the company. As soon as the weaning of infants is over, the parents, generally the mother, must deliver them to relatives remaining in Burma, or entrust them to family members living in Thailand in order to ensure their future Thai nationality. The mother is usually back in the enclave a few weeks later, provided of course her employment contract is still valid or has been renewed.

Ma Nyi Nyi (မညီညီ), a Pa-O Burmese female, was twenty-nine years old when I met her in 2017. She left Burma at the age of fourteen with her mother and was married at seventeen. She has two daughters, aged four and six years, both born in Bangkok. She took them to the country at the age of three months for the youngest, seven months for the oldest. She and her husband return to visit them about every three years. Reunions between migrant workers and their children can be even less frequent. Sai Soe Win Aung (စိုင်းစိုးဝင်းအောင်) and his wife did not see their daughter once for over four years. Ko Than Naing (ကိုသန်းနိုင်) and his wife have only seen their son twice in thirteen years. Ko Thay Lwin (ကိုဌေးလွင်) saw his eldest daughter for the first time when it was decided to bring her back in the Bangkok to work, she was fourteen at the time, now nineteen in 2019; both reside in the same dilapidated enclave of Rama IX Rd (personal communication, March 13, 2019).

"Disposable" is fifth. This was how migrant workers felt, like something inexpensive and replaceable, when on March 23, 2020, 9,000 of them rushed back to the Thai-Myanmar border before it was closed by the Thai authorities at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike factories of the industrial zone at the outskirts of the megalopolis, construction sites were not interrupted. Under these conditions, the massive return of migrant workers included only a marginal proportion of enclave residents, despite the increased risk of COVD-19 infection due to the promiscuity that reigns in the enclaves. But these five qualifiers are certainly not exhaustive; we could add "precarious", "insecure", "violent", "diffuse identity" etc. But whether it concerns the real estate plots on which the enclaves are built, the rotation of work teams and the workers themselves, or even the separation of families and obstacles to any form of communitarianism, everything contributes to distinguishing the enclaves of the city center from any other form of exile living condition. Their territorial isolation is combined with social isolation, a trend further reinforced by the social distancing that the residents of the enclaves maintain with regard to the associative offer.

Figure 2.4: *Enclave on Rama IX*

4. Prospects for Associative Relationships

It is an understatement to say that enclaves produce hierarchy and frontiers, given their emplacement in social crossroads where opposites coexist without meeting, or meet at the margin unintentionally: "registered illegal immigrants" (Saltsman, 2015) go side by side with national and international white collar workers, multiple mobilities and fragmented families oppose sedentary lifestyles and settled family nuclei, plots for construction sit in contrast to lived-in residential districts, the horizontality of the barracks at the foot of skyscrapers; zinc and iron versus concrete and glass walls.

One of the primary characteristics of frontiers, whether territorial or conceptual, is the crossing, the very idea of crossing should be consubstantial to exile. Crossing symbolic borders in time of rites of passage or other rituals, crossing political borders through mutual aid networks, or crossing community borders to which the associative environment gives access – a threshold crossing, whatever its nature, operates on the notion of a sense of common belonging. A cornerstone of community membership in a transnational context, it is from religious bodies and the associative sphere that a community membership in exile draws its vitality and can maintain an indirect link with the mother country. Paradoxically, it is precisely in the absence of crossing in which the social bond is expressed, in the absence of any ritual or associative form by which community membership is created, it is in a way by default that residents of the enclaves position themselves on the margin of all social life compared to other categories of urban migrant workers, factory workers and domestic workers as well.

However, the diversity of associative offers made available to migrant workers theoretically places the residents in the enclaves on equal footing. Three types of religious, educational and health services are made available to migrants. The general criteria that prevailed in their choices correlates with those of the particular informants I accompanied to the places they usually frequent.

4.1 Associativeness through Religion

Among the many monasteries in Bangkok, several are famous for bringing together a large Burmese community in the broad sense of the national term, any ethnic, linguistic or cultural affiliation combined. Most of these monasteries are found on the outskirts, near industrial areas and the cities attached to them. This is the case of Wat Chak Daeng (วัดจากแดง), a monastery located in the southwest of the megalopolis. The abbot is at the head of a hundred monks, among whom seven venerable monks, *upazin* (ဥပဇ္ဈာယ်) and five novices, *koyin* (ကိုရင်), are of Burmese origin. The abbot is Thai himself, but spent twelve years of his life in Burma and preaches in the Burmese language. Each year, during the full moon phases, charismatic monks from Burma are invited to the wat. It was during one of his stays in Burma that the abbot of Wat Chak Daeng met the venerable Pinya Siri (အရှင်ပညောသိရီ), a monk of Mon origin whose fame is partly due to breeding some thousand heads of humpback cows; a monk breeder when others are monk builders or monk planters, their deeds always accounted in the immeasurable, adding to their extraordinary sanctity. The invitation was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Mitta Foundation.[9] Each year announced on social media, the preaching event on the sixth day of the rising moon of the month of Kason (ကဆုန်), falling in March/April, brings together several hundred faithful, most of them Burmese-origin migrant workers living in the megalopolis.

The tendency towards communitarianism in certain monasteries can be much more pronounced. This is the case for example of Wat Nakhon In (วัดนครอินทร์) in Nonthaburi District (นนทบุรี) in northern Bangkok, which has several monks of Karen origin with Thai citizenship. Inter-monastic and transnational relations are here based on the Karen Dana Association (KDA), the "Association of Karen Donations", which is in charge of the coordination of three networked monasteries: 1) the well-known monastery of Mount Zwegabin (ခွဲကပင်တောင်) perched on a rocky promontory overlooking the Salween River (သံလွင်မြစ်),

9. The Kalyana Mitta Development Foundation (KMF) was initiated as a Buddhist Youth Empowerment Program in 2008 and officially registered as a local NGO in 2013. KMF is working with youths of the social change movements, teachers, university students, Sangha and local communities.

south of Hpa-An City (ဘားအံမြို့), capital of Karen State (ကရင်ပြည်နယ်); 2) the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in Yangon (အပြည်ပြည်ဆိုင်ရာ ထေရဝါဒဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သာသနာပြု တက္ကသိုလ်), 3) Wat Nakhon on the northern outskirts of Bangkok. Such an institutional triangulation between a monastic site at the regional level and two centers located in Bangkok and Yangon is representative of transnational Buddhist networks.

The KDA functions through an executive committee of ten venerable ones, all Karen from different countries, which deliberates twice a year. They select student applicants for an international mobility scholarship from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Thailand. The total sum of $11,500 USD collected in 2018 benefited three monks enrolled in doctorate theses in theology, as well as thirty-six other bonzes at license and master's degree levels. U Kundata is one of the lucky ones; his scholarship allowed him to benefit from a one-year study visa in Thailand in order to prepare for a doctorate. Another monk who joined the discussion said it was at the invitation of a disciple and funded by anonymous donations. This year, the KDA celebrates two monks who defended their doctorates in India, the "Venerable Doctors" Ariwawunsa (အရိယဝံသ) and Okkamsa (ဥက္ကံသ) whose photos appear at the top of the calendar for the year 2563 of the Thai Buddhist era, 1381 of the Burmese era and 2020 of the Christian era.

Similar to Buddhist networks, Christian movements of Southeast Asia are also organized into transnational networks involved both in proselytism and in supporting, on a community basis, migrants through various associative environments, charities, youth and women organizations, orphanages, gospel songs and choruses, bible reading circles and sermons, educational and professional training etc. (Baujard, 2009; 2010; Horstmann, 2011). The Church of Christ is one of the active poles of the Hong Kong Association of Christian Missions (HKACM) consortium founded in the 1970s (Bourdeaux & Jammes, 2016, p. 44), with a strong presence in Burma – especially in the Chin, Kachin and Karen states – as well as in Thailand; since the late 1980s, it has been one of the five Christian denominations recognized by the Thai Ministry of Education (Buadaeng, 2003, p. 209). In Bangkok, on Ratchadewi, *soi* 24, the Church of Christ counts among its faithful approximately one hundred and fifty families originating from Burma,

that is to say 1/5th of the total Burmese community affiliated with the churches of Christ in Bangkok. The community groups generated by places of worship, Christian or Buddhist, are at the origin of important networks which actively participate in the activities of the community thus formed; to the extent of course that one is affiliated to one or more of these charitable or educational networks.

4.2 Associativeness through Education

Unlike religious congregations which combine proselytism and educational missions, associations dedicated to the training of migrants are mostly secular, though they may still be under religious supervision. Two such associations established in Bangkok and its surroundings were explored for this chapter under guidance from informants, judged to be representative of the associative environments frequented by migrant workers. If the two are considered in relation to their size and the nature of their tutelage, then their educational project is very similar. The main subjects taught are English and Thai languages, together with computer science as a main curriculum, plus a few more fun and social subjects, secondary in appearance, but actually of prime importance in terms of social ties.

Dear Burma Academy (DBA), the first association, is located in a *soi* on Ratchadewi, one of the liveliest districts of Bangkok, near the Church of Christ but without any connection to it. The NGO is a branch of the Thai Asian Committee for Democracy in Burma. Because the DBA is dedicated to the education and training of migrant workers, it faces multiple administrative difficulties, although all students admitted must have valid papers. The academy is secular and apolitical. It has forty-five employees, including thirty-two teachers for around six hundred students (535 this year compared to 620 last year). Students are mostly Burmese ethnicities, but there are also some from Cambodia and Laos. All of them are young people, with an average age of between eighteen and twenty-five years old, some having initially joined a family member in exile, and none of them presenting any particular professional skills. The goal of U Myint Way (ဦးမြင့်ဝေ), the director of the academy, is to "intellectualize" these young people by making them understand that education provides the means to escape precariousness. "My role is to develop critical thinking

in them, to make them understand on the fact that to oppose is a right", (personal communication, April 29, 2017). The open restaurant at the entrance of the school is an important place of conviviality, friendliness, and solidarity, as were the sewing and make-up classes scheduled during my last visit in 2019.

The students have a similar background and profile. Ko Maw Aung Thein (ကိုမော်အောင်သိန်း), sixteen years old in 2013 when he arrived in Bangkok, twenty-three years old today, is single and has never been to school other than a monastic one. He joined his maternal cousin in a city hotel as a dishwasher, then moved to a hotel with seventy predominantly Burmese employees. Ko Nyunt Win (ကိုညွန့်ဝင်း), about twenty years old, single, is son of a reformed alcoholic father who became a monk. He joined a friend to work for five months in a plastic bag factory, then in a stationery factory with a majority Shan and Karen workforce, and is now housed by his employer in a dormitory. Ma Sanda (မစန္ဒာ) and her girlfriend, both Baw Karen, were sixteen or seventeen years old when they arrived to Bangkok in 2012, both single domestic workers; Ma May Phyu (မမေဖြူ), married, has children aged nine and two years old, is a daughter of rice farmers, now inactive for health reasons. She has changed employers three times and currently works in a sugar factory with housing provided by the company. Ma Cho (မချို), Baw Karen, aged about sixteen when she arrived to Bangkok, twenty years old today, is single and has been a babysitter for six years for the same Sino-Thai family. Her two brothers are in Yangon and her mother comes to visit her sometimes. The vast majority of these students are single and have an unskilled job in a factory or in private homes (students of the DBA, personal communication, January 3, 2019).

The second association, Yadanasein (ရတနာစိန်) Education Development (YED) is in many ways comparable to the DBA but is more decentralized and under religious supervision. The chairman who presides over the general assemblies and presentation of the accounts each week is a venerable native of Mogok in Shan State. For several years now, he has been the superior of a monastery in Bang Khrae (บางแค), an industrial district on the outskirts of Bangkok, a high place of residence for monks from all over the world "which regularly brings us police raids," he points out (personal communication, October 5,

2015). Language courses in Thai and English and computer science make up the concentration of the curriculum. In total, the YED brings together some two hundred students supervised by about fifteen volunteers of Burmese origin.[10]

YED opened four years ago, founded in partnership with the Labor Rights Promotion Network (LRPN) in Samut Sakhon (สมุทรสาคร), about a hundred kilometers southwest of Bangkok. Also known as Mahachai (มหาชัย), this is one of the main transit points for Burmese migrants, especially those working in the notorious sector of industrial fishing. About 500,000 migrant workers live there in transit, according to staff of the Aid Alliance Committee for Myanmar Workers (AAC) association.

4.3 Associativeness through Health Services

The headquarters of the AAC is also in Mahachai. As a moral authority, the monks contribute financially to the association, donating part of the offerings they receive. In 2017 the AAC had only nine members, all volunteers. About thirty workers who had been seriously injured at work were accommodated, but the number was expected to climb to around 100 the following year, in 2018; rows of corrugated iron barracks identical to those found in the enclaves had been hastily constructed to house them. Following Thailand's new drastic migration policy of 2018, a police check forced the scattering and arrest of several of the residents for residency-related issues such as obsolete administrative documents. Water and electricity cuts ensued, making the activities of the center particularly difficult. Less seriously injured migrant workers are not supposed to stay at the AAC beyond a few days, the time needed for them to receive first aid and assert their rights by trying to obtain financial compensation from their employers. In 2016, the association had recorded eighteen official deaths, those cases being the subject of official procedures repatriating bodies. However, the number of deaths due to undeclared work accidents is much higher, around sixty deaths annually according to the association's officials.

10. For more details, see Robinne (2021).

AAC mediates between employees and employers, helping workers achieve better outcomes in discussions with companies. Migrant workers are supposed to live within the limits of the area of the Thai customs office that they were first registered at. Most of them break this regulation to go to Bangkok or elsewhere to look for a job, de facto risking their legal rights. Only a company can issue a health card after recruitment. The advantages of these cards are marginal, except for pregnant women who receive continuing care; the days of post-natal care are also covered. In addition to the fact that it can only be used once, the health card excludes the cost of food and drugs, which must be met by patients. The very poor reception reserved for patients holding such cards is upheld without exception. This is only further reason for migrant workers to avoid the only public hospital – the Ratchawithi Government Hospital near Victory Monument (อนุสาวรีย์ชัยสมรภูมิ) – where these migrant health cards are accepted. In such conditions, rather than acting to enable the provision of medical assistance, holding a health card is rather seen as a form of incomplete integration, a sort of sign of safe-conduct proving that you are in good standing with the administration.

4.4 Social Mediation

Like churches and monasteries, associative movements, secular or religious, play a preponderant unifying role by which otherwise isolated migrant workers come together for intercession exchanges at regular intervals and around which community support is mobilized. The periodicity inherent to ritual forms – whether they are religious on the occasion of ceremonies, or secular such as tuitions and school exams – establishes the idea of common belonging in a migratory context where protean fragmentation otherwise prevails, whether in social, family, religious, linguistic or cultural fields. Whatever the frequency of meetings, on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis, it is on cyclical notions that senses of common belonging take shape and structure. It is in the repetition of ritual occurrences –'ritual' in the broad sense – that the community draws its consistency.

In a context of intense competition, the associative offer must show, on the one hand, its propensity to expand its curriculum and, on the other hand, its ability to break the conditions of isolation and

precariousness.[11] In his reference book *The Cosmopolitan Condition,* Michel Agier reminds us that the intrinsic fragility of any community ideal requires reactivating the community tie at regular intervals (2013a, pp. 32-33). From a sociological point of view, rituality and cyclicality are the *modus operandi;* if these renewed opportunities for social integration are shattered or disintegrated, it is the whole system that is undermined.

Figure 2.5: *Karen ceremony at Wat Nakhon*

11. See in this regard the works of Dudley (2007), Horstmann (2011) and Pongsawat (2007).

5. Social Distancing Policy

The associative environment is the keystone of community bonds where the situation of exile contributes either to make random or, on the contrary, to reinforce. This holds for whatever its nature, whether predominantly religious as with organizations placed under the patronage of monasteries and churches, or resolutely secular for others. The policy pursued in the enclaves is a counter example. As unstable as it is, the community bond in the enclaves is essentially limited to vacant places in the passageways between rows of barracks, between adjoining rooms, or even within work teams; but this tendency towards community regrouping remains in fact very marginal, because the residents obviously do not have control over the allocation of rooms, a tendency which the short circuit of multiple mobilities undermines anyway. "We never get used to it," confided a resident of the enclave in Asok, eight months pregnant, whose departure to an enclave in another city was scheduled for two days later. "We never get used to it" is a feeling widely shared.

In this anxiety-provoking context where social fragmentation, financial insecurity and administrative violence predominate, I cannot here detail the obstacle course of obtaining the various papers, which new laws then make quickly obsolete (Robinne, 2021); nor can I detail the pressure of multiple police checks and the cunning of the brokers who stand in front of the embassy. In this context where emotional loneliness and family breakdowns prevail, the regularity of meetings through the associative environment usually contributes to breaking the confinement of exile; 'usually', because urban enclaves de facto place their residents on the fringes of this relational system.

In a more or less direct way, the associative movements also play the role of social elevator. I think of Ma Htway (မဇတ္ထူး), thirty-five years old in 2017, who opened a shoe store in her hometown of Hpa-An in Karen State, after nine years in Thailand as a housekeeper with seven employers. I think of Ko Myint, first employed in a restaurant in Kuala Lumpur with a two-year employment contract, after which he became illegal; he finally obtained the status of political refugee and received a famous green card, the gateway to the USA where he is now a factory worker. I also think of Soe Myint Aung (စိုးမြင့်ဇော်ဝင်), thirty-nine years

old, and his wife, thirty-one years old, twenty years in Thailand for him, seventeen years for her; he first worked in a hotel in *soi* Nana where he met his wife, then became a worker in a clothing factory, later combined this activity with that of translator for Burmese citizens who came to Bangkok for medical reasons, and finally was recruited by the Myanmar Embassy in Thailand, in the department dedicated to migrant workers. All were integrated during their years of exile in the associative environment. It is certainly not the associative environment that makes for success but being integrated into it constitutes an important vector of social mobility. The few examples of "success stories" – to use the usual Anglicism – I encountered to date have in common that they have gone through associative circles. It is remarkable that, unlike the overwhelming majority of the exiled workers established in the center or in the outskirts of Bangkok - such as factory workers, hotels and restaurants workers, domestic workers, or market employees - , the inhabitants of the urban enclaves don't get involved in any of the religious, educational or health-related associative movements. It is not a trend; it is a constant.

The cosmopolitan condition that prevails in the enclaves is by no means expressed in terms of partnerships and networks, whether secular or religious. Of course, with very rare exceptions, commercial transactions are not allowed outside of the staff; religious services are also prohibited and external marks of religious affiliation are mostly reduced to a few posters stuck inside the rooms. Actually, it is not so much ritual practices that are restrained as any form of gathering, all the more notable as religious and/or associative offers are readily available to migrant workers in the city, as we have seen. The mesh of relational dynamics which brings consistency to social crossroads elsewhere is not operative in these enclaves of migrant workers. At different levels, it is an attitude of self-distancing towards the three major forms of sociability at their disposal that prevails in the enclaves. These are:

1) Distancing from social life via social networks. If the residents of the enclaves remain most of the time connected, this does not go beyond the virtual space in which the dial of their mobile phone confines them. They thus keep each other digitally informed of administrative developments concerning migrant workers,

accidents affecting each other and the labor market without social grouping in physical space.

2) They justify distancing from associative offers by a lack of free time and interest. Their relationship to churches and monasteries is indirect and, in the continuity of the previous remark concerning "social networks", it is by computer subscription that a minority of the residents in the enclaves contribute twice a year to the religious offering.

3) Distancing from family networks with remittances and returns are always distant. To the slow extension of the remittance periodicity corresponds a disintegration of family relationships, to the point where the very idea of returning home vanishes confusedly into limbo (Cung Liang Hu Chin, 2018).

Based on an estimated average salary of 9,000 to 11,000 Thai Baht (THB, 1 THB equaly approximately 0.030 USD) per month including overtime,[12] migrant workers remit around 4,000 THB/month, or roughly a third of their salary, beyond which the budget balance seems complicated. The differences can however be quite variable. Ma Ee Shway Mun (မအေးရွှေမုံ), a 29-year-old volunteer at the DBA, had been in Thailand for six years, and was two years ago recruited into an import/export company. Her salary is 13,000 THB/month and she sends around 9,000 THB/month to her parents, which is more than half of what she earns. "Because sending money to my parents is why I came to Bangkok," she argues (personal communication, January 5, 2019).

Soe Ta Oo (စိုးတာဦး) is in charge of drilling the basement of a building site and driving in the supporting posts, a dangerous activity requiring constant attention. The brow bone injury? "It's nothing," he says. Unable to work for three days and on 'sick leave' without pay, he has been in Thailand for a total of thirteen years, and twelve for his wife, both present now for five months on the Rama IX site. Soe Ta Oo

12. Overtime pays around 60 THB/hour, mainly for extended work in the evening or night work. Depending on the urban environment, Sunday can be a break because of the risk of complaints about sound disturbances from the neighborhood.

considers himself to have come out quite well from his accident, a shock to the brow bone with a steel beam weighing several hundred kilos, especially since his employer covered the costs for the stitches. He earns 400 THB/day or about 12,000 THB/month, barely lower than that of Ma Ee Shway Mun. The two worker's living conditions are however very different from the point of view of the possibilities of family and community mutual aid. Ma Ee-Shway-Mun is integrated into a network of strong sociability from which Soe Ta Oe does not benefit, either because he keeps himself away from the associative environment, or because he was forced to expand his family ties. He remits around 3,000 to 3,500 THB/month. At the time of interview, it had been two consecutive months since he had sent anything because his injury required treatment, and he does not know when he will be able to remit again. Whatever the reasons for this delay, and there are many - medical costs, the cost of making papers compliant, the cost of travel to border posts to have the papers endorsed, undue payments to officials during administrative procedures and police checks, sums demanded by essential intermediaries, expenses related to returning home if possible once a year, loaning money to a friend, or simply the cost of daily living in Bangkok - debt is a recurring trap from which the residents in the enclaves struggle to escape. Because here, in the associative and family solitude of the barracks, no form of mutual aid is able to alleviate the spiral of debt.

Despite the importance of the remittance's share of the total salary, an erosion of social capital correlates with delays in sending money to the family; the disintegration of family relationships is a phenomenon recorded on a constant basis. It is in terms of reciprocity that a cog is put in place of which remittance constitutes the pivot. When the return on investment is broken - and this is common in such a context of precariousness and vulnerability to which are added low income and recurring debt - generalized frustration sets in (Hoang & Yeoh, 2015; Cung Liang Hu Chin, 2018). Frustration for the religious bodies who through their networks helped a migrant worker go abroad, frustration for family members left behind looking after of children, frustration also for the residents themselves for whom the breach of the social contract is experienced as a personal failure, the regular sending of remittances being the main reason for leaving for the transnational. It is their whole social capital that is gradually called into question.

Whether it is the village networks in the highlands of Burma or the associative networks set up transnationally, the cosmopolitan condition is an essential vector of the identity formation it generates. Whether they are of an economic, matrimonial, religious or even conflictual nature, networks of exchanges and mutual aid networks are all concomitant to social formations. In the case of the enclaves in downtown Bangkok, the cosmopolitan condition is combined with a withdrawal into oneself. This distance from all social life – or from a social life essentially reduced to the two confinement spaces that are the construction site and the barracks – is a distinctive fact of the enclaves. A passage comes back to me from *La Condition Cosmopolite* about these *"off-site" (hors lieu)* camps, where the fact of "living" in a foreign camp is "not being in the world, not living in a place" (Agier, 2013a, p. 106) or as Adam Saltsman would say about the so called "buffalo enclosure" camp near Mae Sot (แม่สอด), "both inside and outside the urban space … a third world" (2015, p. 17).

It is through negation that the residents of the enclaves position themselves in their relationship to the world. How could it be otherwise? How can the crossing of a threshold such as those found in enclaves create social ties when the established rule is fragmentation? How can the language of dispersion therefore find its necessary sociological consistency in the absence of any common grammar?[13] Neither "non-places" although interchangeable and impersonal (Augé, 1992), nor strictly speaking outside the world, because they are so cruelly within the world as a residual form of globalization, the enclaves have neither the coherence proper to bonded community formations – as are supposed to be in ethnic groups - nor the consistency of crossroads spaces based on a bundle of partnerships; from every point of view, the enclaves of central Bangkok are a territory of desocialization. To wonder how much of this is by choice or through constraint, is in a way to answer the question.

13. For a discussion of this concept of "consistency" and of "holding together" a heterogeneous territory, see Deleuze & Guattari (1980, p. 398), a problematic discussed also in Robinne (2021).

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3

Female Migrant Labor to and from Kyu Shaw, a Tea-Cultivating Ta'ang Community

Lei Shwe Sin Myint & Sandar Aung

Abstract

Similar to the numerous other Ta'ang (Palaung) communities in upland Myanmar, the families of Kyu Shaw Village, Kyaukme Township, primarily make their living by cultivating tea. Labor involved includes planting, growing, harvesting, and preparing the crop for sale in its different forms throughout the year, but the industry becomes particularly labor-intensive when tea leaf sprouts are picked in March and April. Village households do not have enough labor for this period, so they rely on migrant workers mainly from lowland Myanmar. At the same time, most young Ta'ang women in the village have started migrating to other areas, often China and Thailand, as migrant workers themselves, to pursue alternative livelihood strategies away from the tea industry. This chapter explores the migration patterns of the area, identifying the push and pull factors influencing these decisions, and the changing perspectives of the different groups of migrants. It relies on ethnographic field observation in addition to semi-structured, in-depth interviews with incoming Bama migrant workers and Ta'ang women who migrated elsewhere, and other local community actors. Changes in economic conditions are the primary factor influencing these migration patterns, but other factors such as

changing perspectives on traditional cultural norms and a desire for a different type of livelihood also intersect with these broader economic shifts, shown in this crucial case study of female migration in modern-day Myanmar.

Keywords: Ta'ang communities, tea industry, inward migration, outward migration.

1. Introduction

> *Leqpeqkaung sachinlyin palaungtaun tekhnai*
> (လက်ဖက်ကောင်း စားချင်လျှင် ပလောင်တောင်တက်နှေး)
> "Slowly climb up the Palaung's hill if you want to eat good quality tea"[1] – a local saying.

The Ta'ang (တအောင်း) people, widely known in Burmese as "Palaung", mostly live in the highlands of Shan State (ရှမ်းပြည်နယ်). They are the original and most highly praised tea cultivators in Myanmar. For generations, tea cultivation has been their means of livelihood with tea products their primary source of income. As can be seen in the saying, "Tea originated from the Palaung" (Myint Naing, 2020), they are credited as being the first tea cultivators in Myanmar. "Palaung" is often used synonymously with good quality tea. Because of their knowledge and skills, Ta'ang women play an important part in tea cultivation. However, recent changes in the economic and political situation in Myanmar have encouraged Ta'ang females to migrate from the regions their people have lived in for centuries to other places for work.

People have always moved around the world. Early humans were nomadic, traveling in search of food, shelter, and safety. Today, people move for many different economic, political, cultural, religious, environmental and other reasons. Sometimes events beyond people's control, like war or natural disaster, displace and force people to

1. The main livelihood of the Ta'ang (Palaung) people is tea cultivation. As they live in the highlands, their tea plantations are located up on high hills. One of the everyday tasks of the Ta'ang people is climbing up these hills to pick tea.

migrate. Migration is a response of human organisms to economic, social, political and demographic forces in the environment and an important symptom of social change in society (Kainth et al., 2010).

In developing countries, rural households often rely on more than one income source and the diversity of rural livelihoods deserves critical attention in the discussion on rural poverty reduction in low-income developing countries. Rural livelihoods, however, are not only odd bits of wage work on a neighbor's farm, or full-time non-farm occupations; entire livelihoods rely on the fact that income and food are sourced from various directions, minimizing risk to ensure subsistence and a modest surplus (Ellis, 2000). Livelihoods and land, worldwide, are inseparably linked through human appropriation of natural resources, and associated environmental feedbacks. In the Asian uplands, rural communities have long relied on subsistence swidden farming and the trade of farm and forest products to make a living off the land (Erni, 2015). The uplands of Myanmar are a case in point regarding both of these conditions. The country remains difficult to perform research in due to decades of military rule and ongoing civil conflict, while Myanmar's ethnic upland communities have persistently relied on swidden farming (Mark, 2016).

In Northern Shan State, conflict between the Myanmar military and ethnic armed organizations often affects the areas where the Ta'ang live. As a result, a large number of Ta'ang people have left their homes to find shelter in other places. Although some have been able to return, many are still internally displaced persons (IDPs) and are now struggling in the face of financial difficulty and conflict (Village leader, personal communication, November 11, 2019). The Ta'ang people have used different methods to overcome these challenges.

This chapter focuses on Kyu Shaw Village (ကြူရှော) (henceforth: Kyu Shaw), which is located in Kyaukme Township (ကျောက်မဲ), in Northern Shan State. The inhabitants of Kyu Shaw are Ta'ang people who make their living by growing tea leaves and producing both dry and fermented tea products. Most of the villagers of Kyu Shaw hold onto certain traditional cultural values and follow cultural norms which could be seen as being gender discriminatory. For example, according to tradition, it is the norm for Ta'ang men to be the head of the

household and to provide financial support to the women of the household. As for the Ta'ang women, it is the cultural norm to be the housekeepers of the family, while also taking care of the children. The villagers of Kyu Shaw have for a long time lived and acted within the boundaries of their traditionally accepted gender behaviors.

Unsatisfied, many Ta'ang women of Kyu Shaw have decided to take their lives and future into their own hands. The women have quit tea cultivation due to push factors such as low tea prices, low wages and the seasonal nature of the business income. In order to provide for their families, they have lost interest in tea cultivation and transitioned to other jobs that provide better pay. A number of them have moved to other places outside of the village in search of such jobs.

The migration of Ta'ang women for better work and opportunities is best described in a saying that many of them have quoted: "*taywar mapyaung, lu kaung maphyit*" (တရွာမပြောင်း သူကောင်းမဖြစ်) which means, "unless one moves to another village, it's hard to become a person of significance" (Ta-ang:ကော်နိုးအီလိုည်းခတ်ငေ,ဂျိုက်ဟာဝ်းဆနာဝ်း ဒဲ့ခိုက်ငေ ဘို တော ဆေဆေ). For the Ta'ang women of Kyu Shaw, migration allows them to improve their financial situation. By breaking out of the tradition of staying home and taking care of the family, some Ta'ang females are contributing to transforming their culture. Therefore, this chapter studies the Ta'ang females of Kyu Shaw who bring change to their cultural structure by choosing to focus on generating economic capital instead of maintaining their cultural capital through following village traditions and norms.

2. Literature Review

Inward movement expresses the processes of centripetal movements such as rural–urban migration, gentrification, or re-urbanization/ urban renewal. Outward movement describes the processes of centrifugal movements such as suburbanization, counter-urbanization and urban sprawl (Burdett, n.d.). William Marr (1973) describes the economic determinants of total annual inward and outward migration to and from Canada and the impact of this net inward migration on

the Canadian economy for the period 1950 to 1967. The present study seeks to identify the determinants of both inward and outward migration on the basis of his theoretical framework.

Inward and outward migration within a country is based on the economic situation of the whole country. Yet it is important to note that the findings of this chapter do not represent the country as a whole but are based on the situations and events that took place within the research area.

Research has noted that some labor migration issues have not been explored in the tea sector and that migration flows occur in response to expectations of urban-rural differences in income rather than actual earnings. Consequently, migration trends can be analyzed through these variables (Dharmadasa, 2014). This research discusses the decisions to migrate for work made by the Ta'ang women in Kyu Shaw in response to the decline of tea cultivation and hopes of better employment and income. At the same time, it explores the case of Bama women who migrate to Kyu Shaw and other hill areas in search of better means to support their families. These two simultaneous cases of women migrating to and from Kyu Shaw will be compared. This research highlights how Ta'ang women differ from Ta'ang men in the way they decide to financially support their families. For Ta'ang women, choosing to work outside of the home and village is in itself seen as breaking away from culture.

According to Widyawati et al. (2017), locals of Girimukti Village in West Java, Indonesia, share similar livelihoods to the Ta-ang. They cultivate rice, tea and raise goats. Starting from 1980, villagers began to grow tea. In their case, tea plantation owners and workers faced different difficulties. They found that drought and debt had major effects on the livelihoods of the locals. In West Java, the dry season usually lasts from May to September, but in recent years it has extended as far as November. In 2015-2016, due to the El Niño weather effect, a long drought occurred as well. In addition, local tea traders no longer buy tea from growers once a month, but once every two months due to the drop in tea quality and output. In response, many tea growers sought to increase harvests by using fertilizers and taking out loans. This led to further financial difficulty as they lost manpower and

financial power to maintain their tea plantations. For these villagers, tea cultivation ceased to be a dependable source of income due to the lack of horizontal coordination/social capital.

The research mentioned above portrays how tea cultivation can become unsustainable for people due to drought and debt. Unlike Girimukti, the reasons why villagers in Kyu Shaw are unable to continue their lifelong occupation of cultivating tea are the increasing scarcity of workers and the decrease in tea prices. This chapter focuses on how local villagers have migrated to other places such as Mandalay and China in search of alternative jobs in response to these difficulties.

According to Soe Soe Htway et al. (2014), 30 per cent of Myanmar's rural population are living in poverty, but the country as a whole is self-sufficient in terms of food resources. There is a large income gap between the regions and states of Myanmar (UNDP, 2011). Rural people of Myanmar work in many different occupations depending on their local natural resources and climate. The authors elaborate that in the Ayeyarwady (ဧရာဝတီ) delta regions, where there are both landowners and landless farmers, the two groups depend on each other. Rice cultivation is the main source of income for farmers living there. Farmers may be able to harvest two or three crops per year, depending on the rain level. But many are being forced to abandon agriculture due to natural disasters and price changes. Additionally, farmers are unable to cope with the scarcity of workers and rise in workers' pay. As a result, many farmers are now turning to different occupations. Saith (1999) argued that in order to reduce farmers' dependency on their crops alone, they must diversify their crops and adopt other side jobs as well. Depending on a single crop is a high-risk strategy for farmers and their families as it is vulnerable to climate change and price changes.

Rice farmers are able to make up for the lack of manpower by changing their cultivation methods (Soe Soe Htway et al., 2014). For example, they may utilize machinery. This does not work for all farmers as not all can afford to pay the monthly installments required to buy such modern farming tools and machinery. Therefore, many farmers in the delta region have chosen to leave farming altogether and seek jobs elsewhere. According to interviews, within a decade, 30-50 per cent of

village youths had temporarily migrated for work in other towns, and abroad to countries such as Thailand and Malaysia (Soe Soe Htway et al., 2014). As farming is a seasonal occupation, urban jobs with steadier income were more attractive for rural youths.

The points discussed above show that people in rural areas frequently turn to migration to cope with the financial challenges that come with climate change, rises in expenses, lack of human resources and modern machinery in agriculture. This chapter will compare the case of Kyu Shaw with these research findings.

3. Research Method & Questions

The study area is Kyu Shaw Village, Kyaukme Township, Northern Shan State, located about seven miles from Kyaukme Town ,with a total of 96 households and a population of 300 (Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2019). The research subjects are migrant workers from Myingyan (မြင်းခြံ) and Monywa (မုံရွာ) townships, tealeaf pickers, growers and female migrant workers. From 2018 to 2020, informal, formal, and in-depth interviews were conducted, and extensive ethnographic observation was used, despite the limited duration of the research caused by the ongoing civil war in the area. Participant observation involved the researcher participating in tea picking tasks with locals in the hills. In-depth interviews were conducted with three Ta'ang females with experience in migrating to other areas for work. Semi-structured interviews were used during interviews with Ta'ang females sharing their migration and working experiences in other areas. It was also used in interviews with three Burmese women who were working in the village as tea pickers.

The majority of scholarly discourse about the Ta'ang people focuses on socialization, land grabbing and economic issues (Milne, 2004). The qualitative literature on the Ta'ang still needs insight on the changes in cultural structure and breaking of stereotypes in Ta'ang communities. Therefore, this research aims to address this gap from an ethnographic point of view. By applying ethnographic methods, this study provides detailed insight on the way in which Ta'ang have changed their cultural

structures, the reasons behind such change, and the factors that encouraged transition from depending on socially accepted cultural capital to the prioritization of economic capital.

The chapter asks the following questions: What are the work-related difficulties and main problems that tea plantation workers face? In what ways do young Ta'ang females adjust their tea economy in order to adjust to economic changes? How do migrating women overcome challenges when they migrate in order to find better job opportunities, income and security?

4. Findings

The Ta'ang have been growing tea in the study area Kyu Shaw for over 200 years. Tea production is a heavy burden on the Ta'ang. To get the tea leaf to bloom more, one has to clean up the grass which grows on the farm before the tea harvest period. Moreover, farmers have to pick all the tea leaves on time, otherwise, the tea will become mature. This produces a lower quality tea, which in turn leads to a drop in the value of the tea and can delay when the tea comes into bloom the following season. Therefore, to avoid losing good quality tea, the farmers need a large amount of labor to pick the tea leaves when the tea is in bloom.

4.1 Inward Movement of Female Migrant Workers

In the past, the tea pickers came from places in central Myanmar such as Mandalay (မန္တလေး) and Myingyan, as well as other places in the Ta'ang area such as Kutkai (ကွတ်ခိုင်) and Namtu (နမ့်တူ) townships. But now, labor from these areas is difficult to find because of political conflict so that the villagers need to find new alternatives. There are two types of migrant workers in Kyu Shaw. The first one is local Ta'ang women: when the tea leaf product is low, they go to other areas for work. Other migrant workers are Bama women who live in the central Burma region. In March and April, they came to Kyu Shaw for tea leaf picking. Bama have been coming to Kyu Shaw from the Myanmar lowlands to pick the sprouts of tea leaves for 50 years, according to the oldest informants we found in this village. Nearly 300 Bama people on

average come to pick tea leaves each year. The owners (*paw-linn*)[2] do not pay any wages to the people who come to help with the tea leaf picking. These laborers instead take half of the picked tea leaf sprouts in compensation.

One 50-year-old Bama female migrant worker said:

> "*We have 10 years of continuous experience in picking tea leaves. We have to stay one month or 45 days, as long days, and we have to stay 25 days as short days. Tea leaves grow plenty if the rain is good and less if the rain is bad. It is like a Bama farmer guessing about the yield of their crops*" (Ma Nan Myint, personal communication, February 6, 2019).

By observing the local system of payment in which tea is picked and divided between the tea plantation owners and the Bama migrant tea pickers, it is evident that local tea growers depend on the Bama tea pickers. This is especially true during the *shwephi* (ရွှေဖို) tea harvesting season. These tea leaves are their most profitable product, so it is important that the *shwephi* tea is picked in time. With the help of migrant Burmese tea pickers, local tea growers are able to pick tea while the tea leaves are still tender and fit for harvest. In the next section, labor shortages, the relationships between migrant workers and tea plantation owners, the way in which they support each other, and local experiences and difficulties concerning tea growing are presented.

4.2 Labor Shortage Issues in the Ta'ang Community

According to those interviewed, the numbers of Bama migrants coming to pick tea leaf sprouts has been declining for the last five years. This is due to two factors: first, the economic activity in central Myanmar is increasing and people have less motivation to go to Ta'ang areas for work, and second, the political situation is tense and unsafe, thereby discouraging migration.

2. Pawlin is Ta'ang language meaning "a wealthy person".

Nowadays, most of the workers who help to pick the tea sprouts at Kyu Shaw are women from Myingyan and Natogyi (နွားထိုးကြီး), photos shown in figures 3.1 and 3.2. Sometimes, political conflict can create unexpected opportunities to get extra labor. For instance, in 2019, two Ta'ang families came to help and pick tea leaves, a total of two men and eight women who moved to Kyaukme Township from Pansai (ပန်ဆိုင်း), Namhsan (နမ့်ဆန်), Northern Shan State, to avoid conflict in their region and as they had no jobs.

Some Bama workers used to stay for nearly one month each time they came to pick *shwephi* tea leaves. Some would stay continuously without going back to their region. Some people also come back again in May and June. Within the intervening time, Ta'ang women picked the tea leaf by themselves as a private family job. But when tea leaves sprout plentifully on every farm the private family workforce is no longer sufficient to pick them all.

Since 2015, the majority of Bama tea pickers stopped coming to Kyu Shaw due to military conflict in the Ta'ang areas. As a result, tea growers in the village suffered a tea picker shortage. Tea leaf yield decreased as many of the tea trees were left unpicked and grew older leaves. In spite of the conflict and difficulties, many tea growers tried their best to recall as many Bama tea pickers as they could and provided them with food and accommodation.

4.3 Network System of Migrant Workers and Local People

As in the past, tea leaf laborers still keep 50% of the harvest. In addition, the owners of tea leaf farmland support their workers by providing them with vegetables, tomatoes and cauliflowers which they get from their farmlands, and salt and firewood for cooking meals. Laborers are allowed to stay in the hut which is used for steaming the tea leaves. Some workers brought their own cooking pots, plates, and blankets. The owners give these out to the workers who did not bring their own.

As explained by a 52-year-old woman who lived in the eastern village of Khan Sat Kone (ခံစပ်ကုန်း), Natogyi Township:

> *"The farmland owners are not all the same as each other, some owners arrange for accommodation only … the weather is very hot in our region, but the weather is very good at this village and tea leaf picking can provide as much income as we are able to pick. Thus, we came to this village to pick the tea leaf sprouts"* (Ma Thein Hla, personal communication, February 6, 2019).

Relations between Ta'ang tea plantations and Bama workers can be analyzed through different perspectives. One is that most of the migrant workers know that the tea picking season starts fifteen days after the Buddhist New Year holiday and Thingyan (သင်္ကြန်) festival as they come to Kyu Shaw every year. Another perspective is that these labor migrations involve not only Kyu Shaw and migrant workers but also networks of other villages selling materials for picking tea leaves. Some women who come from eastern Khan Sat Kone Village carried materials from the lower part of the country to sell or barter at Kyu Shaw. The Ta'ang residents who lived in Kyu Shaw would find contacts to come and pick tea leaves via these traveling women traders.

The *shwephi* tea harvest season is the most important season for the tea growers of Kyu Shaw Village. However, during the *shwephi* tea harvest season, local tea growers of Kyu Shaw require additional tea pickers from other areas. Most of the Bama who help with the tea leaf picking work are employed until the time of *shwephi* tea leaf sprouts is over. They take back the tea leaves that they picked after drying. When they reach their home, they trade the tea with their neighboring families and villages by using monthly payment and cash down payment systems.

Although tea growers of Kyu Shaw have to work only from March to November, they are usually able to live the whole year round on the profits if there is a good tea leaf yield and tea leaf prices are normal. But the recent decrease in tea prices has created problems for tea growers. Thus, to increase their income and promote financial stability in the family many young women switch to different jobs outside of their traditional occupations and are losing interest in tea growing. Young Ta'ang females express great desire to live and work in more modern ways. This is fueled by their perception that the long tradition

of tea growing is no longer a sustainable means of income. Therefore, many young Ta'ang females choose to leave tea growing and migrate to other places in search of alternative work opportunities.

Figure 3.1: *Migrant workers from Myingyan, photo taken by Sandar Aung*

Figure 3.2: *Migrant workers from Nahtogyi, photo taken by Sandar Aung*

4.4 Young Ta'ang Women Look Outwards for Better Livelihoods

For generations, the villagers in Kyu Shaw have used the same methods for tea cultivation and production. One such traditional method is the rolling and steaming of tea leaves in earthen pots by hand. This method was passed down from generation to generation. In 2016-2017, about twenty tea growing families started to use metal steam boilers and tea rolling machines. Women are involved in the tea production process from the picking to the final production of dried tea and fermented tea products and have been long praised for their skill in tea leaf picking. This is reflected in the old Ta'ang saying that goes, "women always have their *paline* (bamboo basket with tumpline) and men always have their sword" (Ta'ang: ဝါအာဝ်ခလာညး် အိုန်ဇူး; အိုမ်ပါန်း ဂေါ်ညးလှာ်နန်းမဝ်ပေန်တူအီးပဲန်း). From a very young age, Ta'ang women learn the details of tea picking by following their parents to the tea fields. There are many Ta'ang proverbs about tea picking that are passed down the generations along with their traditional knowledge. Some include, "When harvesting tea, start from the highest tree to the lowest" and "when picking tea, start from the lowest branch" (Ta'ang: ယာမ်းပက်တာ်ညျေမ်း ခူစပို့ဇေမ်း စဆဲ; တိုင်နောဇား ပက်လေ; ဇူးပါ်ဇေမ်း).

In addition to tea growing and harvesting, traditionally Ta'ang women are also responsible for taking care of their children and doing the household chores. For many years, they followed other traditions too, such as ceasing beautification and shaving their heads after marriage.

Our research discovered that also Ta'ang people in Kyu Shaw practiced and lived in accordance with these traditional customs, although there is no equality and equity in gender relations. They used to think that if girls are skilled in household work such as cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house, looking after the children and serving their husbands, it will be sufficient for a secure marriage and livelihood.

In the past, Ta'ang parents did not allow their daughters to migrate to other places or work elsewhere. However, the community now faces new problems such as financial difficulties, inability to support children's education, and the increased prices of essential food items. Many have fallen into debt and are forced to purchase these necessities

with credit. Families were forced to pawn their valuables and many had disputes and arguments. Seeing the financial problems of their parents, many young females started to look outwards for alternative sources of income to help their parents. Taking the example of other villages, some women became charcoal makers, while others migrated to China for work. Thus, by word of mouth, young Ta'ang females began to leave their traditional tea growing background and shifted to different livelihoods in order to help their families overcome financial difficulty.

In accordance with the transformed era, younger generations of the Ta'ang who live in Kyu Shaw are struggling to transform their lives. For the last ten years, the younger generations of Kyu Shaw have been less interested in tea. They moved to adjacent regions and places further afar for work. A number of Ta'ang men and some young girls also migrated to China to work as masons, at handset factories or at restaurants (see figure 3.3). Because of this, youths are rare to see in Kyu Shaw and young people working in or interested in the tea business are even scarcer, their number gradually declining to the time of writing.

Figure 3.3: *Young girls who went to China, photo taken by Lei Shwe Sin Myint*

Regarding young outward migration, a twenty-five-year-old female said,

> "*I go to work in China because I can earn money easily. The work situation in our upland area is difficult for my mother. We cannot afford for my younger sisters to go to school. That is why I go to work in China, so I can help my mother*" (Ma Ei Htoo, personal communication, February 9, 2019).

In Kyu Shaw, most of the young females delight to work in other countries, such as China, rather than in their traditional tea business. They usually return to their villages for a year, especially in *shwephi* tea season, March and April. As this time is very important for tea cultivation, most parents ask their children to return to their village for tea picking.

A mother of five daughters also explained about her experience of working in China. The oldest daughter went to China for a long time and the second oldest daughter recently followed her. Now, there are less people to work effectively in the family tea business. But the two daughters can earn money in China and afford for their younger sisters to go to school. The profit from the family tea business only meets their subsistence needs with a low income.

> *"I sent my youngest daughter to the bordering school in Kyaukme when she was in sixth grade. Now she is in the eleventh grade. This year we had to spend 1,000,000 Myanmar Kyat for her education. So, my older daughters have to go to China and find jobs there. They save money and send it to me. Sometimes they come back home in the shwephi tea season. So, it is very helpful for us that they work in China"* (Lway Aye Moon, personal communication, February 7, 2019).

Furthermore, most of these young female villagers want to change their lives. They desire to have beautiful lives and lifestyles, and they want to buy consumer goods such as mobile phones, cosmetics, or clothes. They realize that they might not achieve these desires if they

live in their village. As the Myanmar telecommunication network has recently developed, they have learned many things from the internet and their social networks. They realize that it is a great advantage for them to work at places with higher incomes than their native village. In 2019 some of the young females went to work in Wa State (ဝကိုယိုင်အုပ်ချုပ်ခွင့်ရဒေသ), mostly at cigarette factories. It is easier now to travel to Wa State than to China and other countries, as Wa State does not require a passport or visa.

Most of the younger generation want economic and social development for their native Kyu Shaw. Through the assistance of Ta'ang Buddhist monks, the young generation is working together for village development. The population in Kyu Shaw has decreased as many people choose to become migrant workers. In 2018-2019 some of the Kyu Shaw villagers noted some positive developments in the village. One said,

> "*My village now has a lot of development. Many houses are built with bricks as modern houses* (see figure 3.5). *When I was young, we had only traditional bamboo long houses* (see figure 3.4). *It was thirty years ago. Now, some households even have cars. So, the situation is totally different. When I was young, the village situation was underdeveloped. Now, Kyu Shaw is developed.*"

Figure 3.4: *Traditional long house, photo taken by Lei Shwe Sin Myint*

Figure 3.5: *Modern house built with bricks, photo taken by Lei Shwe Sin Myint*

It is true that many Kyu Shaw houses are being built in better condition than in the past, thanks to higher incomes. A leader of a Kyu Shaw youth group expanded that:

> *"We could develop our village because our young generations of females work outside the village. In this village we have a youth group and work together if we have a celebration or festival. We have over 1,000,000 Myanmar Kyat (about seven hundred US dollars) for public funds. This fund is mainly donated by our migrant workers. If they stay in this village, we cannot get funds from them. The people who work outside the village are not providing physical work for the village, but they are donating for the village fund. The young people from the village cannot make donation, but they can physically help for the village development … We can do many things for the village. We can build a football playground … I have tried to explain about the village (public) funding for development. Some villagers understand it and they can donate it happily. But some people don't really understand it although they donate some cash"* (Mai Tun Aye, personal communication, April 10, 2019).

A twenty-five-year-old male said that people often worry that young males and females who migrated may not return to their native village:

> *"I worry about one thing. When we are doing village development, some people study at the cities, they become educated people and they don't return to their native village. Some people come back to the village only one or two times. However, the people who are not educated and graduated, they always return to their village and they are not proud of themselves. The people who work in big cities and abroad, they usually come back to the village. I wish that all the young people should return to their native village Kyu Shaw"* (Mai Yan Naung, personal communication, April 10, 2019).

Most of the young Ta'ang females do not have an ethnocentric ideology. To this day, many married Bama, Shan, Kachin, or Chinese, not only people from Kyu Shaw. They have opposed and broken away from their long-accepted ancestral way of life, traditions and customs, and lost the zeal for tea that is expressed in the old Ta'ang saying, "if one wants good tea, slowly climb up the Palaung hill." Instead, they focus their energy on overcoming traditions and customs in order to change their lives for the better.

5. Discussion

The main problem for Ta'ang tea plantation owners living in Kyu Shaw is the decrease in tea pickers. In the past, this problem was solved by laborers from the lowlands. But now, due to armed conflict in the area, the number of lowland tea pickers has decreased. The situation worsened further as many young local women from the village began to migrate to other places for work. Many Ta'ang females in the village felt burdened by the decreasing profits of traditional tea cultivation. No longer wishing to see their families struggling and unsatisfied by their current situation, they decided to avoid their traditional work. Looking at the way in which they choose to migrate to towns, cities and even other countries it is evident that the Ta'ang females value

their families' wellbeing over their traditions. The more they lose interest and sentiment for their traditional way of life and livelihoods, the more their focus centers on finding and working in different occupations outside of the village. While Ta'ang females pursue lifelong careers in areas outside of their traditional boundaries, they slowly begin to change the customs observed by their ancestors. It is believed that this change is not done in wish of denying their traditions. Rather, their continuing the path of cultural change is in order to improve their lives according to the changing times.

According to Iqbal and Gusman (2015), there are numerous push and pull factors of labor migration. Poverty, unemployment, natural disaster, war and culture have been the common push factors. The side effects of female labor migration are the major number of workers becoming victims of human trafficking. These female migrants become the object of forced labor, underage-employment and forced to be sex workers. In contrast, the Ta'ang females of Kyu Shaw migrate out of their own will and desire to improve their lives.

Duara and Mallick (2012) describe the tea industry in Assam against the backdrop of two major issues and concerns: the extent of migration and subordination of women workers in the tea estates. The authors claim that the tea industry in Assam is a significant contributor to the development of the region, having produced annually nearly 53 per cent of the total production of tea in India and generated employment for a large proportion of the population in Assam. Their paper asserts that the issues of migration from other regions and sectors, declining labor conditions, and subordination of women workers may be attributed to the withdrawal of the state from its responsibilities, commitment and social welfare activities.

A few Burmese tea pickers have managed to come to the village in spite of armed conflict, but there are still not enough workers. According to Duara and Mallick (2012), tea cultivation helps to increase jobs and improve a region's development. But due to the current situation in the study area, while tea cultivation in Kyu Shaw may provide job opportunities to locals, it contributes little to the development of the village due to low profits. Instead, tea cultivators earn only enough to cover their families' living expenses. This is the

main reason why Ta'ang females from the village migrate to other places for work. Therefore, the findings of this study share some similarities with Duara and Mallick while showing that in times of conflict and unrest, tea growing societies may look elsewhere for alternative income opportunities in response.

The desire to migrate and work in other places in order to improve one's financial situation is especially strong amongst Ta'ang females in the research area. For them, migrating for work is seen as a means to carry their families out of financial difficulty: changing their lives while improving their family members' lives as well. Therefore, it is observed that the young Ta'ang females of Kyu Shaw have shifted from depending on cultural capital to generating economic capital.

6. Conclusion

During this chapter's study of the economic changes occurring due to the migrant work of young Ta'ang females in Kyu Shaw, two migration types were found: those of Ta'ang females and Bama women. On one hand, the migration of Bama women takes place during the summer months when there are few jobs in the lowlands where they live. For many years, these women have seasonally migrated as tea pickers to the tea plantations for work and have established lifelong friendships with tea growers. Thus, these are the pull factors that bring Bama tea pickers to Kyu Shaw.

On the other hand, the Ta'ang females' migration is often permanent as few choose to return home once they become financially independent. The main push factor for Ta'ang females is the prospect and benefit of a steady income elsewhere. A similar push factor is the financial independence that migration provides as they find it difficult to ask parents for money for personal use. The financial gains and career advancements that these females have worked long and hard for in their new locales discourage them from returning to their villages permanently, and they prefer to provide financial aid to their families and village. Although their parents want them to return at least during the tea picking season, many refuse as they are concerned to lose their

jobs, and the income from tea picking is much less than their salaries. As a result, a scarcity of available tea pickers, especially at peak seasons, has become a central problem for tea businesses in Kyu Shaw.

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4

Combating the Trafficking of Myanmar Women to China and Thailand and Protecting Victims on their Return

Nita

Abstract

Human trafficking continues to threaten lives all over the world and Myanmar is a major source country. By adopting the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in 2000, the United Nations established a normative framework to combat human trafficking at the international and national levels. However, this protocol does not explicitly mention forced marriage or bride trafficking in its definition of human trafficking; nor does the Myanmar 2005 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law, which remains an important piece of national legislation in line with international standards. From 2007 to 2018, a large number of Myanmar females were trafficked to China for forced marriage and to Thailand for sexual exploitation. This chapter focuses on the efforts by the pre-coup Myanmar government to prevent the trafficking of Myanmar women to China and Thailand and to protect trafficking survivors on their return. It argues that recent and current efforts are insufficient and more must be done to prevent trafficking and protect

survivors. The chapter also evaluates policy measures in Myanmar related to ongoing support for returned victims of trafficking.

Keywords: human trafficking, bride trafficking, trafficking victims, sexual exploitation, forced marriage.

1. Introduction

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery and an abuse of the human rights of the persons concerned, as well as a crime against the state. In Myanmar, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law (henceforth the "ATP Law") was promulgated in 2005. As a source country, Myanmar has been strengthening its efforts to combat trafficking in persons for the past 20 years, with mixed results. Five forms of human trafficking were identified by the Myanmar pre-coup government: forced labor, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, forced adoption, and bonded labor, with forced surrogacy added as a distinct and separate crime (The Central Body, 2018). There has been a high demand for women in the Chinese sex industry and as wives of Chinese men because of that country's government's birth control policies.

Although a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on cooperatively combating human trafficking was signed by Myanmar and China in 2009, they are yet to draft and develop a plan of action. The Chinese government has not classified forced marriage as a form of human trafficking and thus it remains difficult for Myanmar authorities to either control or prevent Myanmar girls and women from being forced into marriages with Chinese men (The Central Body, 2018). Masood's research (2013) shows how the sex industry in Thailand is another major destination for Myanmar women. This chapter describes the experiences of women trafficked to China and Thailand, discusses the legislative framework in Myanmar and evaluates the actions and measures taken by the pre-coup Government of Myanmar to prevent women and girls from falling prey to traffickers and to protect victims of trafficking on their return.

1.1 Review of Literature

Despite the Myanmar government attempting to combat human trafficking from several angles, incidents of human trafficking have not declined in the country. Trafficking is fueled by major push factors such as poor economic development, natural disasters, conflict, lack of employment, and low-income generation. Rehabilitation assistance for the victims of trafficking and support for vocational activities is limited and ineffective, especially in remote areas where security is an issue (The Central Body, 2018). The Department of Social Welfare (DSW), inside the Myanmar Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR), was at the time of research responsible for helping victims of trafficking and claimed to offer various services. However, the resources available to victims were not sufficient and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have deemed the services provided to be inadequate (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Other research has also found that Myanmar does not abide by its obligations under international law to provide effective support for trafficking victims (Nwe Nwe Lwin, 2016). The 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report (United States, 2020) again recently ranked Myanmar as a Tier 3 country using the 2000 Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act. The Palaung Women's Organization (ပဧလောင်) (2011) asserts that Myanmar women who have escaped trafficking situations and returned to their communities encounter great difficulty returning to a 'normal' life. They face discrimination from local community members who believe they were engaged in sex work while absent from their homes.

UN Women (2020) shows that the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (also known as the Palermo Protocol, but henceforth the "Anti-Trafficking Protocol") fails to address reintegration in any of its articles. Absence of long-term support for reintegration and the lack of capacity to check on survivors over time were also referred to as gaps in reintegration programming by one NGO representative in Myanmar. Current reintegration programs are short-lived and dependent on donor funding. Myanmar and Thailand also signed an MOU which is ineffective in practice and has not decreased trafficking. Robinson and Branchini (2018) suggest that the Myanmar government needs to support local programs to raise awareness about the risks of migration

and forced marriage, including incorporating anti-trafficking messages into school curriculums, health services and microfinance initiatives. According to this literature review, the previous Myanmar government did not do enough when it came to supporting victims of trafficking upon their return to their home country.

Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to suggest ways to ensure the efficient protection for trafficked women including their repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation, thereby better informing Myanmar governance actors in their future policy making. The chapter asks: what are the gaps in recent Myanmar government policy measures aimed at combating human trafficking in Myanmar? What legal loopholes exist, for example in the 2005 ATP Law, and what are their consequences? The chapter also examines the normative trafficking framework at the domestic and international levels.

1.2 Research Methodology

This chapter employed qualitative methods and sourced data from in-depth interviews with two trafficking victims at a temporary shelter for trafficked women called the Vocational Training Schools and Women Development Center (henceforth the "Center") in Yangon in 2013. Analysis of this data was supported by investigation into other trafficking cases of women at the same organization. The case studies are consonant with experiences recorded in interviews conducted by experts from World Vision (project managers, personal communication, February 14, 2020) and the Lieutenant Colonel and Police Major from the ATIPD, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division of Myanmar (Khin Khin Soe and U Kyaw Nyunt, ATIPD, personal communication, June 22, 2020).

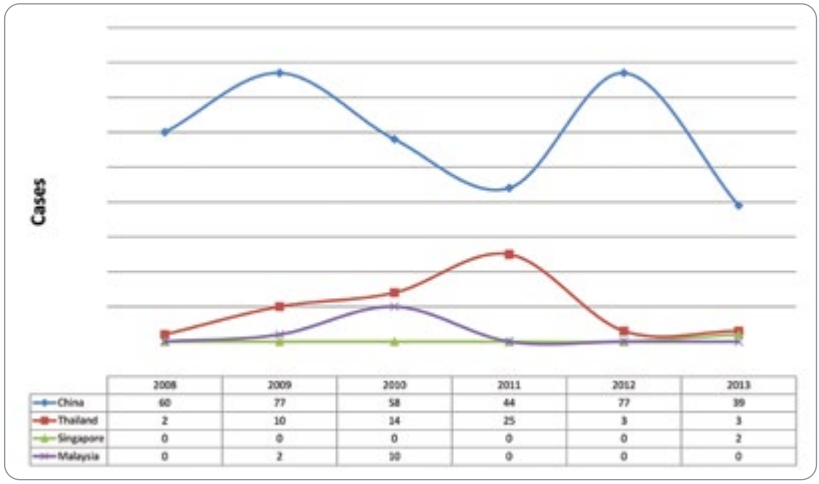


Figure 4.1: *The number of trafficked victims at the Center from 2008-2013, according to the Center's own data*

Additional information was gleaned from a desk review of the existing literature, including information from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Central Body for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons (henceforth "Central Body") and the United States Trafficking in Persons Report (United States, 2020).

2. Trafficking of Myanmar Women to China and Thailand: An Overview

Human trafficking is the act of trading human beings as goods, including torturing, prostituting and exploiting people for profit, harmfully affecting a person not only physically but also affecting their dignity and psycho-social condition. Nowadays, many countries are facing the trafficking of persons as one of their most challenging issues (The Central Body, 2007).

Myanmar shares a border with five other Southeast Asian countries: Thailand, Laos, China, India, and Bangladesh. The predominant destination countries for trafficking of persons from Myanmar are China, Malaysia, and Thailand, with China being the main destination

for Myanmar victims of trafficking. According to a report from the United Nations:

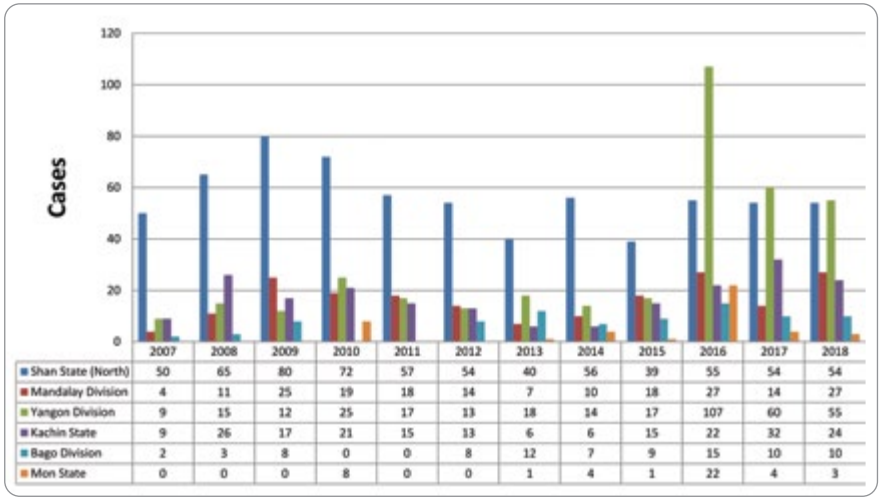
> *"Trafficking to China is primarily of girls and young women for marriage to Chinese men, with similar trends reported internally in Myanmar. Myanmar victims of trafficking in Thailand and Malaysia have often initially migrated for work voluntarily only to find themselves trafficked at the destination. Such victims are used in forced labor in factories, plantations or fishing boats, domestic servitude, commercial sexual exploitation, and begging"* (United Nations, 2011, p. 8).

A mix of both push and pull factors have contributed to the movement of Myanmar women and girls into China and Thailand. Women frequently become the sole breadwinners for their families, especially in regional areas, as many men leave the home and participate in the several armed conflicts across the country. For example, since the surrender of the Palaung State Liberation Army in 2005, Myanmar's military rulers have fixed control of Palaung (Ta'ang) zones, pouring in troops who have imposed increased taxes on agriculture and trading. In light of the low income earned from cultivating tea, the traditional livelihood there, young Ta'ang women feel compelled to move to China to search for work, leaving them open to the danger of being trafficked (Palaung Women's Organization, 2011).

Eager to help their families yet with few opportunities to do so, many feel they have no choice but to seek work in China. Wages are higher in China, even when working illegally, and there are a lot of work opportunities. The border is near and easy to traverse with or without travel documents. There is no arrangement regarding regular migration from Kachin and Northern Shan states to work in China, yet there are organizations of neighbors, associates, and family members who reach out to Myanmar women with employment opportunities on the opposite side of the border. While in many cases the work opportunities are genuine, too often Myanmar women are deceived by traffickers intending to sell them as "brides" into a daily existence that bears likeness to sexual servitude (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

China has an enormous and developing gap between the quantities of women and men, driven by gender discrimination and exacerbated by the "one-child policy" imposed by the Chinese government between 1979 and 2015. This gap created a severe "bride shortage" among the age group most likely to be looking for a spouse. China's gender imbalance has created a demand for brides that outstrips China's domestic population (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Over a hundred Myanmar women are trafficked each year and sold into sexual servitude for a sum ranging from $3,000 to $13,000 USD. In China, these women are regularly locked in a room and raped so they fall pregnant. Chinese families are ordinarily keener on reproducing a new baby than incorporating a new adult member of the family as wife, daughter-in-law or otherwise (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

According to the Palaung Women's Organization (2011), under the previous one-child policy, families in rural areas were commonly permitted a second child when their first reached five years of age, but only if the first child is a girl. Substantial fines, appropriation of assets, and prohibition from work are among the punishments for those who do not comply with the policy. The one-child policy has prompted a shortage of females among the Chinese population, as traditional son preference has led to sex-selective abortions, the kidnapping, and trafficking of women for marriage, and an increased number of commercial sex workers. Women from Myanmar are especially looked for as brides since they are seen as "less expensive" than Chinese women (Palaung Women's Organization, 2011). Myanmar's recurring military governments are supported financially and economically by China, whose policies continue to fuel conflicts and poverty in the country, causing mass migration and leading to women being trafficked to China (Palaung Women's Organization, 2011). Figure 4.2 shows the geographical distribution of the highest number of human trafficking cases in Myanmar.



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Shan State (North)	50	65	80	72	57	54	40	56	39	55	54	54
Mandalay Division	4	11	25	19	18	14	7	10	18	27	14	27
Yangon Division	9	15	12	25	17	13	18	14	17	107	60	55
Kachin State	9	26	17	21	15	13	6	6	15	22	32	24
Bago Division	2	3	8	0	0	8	12	7	9	15	10	10
Mon State	0	0	0	8	0	0	1	4	1	22	4	3

Figure 4.2: *The states, divisions, and townships in Myanmar with the highest number of human trafficking cases from 2007-2018, according to annual MOHA progress reports* (The Central Body, 2018)

These numbers, which were reported by the Myanmar police force in collaboration with the international community, reveal that Northern Shan State had the highest number of human trafficking cases, 676, over the 2007-2018 period, followed by Yangon Region with 362 and Kachin State with 206 cases. According to Myanmar government reports from 2007-2018, this is mainly due to proximity to China and Thailand and the fact that Yangon and Mandalay are main transit routes towards other countries because of their good transportation and communication systems.

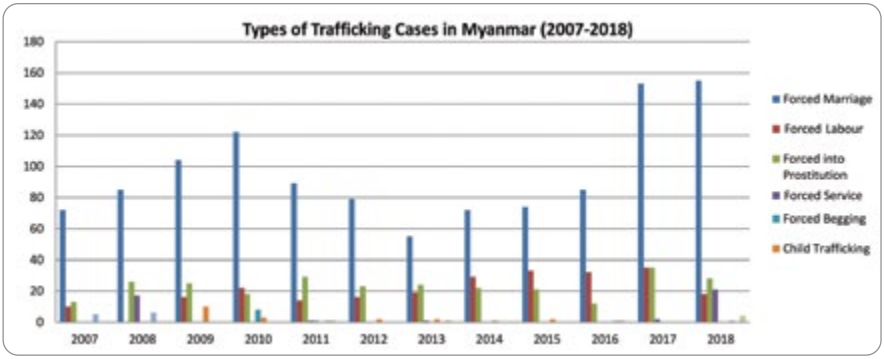
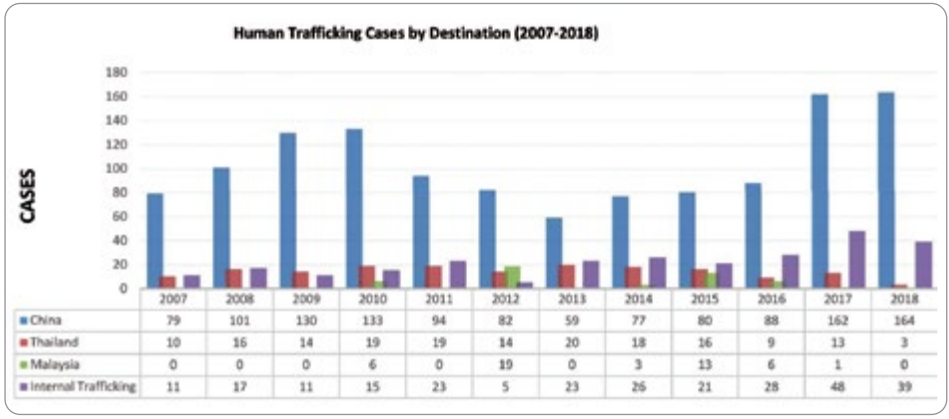


Figure 4.3: *Types of trafficking cases in Myanmar from 2007-2018, according to annual MOHA progress reports* (The Central Body, 2018)

For Myanmar as a source country, China and Thailand are the main destinations. According to the figures provided by the government and displayed in figure 4.3, the total number of trafficking victims from 2007-2018 was 1,735. This included 1,145 cases involving forced marriage; 276 cases where women were forced into prostitution; 244 cases involving forced labor; 21 cases involving forced services; 14 cases involving forced adoption; 18 cases involving child trafficking; nine cases involving forced begging, two cases involving debt bondage and four cases involving forced surrogacy. The majority of the persons concerned were women and girls above 16 years of age who were trafficked for forced marriage and sexual exploitation. The largest number of Myanmar female victims are trafficked to China for forced marriage. The second-largest country is Thailand for sexual exploitation.



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
China	79	101	130	133	94	82	59	77	80	88	162	164
Thailand	10	16	14	19	19	14	20	18	16	9	13	3
Malaysia	0	0	0	6	0	19	0	3	13	6	1	0
Internal Trafficking	11	17	11	15	23	5	23	26	21	28	48	39

Figure 4.4: *Human trafficking cases from 2007-2018 by destination, according to annual MOHA progress reports* (The Central Body 2018)

3. Cases of Myanmar Females being Trafficked to China and Thailand

There were 426 cases of trafficked people at the Center in Yangon from 2008-2013, including 355 cases involving women being sold as wives to Chinese men in China (Women Development Center Recorded cases, 2008-2013). According to an interview with the headmaster of the Center at Yangon, young women were trafficked to China for

forced marriage, whereas illegal migrant workers fell into different types of trafficking in Thailand. Chinese men frequently make a profit from selling their "wives" to new "husbands". The superintendent noted around 60% of trafficked women and girls returning from Thailand were infected with HIV. Six girls who had been trafficked to China interviewed at the center indicated that they were sold as wives to China with their consent because of poor economic conditions. The following two cases show the tragedy of women sold as wives in China.

> **Case 1: Su Su** (စုစု), an orphan, was 20 years old and worked at a karaoke bar as a singer. One day three men offered her a visit to China for two or three days. She accepted but along the road journey to the border she realized she was being sold as a bride. After reaching China, her marriage was arranged with a Chinese man. Her mother-in-law was a broker who had already sold many girls on after they first married her son. Su Su turned out to be the fifth wife of her husband. After she stayed for eight months with the man in China, her mother-in-law arranged to sell her to another Chinese man. The traffickers watched Su Su all the time but she managed to run away at one point when they fell asleep. She did not know where she was, but fortunately, she met a woman who phoned a police station. The police called a Burmese translator and after explaining her plight she was imprisoned for six months. She was finally sent back by airplane to Muse (မူဆယ်), and then sent to the center at Yangon. There were very limited counselling services and treatment at the center and Su Su felt traumatized and stigmatized. At the time of interview she had still not decided what to do next. She was afraid that if she returned to her village, then her neighbors and relatives would blame her rather than support her (Su Su, personal communication, October 15, 2013).
>
> **Case 2: Hla Hla** (လှလှ) was 21 years old and lived in Tanintharyi Region, working at a canteen. One day she met a man who promised her a good job and a good salary in China. After accepting and during the road

> journey to China, she was handed over from one broker to another until finally she reached Beijing. During the journey, Hla Hla became aware that she had been sold as a wife to a Chinese man, who turned out to be 75 years old. She ran away before the marriage ceremony and fortunately encountered a man who took her to a police station. The police called a Burmese translator and she had to stay for three months at the police station. Finally, she went back to Muse for a week and Mandalay for another week at a shelter and then transferred to the center at Yangon. The government sent her back to her village with only 500,000 Myanmar Kyat as support for her future (Hla Hla, personal communication, October 15, 2013).

Case 1 shows that Su Su did not receive any post-harm assistance to mitigate the risk of revictimization. In case 2 however, Hla Hla received some funds and vocational training, which turned out to be knitting, sewing, and weaving alongside other activities like conducting daily chores and hobbies. According to interviews with victims at the Vocational Training Center for Women at Yangon, all victims had very limited access to psychosocial support. One major problem at the moment is the lack of measures aimed at facilitating the reintegration of victims of trafficking. Too often, when the victims of trafficking return to their home, they are blamed for their plight instead of receiving the support they need to help them with their situation and traumatic experiences.

Thailand is the second-largest destination for trafficking in persons from Myanmar after China. In general, Thailand is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking in persons (United Nations, 2017). Thailand has no civil wars and few extreme human rights abuses compared to Myanmar. Against this backdrop, many people from Myanmar who want to escape their troubles at home choose Thailand as a safe destination, although they are likely to travel there illegally and remain "irregular" in the country (Nang Lao Liang Won, 1999).

4. Legal Aspects Related to the Protection of Trafficking Victims in Myanmar

The law for the protection of victims of trafficking can be found in various branches of international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and laws against international organized crime (Obokata, 2006). The Anti-Trafficking Protocol includes provisions relating to the protection of the human rights of victims of trafficking. The protocol has been ratified by the three states mentioned in this research: Myanmar, China, and Thailand. The need to protect the "internationally recognized human rights" of those trafficked is spelled out under the preamble of the Anti-Trafficking Protocol, and Article 2 clearly states that the protection of victims of trafficking "with full respect for their human rights" is one of the purposes of the protocol. This is a clear statement by the international community that trafficking is a human rights issue (Obokata, 2006).

Article 3(a) of the Anti-Trafficking Protocol defines trafficking in persons as:

> *"the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs"* (Office, 2000).

There is no specific reference to "forced marriage" in this definition; however, the practice of "forced marriage" can be considered either as a form of forced labor or as a separate item under the definition of exploitation.

Article 1(c)(i) of the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to

Slavery, includes perhaps the broadest definition of forced marriage as a slave-like practice: "A woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or kind to her parents, guardian, family or any other person or group", (Office, 1956). This definition covers many forms of coercive marriage. The inclusion of an exchange of money or other valuables reflects the profit-seeking dimension that drives almost all forms of human trafficking.

There are also relevant human rights instruments at the international level that can be used to guide the actions of the Myanmar government when it comes to protecting victims of trafficking. While Article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979 (CEDAW) urges states to "suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women" (Office, 1979), Article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC) calls for prevention of the "abduction of, sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form" (Office, 1989). Article 35 of the CRC was strengthened when the Optional Protocol on Sales of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography was adopted in 2000. Myanmar has ratified all these human rights treaties and has, thus, an international obligation to act in conformity with these provisions. Even without specific reference to trafficking, other human rights instruments touch upon some of its aspects. Article eight of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 has a provision on the prohibition of slavery, servitude, and forced labor. Similar provisions can also be seen in Article 11 of the 1990 International Convention on Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Besides, Article 10 (3) of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Myanmar has ratified, calls for the adoption of special measures to protect children from economic and social exploitation.

At the domestic level, Myanmar prohibits sex trafficking and labor trafficking through its 2005 ATP Law, which prescribes criminal penalties. The Anti-Trafficking Task Force conducts investigations and leads prosecution efforts against traffickers in Myanmar. Many people have already been convicted of trafficking-related offenses. According to the ATIPD, in 2019 courts reached a verdict in cases involving 163

traffickers, including 97 convictions, 10 cases discharged without conviction, two acquittals, and 57 guilty verdicts for defendants who had absconded. Sentences ranged from four years to life imprisonment, with longer sentences associated with cases involving organized groups or defendants who had previously absconded (United States, 2020). There is no reported case relating to human trafficking decided in the Supreme Court of Myanmar.

Before the adoption of the 2005 law, Myanmar had already had provisions penalizing some acts of modern-day trafficking in persons and sex trafficking in the 1861 Penal Code. The Penal Code is still in force in Myanmar. It criminalizes some forms of trafficking, including import, export, and sale of slaves, and forced labor, mentioned in sections 358-377 of the Penal Code. The act of trafficking itself is illegal.

The definition of human trafficking provided in the Myanmar ATP Law derives from the Anti-Trafficking Protocol. Section 3(a)(1) of the Myanmar ATP Law defines "exploitation" as follows: "Exploitation includes receipt or agreement for receipt of money or benefits for the prostitution of one person by another, other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor, forced service, slavery, servitude, and debt-bondage or the removal and sale of organs from the body".

For both adults and children, the Anti-Trafficking Protocol states that consent by the victims is irrelevant to the question of whether an act constitutes trafficking. This same provision is provided in section 3(a) of the 2005 Myanmar ATP Law that defines trafficking in persons as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, sale, purchase, lending, hiring, harboring, or receipt of persons after committing any of the following acts for the purpose of exploitation of a person with or without his or her consent".

The protocol requires governments to introduce measures to prevent trafficking, protect and assist trafficking victims, and cooperate to combat trafficking (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The 2005 ATP Law criminalizes all forms of labor trafficking and some forms of sex trafficking and requires a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion for the child sex trafficking offence to materialize (UN Women, 2020).

Therefore, the ATP Law does not criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking. Section 25 of the law prescribes penalties of five to ten years imprisonment and a fine if trafficking offences involve male victims and section 24 prescribes penalties of 10 years to life imprisonment if trafficking offences involve female or child victims.

However, in July 2019, the Parliament enacted the Child Rights Law, which criminalizes all forms of child sex trafficking, thereby addressing this gap. Section 105(a) of the 2019 Child Rights Law prescribes penalties of one to ten years' imprisonment and a fine of one to two million Myanmar Kyat, penalties commensurate with those prescribed for serious crimes such as employing or permitting a child to work for purposes of prostitution, producing child pornography, forced marriage or allowing a child to be subjected to forced marriage.

Women have a right to be protected from discrimination under Article 347-348, Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008 which states that:

> *"The Union shall guarantee any person to enjoy equal rights before the law and shall equally provide legal protection. The Union shall not discriminate any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex, and wealth."*

Payment of dowry is lawful in Myanmar and practiced in some communities such as those of the Kachin. Marriage, divorce, and other areas of personal law in Myanmar are governed by customary law which changes based on the customs of the people in question. Many of these laws impose or permit harmful and discriminatory gender norms (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Myanmar adopted the first five-year national plan of action (2007-2011) followed by a second five-year plan (2012-2016) and third five-year plan of action (2017-2021). Preventative measures are being undertaken through annual work plans leading to a certain level of success. Prosecution, prevention and protection are the main pillars of the strategies aimed at combating human trafficking in Myanmar (The Central Body, 2018).

4.1 Prevention

According to Article 9(2), 9(4) and 9(5) of the 2000 Trafficking Protocol, states parties shall protect survivors from revictimization and take or strengthen measures, including through bilateral or multilateral cooperation, to alleviate poverty, underdevelopment, lack of equal opportunity and adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures, such as educational, social or cultural measures, to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking.

Aside from giving training to officials in the prevention of trafficking in persons, chapter four, sections eight, nine and ten of the 2005 ATP Law do not contain any provisions relating to measures preventing revictimization or the modification of legal, social and cultural practices to discourage the exploitation of persons. There are also no poverty alleviation mechanisms. One of the objectives of the government-sponsored Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF) is "to reduce and finally eliminate trafficking in women and children as a national task" and according to claims under Article 6 of CEDAW, MWAF is combating human trafficking by "conducting awareness-raising programs, opening counselling centers and disseminating knowledge about the laws which protect women" (Palaung Women's Organization, 2011).

The ATIPD maintains devoted ATTF police units all through the nation and expanded the number of regional offices from 32 to 60 in 2019. Myanmar's Central Body coordinated the government's anti-trafficking efforts, including training for the ATIPD offices. At least until 2021, it also continued to host training sessions and coordination meetings on trafficking for government officials in collaboration with foreign donor assistance (United States, 2020, p. 127) and NGOs and international organizations such as World Vision, Save the Children, UNICEF, IOM, and UNODC (The Central Body, 2018).

4.2 Protection

Article 6(3)(b) of the trafficking protocol requires state parties to consider implementing measures that provide for the physical,

psychological and social recovery of victims of trafficking, including counselling and information in regard to their legal rights, in a language that the victims of trafficking can understand. Chapter 7, Section 19(c) of the 2005 ATP Law of Myanmar states that the Central Body shall coordinate and carry out resocialization of survivors. However, it is unclear whether this means the Central Body is to rehabilitate the social circumstances of the trafficked person themselves or other social aspects not pertaining to the person. Section 19 of the 2005 ATP Law provides for the repatriation, reintegration, and rehabilitation of the trafficked victims. Services include the provision of a temporary shelter at a safe place or appropriate housing, legal assistance, social rehabilitation and vocational pieces of training, and access to health and examination with the consent of trafficked victims. It is not clear whether social rehabilitation in this context includes counselling and if medical care covers psychosocial support.

Article 6(4) of the Anti-Trafficking Protocol provides that state parties should take into account the age, gender, and special needs of trafficking survivors, in particular the special needs of children, including appropriate housing, education, and care. However, there is no provision in the 2005 ATP Law which specifically requires the Myanmar government to consider the age, gender, and special needs of trafficking survivors. Section 16(e) also requires the Central Body to make special arrangements for the rehabilitation of physical and mental damage, vocational training and medical treatment. However, the law does not elaborate on what factors would be taken into account in determining these special arrangements.

The MSWRR is primarily responsible for the repatriation, reintegration, and rehabilitation of trafficking victims. In 2018, a total of 373 trafficked victims (243 from China, 127 from Thailand, and three from Indonesia), were repatriated back to Myanmar and reunited with their families (The Central Body, 2018). Once a person is identified as a victim they are given protection. Conversely, if a person is not identified as a victim, the person is not protected under the relevant MOU and the destination country is not obliged to provide support (Yamada, 2012).

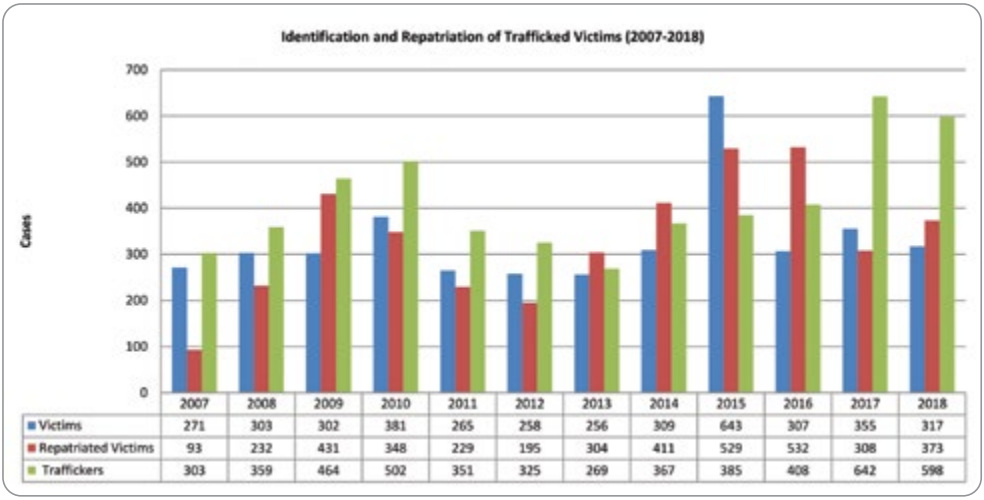


Figure 4.5: *Identification and repatriation of trafficked victims from 2007-2018, according to annual MOHA progress reports* (The Central Body, 2018)

Concerning reintegration, the DSW is responsible for assisting trafficking victims by: (a) Fulfilling basic necessities, (b) Providing psychosocial support, (c) Offering voluntary medical checkups and arrangements for treatment if necessary, and (d) Issuing temporary travel documents for those without citizenship cards in coordination with the National Registration and Citizenship Department. The resources allocated to DSW are insufficient for demand and services are inadequate. The DSW is under-resourced to the point of dysfunction. The government provides these services only to people who were transferred from Chinese authorities to Myanmar authorities and does not assist people who were being trafficked but were intercepted before crossing the border or people who escaped without police involvement (Human Rights Watch, 2019). According to an interview with an NGO expert, although the MWAF supposedly gives counselling service to survivors after returning to Myanmar, most of the victims did not actually receive psychosocial support, formal counselling services or medical checkups and there is no formal established shelter for trafficked victims only, with survivors usually transferred to generally appropriate shelter or safe house in Myanmar instead (IOM expert, personal communication, November 8, 2020).

Table 4.1: *The number of trafficked women who received support by the MSWRR from 2010-2017, according to Human Rights Watch* (2019)

Sr No.	Year	Number receiving follow-up care	Support Services						Total Support Services
			Education	Health	Economic	Agriculture	Livestock	Vocation	
1	2010	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	2011	54	2	5	12	-	1	-	20
3	2012	11	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
4	2013	49	-	1	12	-	1	-	14
5	2014	83	-	-	-	-	5	-	5
6	2015	92	1	3	23	-	3	-	30
7	2016	154	1	5	56	2	14	4	82
8	2017	181	-	5	79	-	20	7	111
Total		**624**	**4**	**19**	**182**	**2**	**45**	**11**	**263**

The Anti-Trafficking Task Force identified the number of repatriated victims during the 2010-2017 period as 2,856 and the number of identified victims as 2,774, as shown in figure 4.5. When these numbers are reconciled with the number of repatriated victims and identified victims in table 4.1, the support services provided by the Ministry in regards to education, health, vocational and agriculture training appear severely limited.

Myanmar aimed to eliminate human trafficking in the cross-border areas through the conclusion of MOUs with Thailand in 2003, China in 2009 and at the level of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region in 2004. Although the MOU on cooperation between Myanmar and China to combat human trafficking was signed in 2009, the two countries have yet to draft and develop a plan of action. On 18 May 2009, a temporary shelter was also established in Muse near the border with China. In China, there is no trafficking law to support protections for victims, Chinese authorities treat victims as illegal migrants and victims have to spend several months in detention in China before returning to Myanmar (The Central Body, 2018).

5. Challenges to Protecting Victims of Trafficking in Myanmar

To promote effective action to combat trafficking in persons several countries have developed legislation focusing specifically on the issue. The 2005 ATP Law is the most important instrument under national law in Myanmar and is in line with international standards. Section 19 (b) of the ATP Law mentions that the Central Body shall arrange temporary shelter at a safe place or appropriate housing for the repatriation and restitution of the victims if available. Other types of restitutions and post-harm assistance such as the creation of victims' employment, enjoyment of human rights and recognition of the victim's legal identity are not provided in this law.

Figure 4.6: *Myanmar's tier ranking in the TIPR from 2013-2020* (United States, 2020)

Indeed, according to the 2020 TIPR, in 2019 the Government of Myanmar did not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and was not making significant efforts to do so. Therefore, Myanmar remained on Tier 3 in the report, which also focused on the country's child soldier issue (United States, 2020).

Prosecution, prevention and protection are the main pillars of the strategy aimed at combating human trafficking in Myanmar. Some of the plans have been implemented to incorporate Myanmar's commitments under the United Nations Trafficking Protocol and the COMMIT MOU between Myanmar and China in 2009. This MOU contains very general provisions.

Since 2019 the Myanmar government has drafted trafficking legislation and rules to replace the 2005 Anti-Trafficking Law but the draft is still pending cabinet approval. To combat bride trafficking, the definition of forced marriage needs to be included in the new trafficking law. According to 2018 the government annual report, despite the Myanmar government trying to eliminate trafficking in persons through five-year national plans of action, human trafficking has not yet decreased due to poor economic development and low wages in Myanmar. The total number of relevant chapters in Myanmar law number no more than ten, among them some of the provisions relating to safeguarding the rights of trafficked victims, special protection of trafficked victims, women, children and youth, repatriation, reintegration, and rehabilitation, none of which have yet been fully implemented in practice.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter has shown that sex trafficking and labor trafficking are already criminal offenses under the 2005 ATP Law. Although the law was drafted in line with international standards, some of the major provisions of the law have not been implemented in Myanmar. The important legal loophole is found in section 19 of the 2005 Law which refers to the repatriation, reintegration, and rehabilitation of the trafficking victims. In practice, there is no formal counselling service, psychosocial support, very limited post harm-funding and short-term support to the trafficked victims who are dependent on donors' funding. The role of the ATTF is dominant in investigation and prosecution efforts against traffickers in Myanmar. The gaps in government policy measures relating to the protection of trafficked victims show that the government of Myanmar has not done enough when it comes to supporting victims of trafficking upon their return to their home country. This is because the resources allocated to DSW are not sufficient for demand and services for survivors are inadequate, especially in education, health, agriculture and vocational services as shown in table 4.1. Apart from those services, the Myanmar government should provide more on-the-job training in factories, hospitality and other suitable industries to prevent revictimization.

Trafficking in persons is a tragic issue that spoils Myanmar's national prestige and dignity. Myanmar's efforts to combat human trafficking has been a national cause since 1997. To effectively combat bride trafficking and forced marriage, authorities in Myanmar and China should negotiate a new MOU to legally facilitate marriages between people from both countries. Concerning preventative measures, the Myanmar government should take an active role in preventing trafficking by utilizing radio, poster, and other educational means. It should alert its citizens to the risks of falling prey to traffickers, not only in urban areas but also in rural areas of Myanmar. Concerning the protection of trafficked victims, the Myanmar government should provide post-harm assistance and reintegration support to returned survivors instead of focusing on short term actions. The state must implement long term recovery support to trafficked victims.

The MSWRR provides longer-term livelihood assistance to some survivors, including, for some, a cash grant, which the ministry recently increased from 500,000 to 1,000,000 Myanmar Kyat under chapter eight of the Anti-trafficking Law, 2005. Yet, the government should also enhance medical, legal, psychosocial, recreational, and educational services, besides livelihood training in shelters. NGOs, including international NGOs, should be allowed to access and support victims in the government-run shelters. Some trafficking survivors returned from China to Myanmar have subsequently been trafficked again to China (Khin Khin Soe and U Kyaw Nyunt, ATIPD, personal communication, June 22, 2020), so Myanmar and China authorities must cautiously identify victim status before deporting victims back to Myanmar.

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5

Agrarian Change and Rural-to-Urban Transitions in Kyaw Town

Nyunt Nyunt Win

Abstract

Up until the late 1980s, the area around Kyaw was largely isolated, mountainous forest with a relatively small and dispersed population reliant on shifting cultivation and the collection of forest products. The situation changed rapidly in the period after 1988 when the military government identified the surrounding Yaw area as a strategic site for national economic development and state-military infrastructure development. The rural landscape of villages, fields and forests was rapidly transformed into an urban hub of economic activity, attracting thousands of migrant workers to work on roads, railway and infrastructure projects. Moreover, the region became a key trade and transportation corridor linking Myanmar's central lowlands, the Chin Hills and the Indian border. This chapter examines changes in agricultural land, resource use, and rural livelihood dynamics brought about by successive waves of state-led development and (trans)national market integration in a previously peripheral area, focusing on the period since the 1990s. It employs an ethnographic approach to examine how farm households have responded to the pressures placed on agricultural land and natural resources, and how they have diversified their livelihood portfolios in the face of opportunities and challenges brought by development, demographic transition and increased mobility. The chapter also complicates

definitions of the "rural" and "urban" by examining the peri-urban frontier as a zone of transition where livelihoods are increasingly a hybrid mix of rural and urban livelihoods.

Keywords: migrant workers, land use, ethnographic approach, urban livelihood, spatial boundaries.

1. Introduction

My interest in Kyaw Village Tract, (ကျော), which has been redesignated as a 'Town', in the northernmost township of Gangaw (ဂန့်ဂေါ) of Magway Region (မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), first developed when I read Myanmar author Tin Myint's (တင်မြင့်) *Journey to Pontaung Ponnya* (1992). He describes the difficult social and economic conditions of a remote mountainous and forested region inhabited by the Yaw people (ယော), considered to be part of Myanmar's ethnic Bama majority (ဗမာ), in the 1950s and 1960s. Road access was available only in the dry season and the only year-round access to the area was by bullock carts that could cross the Myitthar River (မြစ်သာမြစ်) on rafts. In 1952, flights began operating to Gangaw Town. Traders from the Chin Hills to the west frequently descended the mountains to sell bush meat, bamboo shoots, mushrooms and other forest products. In 1968, a road was completed connecting Kyaw to Gangaw and Pale (ပုလဲ) towns, allowing staples like salt and palm sugar to be sold year-round.

Due to limited paddy land, villagers have long relied on mountain swidden land, *taungya* (တောင်ယာ), to cultivate rice, pulses and vegetables, graze livestock and collect forest products. However, following the Burmese army's defeat of communist insurgents active in the area in the mid-1970s, villagers lost access to much of their upland swidden fields. The Forestry Department claimed these areas as state reserved land and initiated a campaign to encourage shifting cultivators towards sedentary agriculture. As there were few local opportunities to earn alternative incomes, some household members (mostly men) travelled to other parts of the country after harvest season to work as laborers in mines and other development projects, returning home for the new planting season the following year.

Even after communist insurgents were defeated and security improved in the area, Kyaw Village Tract and much of Gangaw Township remained geographically and economically isolated. However, the situation changed rapidly in the period after 1988, when the military government identified Gangaw Township and the wider Yaw Detha (Yaw region) area, which includes neighboring Htlin (ထီးလင်း) and Saw (ဆော) townships, as a strategic site for national economic development and state security, paving the way for resource extraction projects, transportation infrastructure and urban-industrial development. The once remote rural landscape of villages, fields, and forests was rapidly transformed into an urbanized hub for trade and economic activity.

The transformation of Kyaw Village Tract and Yaw Detha more broadly started with the exploitation of timber and oil resources by state-military companies as well as smaller-scale business entrepreneurs. While the bulk of timber and oil was destined for Mandalay (မန္တလေး) and Yangon (ရန်ကုန်), much of it was exported to China as well as across the border to India. To facilitate trade between Myanmar's central lowlands, Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်) and the Indian border - but also to increase state military presence in the region - Kyaw was targeted for large-scale infrastructure development. By the mid-1990s, Kyaw was experiencing a resource and construction boom attracting thousands of migrant workers. In 2008, Kyaw gained additional significance as a site of national security with the construction of a military-industrial manufacturing complex commonly known by its Myanmar acronym, *Ka Pa Sa* (က.ပ.စ). To make way for these developments, the military-state and private companies confiscated local people's farmland and residential land, often with little or no compensation paid, in line with Rhoades' description of the state's use of forced eviction as a form of urban planning and development in Yangon (2018). In March 2015, Kyaw Village Tract officially changed its status to become a 'Town' and villages were reorganized into wards with corresponding administrative structures.

Some households were able to capitalize on new economic opportunities and became wealthy business owners, often drawing on their links to military-government officials to secure lucrative construction contracts or obtain better paid positions within

companies or in government institutions. The new generations no longer aspire to continue farming and instead see their future in construction, transportation, and the retail and service sectors. At the same time, as infrastructure projects move to other "underdeveloped" parts of the country, such as Chin State, employment opportunities for wage labor in Kyaw Town have declined, resulting in a reversal of patterns of labor movement towards emigration.

1.1 Objective and Research Questions

This chapter examines changing dynamics of rural livelihoods and processes of social differentiation in the context of rapid land and resource commodification, demographic change and rural-urban transition. It does so by asking: how has the Myanmar state approached rural development in Kyaw Town and Yaw Detha more broadly since the 1990s? What does this say about broader state building processes? In addition to canvassing the state's approach, the chapter also asks, what are the key factors shaping farmers' strategies to diversify their livelihoods? And then, who in the end has actually benefited from development activities and associated rural-urban transition in Kyaw Town and surrounding areas?

2. Research Site

Kyaw Town is located in Gangaw Township in the northernmost tip of Magway Region. Gangaw Town is the capital of Gangaw District, which consists of Gangaw, Htlin and Saw townships. This whole area is inhabited by the Yaw people, who are considered ethnic Bama but have a unique pronunciation of the Burmese language. For example, they pronounce the word for cooked rice as *htaman* (ထမန်း) rather than the standard *htamin* (ထမင်း). This area around Gangaw District is thus commonly referred to as Yaw Detha. As seen in figure 5.1, Gangaw Township borders Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) to the north and east, and Chin State to the west. Kyaw Town (formerly Kyaw Village Tract) is situated approximately 65 km southeast from Gangaw Town and 260 km west of Mandalay.

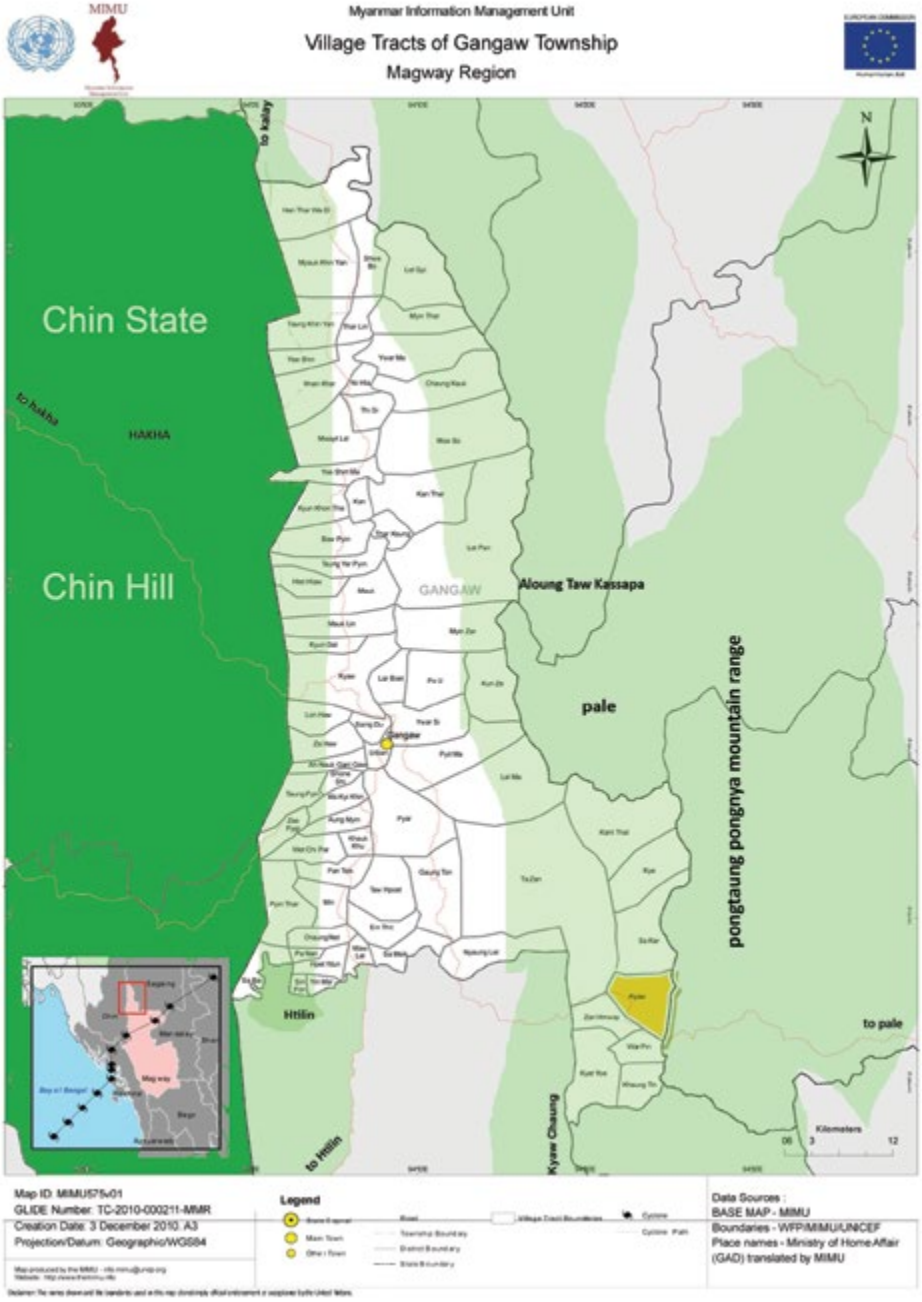

Figure 5.1: *Village Tracts of Gangaw Township, Magway Region, adapted from the Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2010*

Before Kyaw was officially declared a town in 2015, Kyaw Village Tract was composed of six villages: Kyaw, previously called Kyaw Ywar (ကျောရွာ), the largest of the villages, Shwe Pin (ရွှေပင်), Pe Ma Sar (ပဲမစား), Ywa Kyi (ရွာကြီး), Kywe Kaing (ကွဲကိုင်း), and Sa Khar (စခါး) villages. On 30 March 2015, the Ministry of Home Affairs changed the administrative status of Kyaw into a town and reorganized the six villages into three wards. Ward 1 comprises Kyaw Village; Ward 2 comprises Shwe Pin, Pe Ma Sar and Ywa Kyi villages; and Ward 3 comprises Kywe Kaing and Sa Khar villages, as seen in figure 5.2.

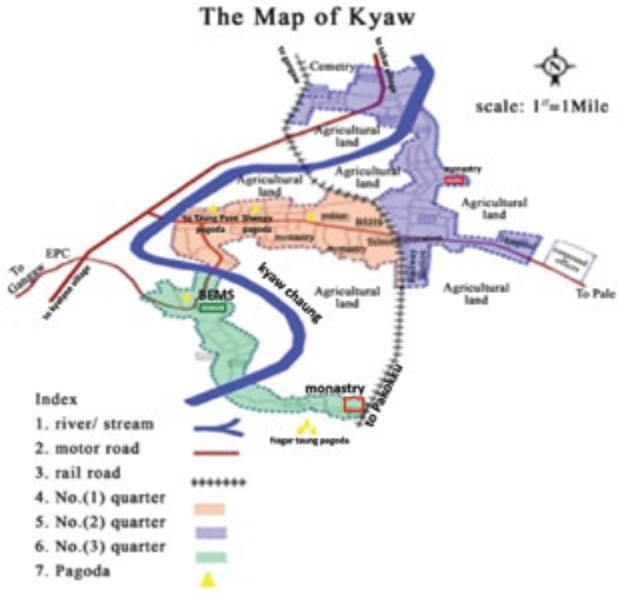

Figure 5.2: *Map of Kyaw Town, from the Gangaw Township Land Records Department, 2017*

Previously Kyaw Village Tract was headed by a chairman selected from Kyaw Village with each of the six sub-villages also appointing their own chairman. Now, Kyaw Town lies under the authority of the Township Administrator and each of the three wards has an administrator. In addition, a number of government departmental offices were established in Kyaw Town under the new administration. According to the 2017 census, Kyaw Town has a total population of 4,565 people of which 15 households are identified as Chin (General Administration Department, 2017).

3. Research Methodology

This study draws on prior research undertaken in Gangaw Township from 2007 to 2012 as part of my PhD dissertation at the Department of Anthropology, Yangon University. Additional fieldwork for this research was conducted in Kyaw Town (Ward 1, 2 and 3) in May, June and September 2017, with the help of my research assistant, Nilar Kyaw (နီလာကျော်). Kyaw Town was selected as the focus of this research because of the extensive transformation in land use, livelihoods and socioeconomic conditions that has taken place since the 1990s.

I employed an ethnographic approach to collecting information, namely focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and participant observation. First, I conducted a social mapping exercise with villagers and authorities to help identify the main social actors in Kyaw Town to later interview, as shown in figure 5.3. Interviews usually lasted between one and three hours and often involved multiple sessions. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and interpreted using narrative analysis.

Figure 5.3: *Performing the social mapping exercise in Ward 2*

4. Frontier Dynamics and Territorialization in Myanmar

My research is situated within and contributes to wider discussions in the literature on frontier dynamics and state internal territorialization. Scholars in Southeast Asia and elsewhere have examined territory as a key aspect of state control and source of state power in the expansion and consolidation of national territorial sovereignty (Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018; Scott, 2009; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995). Territorialization has been highlighted as a strategy used by states to secure land and resources and control populations within their borders by governing access, policing boundaries and (re) defining space (Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995).

The literature also points to the discursive and material production of frontiers as "sparsely populated" or "vacant", "resource-abundant", "wild" and "ungoverned" spaces that make way for acts of territorialization (Barney, 2009; Eilenberg, 2014; Hardy, 2003; Kelly & Peluso, 2015). Throughout Southeast Asia, upland borderland areas have been characterized as ethnically and culturally distinct frontiers "incompletely inscribed by civilization… and the power of governing regimes" (Li, 2001, p. 42). These upland areas have historically been targeted for development programs and state sponsored settlement schemes driven by political agendas from the center (Eilenberg, 2014; Hardy, 2003). In particular, upland areas have been marked by the attempts of centralized states to regularize or eradicate shifting cultivation, increase the legitimacy and permanence of settlement, foster national identity among marginal populations and consolidate the nation, including by improving security (Bryant, 1997; De Koninck, 2000; Dwyer, 2014; Scott, 2009). In this sense, the frontier has been conceptualized as a (neo)colonial project aimed at "pushing back the frontier of civilization" as well as "a metaphor for national development in its material and ideological senses" (Fold & Hirsch, 2009, p. 95).

Much of the literature exploring dynamics of frontiers and territorialization in Myanmar has thus focused mainly on the upland ethnic regions, where state projection of power in, and militarization of, previously hostile areas has accompanied the intensification of (principally cross-border) investments in land-based activities,

resource extraction and commercial development (AASYC, PYO & MYPO, 2009; Buchanan, Kramer & Woods, 2013; Einzenberger, 2018; Fink, 2008; Kachin Development Networking Group, 2007; Sekine, 2016; Woods, 2011; 2019). This research instead draws attention to a less explored area where state frontier expansion and territorialization catalyzed significant socioeconomic and environmental transformation: the lowland-upland borderlands in central Myanmar.

The township of Gangaw in the northernmost periphery of Magway Region is administratively, ethnically and politically part of central Myanmar, yet its upland-like agro-ecology sets it apart. In this mountainous and forested region bordering the Chin Hills and Sagaing Region, lowland paddy land is scarce and the ethnic Bama (Yaw) population traditionally relied on shifting cultivation, livestock and forest products for their livelihoods. This area thus exhibited a certain ambiguity, continuity and dynamism not often captured in efforts to define "Valley people" and "Hill people" as representing different forms of social organization (Boutry, 2011).

In Kyaw town and surrounding areas, livelihoods are diversifying away from agriculture as people increasingly turn to non-farm activities; aspirations, particularly among the young, are shifting towards non-agricultural pursuits, and households increasingly move across "rural" and "urban" sectors and spaces. These processes of rural transformation and increased rural-urban interpenetration in Kyaw reflect what Rigg and others have described as the de-agrarianization of Southeast Asia taking place in the context of a "mobility revolution" (Rigg & Nattapoolwat, 2001; Rigg 2001; 2013). As argued by Rigg (2013), evolving mobilities in the region have engendered a series of boundary crossings that challenge conceptual categories we normally use like "the village", "the rural" and "the urban". Even households "have become multi-sited and stretched over space, and occupations are increasingly non-farm and ex situ" (p. 9).

In Myanmar, research on urbanization, agrarian change and mobility has so far mainly focused on rural-urban migration and/or been confined to the fringes of the main urban centers in Yangon and Mandalay (Matelski & Sabrié, 2019; Nilar Aung & Tin Tin Mar, 2019; Rhoads, 2018). This research seeks to extend analyses of rural-urban

transitions and relations to peripheral rural towns, and to the multi-faceted responses of people to such changes, including how a new type of "urbanized" peasantry is being produced in the countryside.

5. Changes in Agriculture, Land Use and Tenure

Agriculture used to be the cornerstone of local people's livelihoods in Kyaw. People grew rice, vegetables and legumes, and raised cattle on their lowland paddy land, farmland and swidden fields. They also collected forest products such as bamboo, mushrooms, herbs, medicine, firewood and hunted for bush meat. Today, agriculture continues to play an important role in Kyaw's local economy and many people still depend on farming and forest products for their food security and to at least supplement their income. However, the past three decades have seen significant changes to the agrarian structure, including a reduction in the amount of land available for cultivation, the emergence of land-poor and landless workers, and a growing diversification in-and sometimes a total shift towards-non-farm-based livelihood activities, particularly among the younger generations.

There are various dimensions to changing agricultural land use and the broader processes of agrarian transformation in Kyaw. One key factor that catalyzed agrarian change, particularly since the mid-1970s, is that people lost access to their upland swidden fields due to government policies and projects aimed at eradicating shifting cultivation. Due to the region's mountainous topography, paddy land was never enough to provide for farm households' food security and so farmers also relied on *taungya* to secure sufficient food for their families, even though rice yields increased in the 1970s from investments in irrigation and the introduction of new rice varieties.

Each year, farmers would collectively decide on which fallow areas to cultivate for that year's season. They cleared vegetation with fire and cultivated crops for one or more years and then allowed the vegetation to naturally regenerate, thus replenishing the soil. When villages in and around Kyaw were first settled, households established land claims by being the first to clear and cultivate patches of forest. Households

maintained tenure rights to their swidden land throughout the cycle, returning after the fallow period to cultivate the same patch of land they cultivated years before.

However, since colonial times, shifting cultivation has been seen as an "unproductive" form of agriculture that destroys forests (Bryant, 1997). Subsequent governments have declared fallow lands, which are part of the shifting cultivation system, as "wastelands". This classification, inscribed in various laws-the latest of which is the 2012 Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Law (amended in 2018) - has served to justify the state's claims over these lands and allow leases of "fallow" and "waste" land to business for agricultural and other development purposes (Saw Alex Htoo & Scott, 2018).

In the Kyaw area, large swathes of upland areas previously used by local farmers for shifting cultivation, grazing land and the collection of forest products were demarcated and classified as state forest reserve land, making cultivation within these zones illegal. Moreover, policies were introduced to encourage farmers to convert the remaining upland swidden land into permanent crops for cultivation (these fields are now referred to as "farmland" or "fallow land"). In Kyaw, government projects to encourage farmers to switch to permanent commercial crops failed in part due to poor soil and weather conditions. As explained by a 70-year-old farmer:

> *"I grew sunflowers according to the instruction of the agriculture department, but birds destroyed the sunflowers and the rain damaged the crops. Pigeon pea also did not yield well as it was muddy soil, kyitmyay (ကျိတ်မြေ). The village chairmen only nodded when I explained. In the end, farmers themselves were left to bear all the risks and losses and faced difficulties"* (anonymous informant, personal communication, May 5, 2017).

Some farmland plots are located lower down on flatter soil close to paddy fields areas and are of better soil quality. They are used for growing rain-fed rice and vegetables such as sesame, peas, beans, corn, potato, onion, chili and Indian mustard. However, plots located further away from the village in the uplands have poor soil and lack water.

They are now mainly used as grazing land (managed by village administrators) and only cultivated occasionally by local villagers (see figure 5.4). As explained one woman:

> *"I don't cultivate all my farmland plots because vegetation and weeds have taken over. I have to enlist the help of relatives or neighbors to clear them. I leave my farmland areas that are not cultivated as grazing land and this helps to fertilize it. I only grow two acres of paddy land and farmland every year. My remaining six acres of farmland have been left idle for six years"* (anonymous informant, personal communication, September 25, 2017.

This makes these lands particularly vulnerable to land grabbing, not only by state and company actors, who label them "abandoned", but also by other wealthier villagers who are encouraged to use these lands productively and invest in planting teak or other cash crops. The lack of tenure security over these lands also works as a disincentive for farmers to invest in that land.

Figure 5.4: *Clearing vegetarian and weeds in upland fields to cultivate crops*

Years of government policies restricting *taungya*, alongside other processes of agrarian change, has resulted in farmers in Kyaw abandoning shifting cultivation altogether. They have converted some of their better quality fields, mostly located close to paddy fields, into permanent crops, while the more distant upland fields are used as grazing land and only cultivated some years. Some poorer farmers permanently cultivate their upland fields previously given over to shifting cultivation. Their former swidden fields are located far from Kyaw Town, so they settled permanently in the areas close to their fields. The practice of staying in the shifting cultivation field over a long period of time is locally known as *poke-sin pin sin*. (ပုတ်စင်ပင်စင်). Members of those families have to live in *poke sin pin sin* areas the whole year round from planting up to the end of harvest. They only return to Kyaw Town for special occasions. Their children are generally left in Kyaw Town so they can attend school. Importantly, some farmers actually bought upland swidden land to produce food for their families after their paddy land was confiscated by the state for infrastructure projects. This highlights how land acquisition for "development" drove some farmers further into the hills to find alternative land for cultivation.

Alongside the erasure of upland shifting cultivation practices and the conversion of upland swidden fields to permanent crops, people have lost paddy land, farmland and residential land to infrastructure projects. The extent of agricultural land confiscated for these projects is unknown. Land use records for Kyaw obtained from the Gangaw District Land Records Department for the years 1994/5 and 2015/6 show very little change in land use categories for the 11-year period when land-intensive development projects were in their prime. The land use changes depicted in table 5.1 are mostly attributed to land acquired for the railway project, which includes 26 acres of fallow land, 13 acres of paddy land, two acres of farmland, and two acres of village/residential land. Land confiscated for roads, the *Ka Pa Sa* industrial complex and other development activities are not included in the figures, nor is the conversion of agricultural land to urban use such as residential houses accounted for.

Table 5.1: *Land Use Categories in Kyaw in 1994/5 and 2015/6 according to Gangaw District Land Records Department, 1994-95 and 2015-16*

Land type		Acres	
		1994/5	2015/6
1	Forest Reserve (FR-Protected)	5,682	5,682
2	The Wild (Fallow Land)	976	950
3	Paddy Land	991	978
4	Farmland	162	160
5	Garden	3	3
6	Village Land (Homestead)	87	85
7	Other	2,373	2,373
Total		**10,274**	**10,231**

The acquisition of paddy and farmland for state development projects has had flow on effects in terms of catalyzing further land conversions. For example, some people were forced to rebuild houses they had lost on part or all of their remaining paddy/farmland. Others, particularly those close to main roads, decided to convert their paddy/farmland into houses for their children, home shops or other businesses, seeing opportunities to earn more income from retail trade than from farming (see figure 5.5). The conversion of paddy/farmland into residential houses, shops and other businesses increased rapidly alongside the boom in trade, construction, services and other economic activities, contributing to further urbanization. More recently, the government has sought to regulate the uncontrolled conversion of paddy land into urban/residential areas by requiring people to apply for permits at the township lands records department.

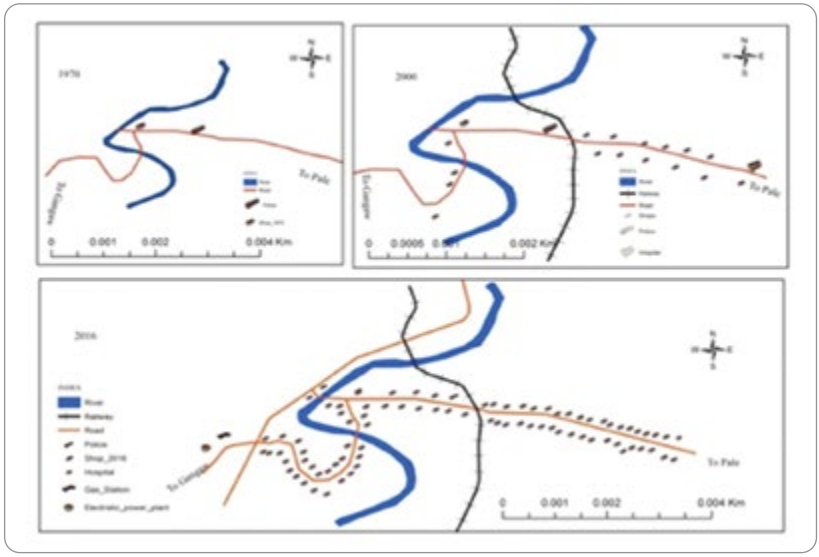

Figure 5.5: *Urban expansion along main roads in Kyaw Town has led to increased land prices, by author*

Another dimension to the agrarian change process in Kyaw area is the increased atomization of paddy and farmland, whereby land parcels are becoming smaller and smaller as land is subdivided among children through each passing generation. As seen in table 5.2, around 46 per cent of farming households in Kyaw own less than one acre (0.4 ha) of paddy/farmland, while 50 per cent own between one and five acres (under two hectares). Although government records are only available for 2016-17, making it difficult to identify changes in plot sizes over time, the survey conducted with farmers confirms that land plots are becoming smaller due to subdivisions, making farming increasingly unviable, particularly for future generations. In Kyaw Town today, not all children are able to inherit land from their parents – only one or two children will inherit land for farming. This is another factor pushing household members and particularly younger generations to find alternative forms of employment and income, although land stays with the family and continues to contribute to household food security and income, particularly for elderly parents. While the parents are still alive, some children who engage in farming have to work on the family paddy field and to contribute half of the paddy yield to their parents, a system referred to as ahpeq paychin (အဖက်ပေးခြင်း), contributing half of the paddy yield to their parents.

Table 5.2: *Structure of agricultural landholdings in Kyaw, 2016-17 (paddy and farmland mostly used for rice cultivation; excludes upland fields and fallow land), according to author's survey and data from the Gangaw Land Records Department*

			Planted Area (%)				
Ward	Total No. Households	Total No. Farming Households	Under 1 acre	1-5 acres	5-10 acres	Over 10 acres	Total
Ward I	510	257	45.9	50.6	3.1	0.4	100%
Ward II	483	319	47.4	49.8	2.8	-	100%
Ward III	235	233	50.2	48	1.3	0.5	100%
Total	**1,228**	**809**					

Farmers sometimes loan their paddy land to close relatives or neighbors who need land to meet their subsistence needs. Payment is based on the amount of rice yield rather than the size of the land. People who own shops or businesses and do not cultivate their land also lease their paddy land to other villagers, particularly the landless or those with small pieces of land, where the produce is shared equally between landowner and tenant.

The buying and selling of paddy land, farmland and homesteads is not based on formal land titles, as few people have these. Rather, village administrators and neighbors who bear witness verify land transfers. There is an ethnic dimension to land ownership rights as well. Local people will only sell their land to ethnic Bama, including migrant workers, but they will not sell their land to Chin people, who they consider to be of a different ethnicity and religion. In the past, a Chin pastor was sold land for a house and the person who sold the land was denounced. Chin families must rent accommodation to live in, even if they are long-time residents. Most Chin families work as laborers on other peoples' land (e.g., teak plantations) and do not rent land for cultivation themselves.

Most people do not hold Land Use Certificates (LUC, Form 7) for their houses or for their paddy land, even though they are eligible to apply for one. All land transfers and mortgaging of land continues to be done semi-informally through local authorities. In 2012, a land titling initiative was introduced by the Gangaw Township Land

Records Department, whereby farmers were encouraged to apply for LUCs. Villagers were notified before the titling team arrived and asked to register by filling out Form 1 with information about the household's landholdings. However, not many people applied. As explained by the current chairman from Ward 2 in Kyaw:

> *"The township land records team came to the village three times and told villagers to fill out Form 1, but some local farmers didn't understand the process and haven't applied yet. Even my sister said that we can cultivate our land as per usual without a LUC. Two-thirds of local people don't have a Form 7 yet"* (anonymous informant, personal communication, September 20, 2017).

There are several reasons why so many villagers have not applied for and deprioritize LUCs. First, they do not see the added value of obtaining a Form 7 title. Most people feel that their homestead and paddy land, the main land categories eligible to receive a title, are already sufficiently secure and uncontested. They pay land tax and village administrators and neighbors all know which villagers own which plots of land. Second, in order to issue a LUC the township land records department must survey and measure the individual land plot. However, the department lacks the staff, capacity and budget to do field surveys. Getting a title thus incurs a fee for villagers to get their land measured. Third, the land plots that villagers feel are most insecure in terms of tenure are not even eligible to receive LUCs. For example, most farmland (formerly shifting cultivation land) is not eligible to receive a LUC. Only some farmland near the paddy fields is eligible; fields in the forest reserve area with existing vegetation (e.g., fallow land) are not. Moreover, paddy fields and farmland areas along Kapasa Road or near the oil well operated by the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise are not eligible for titling.

In 2015, some local people received a LUC Form 7 after the township land records office visited houses and carried out surveys. However, most farmers still only have land revenue receipts as the main documented proof of ownership for their farmland. As explained by an elderly farmer:

> *"I have 3.5 acres of land, but I only got a LUC for 1.5 acres of my paddy land. My other two acres of farmland was not eligible for a LUC. Moreover, another 0.7 acres of shifting cultivation land which I bought 23 years ago now lies in the forest reserve area and I cannot legally claim that land"* (anonymous informant, personal communication, September 20, 2017).

5.1 Livelihood Change and Rural-Urban Interactions

Farming and livestock production remains an important source of food and income for many Kyaw households. Yet, most households do not have sufficient land to sustain their livelihoods based on agriculture alone, and those who continue farming (approximately 65 per cent of households, see table 5.2) increasingly do so on a part time basis. While some households are now landless and rely entirely on trade or wage labor, many of those impacted by land grabbing have been dispossessed of part, but not all, of their land. Many households thus find themselves in the "awkward predicament of semi-proletarianization", whereby they retain a small plot of land that is not large enough for subsistence and they are required to engage in some form of wage labor (Kenney-Lazar, 2012, p. 1022). Table 5.3 below shows how rural households in Kyaw Town are coming to divide their time between farm and non-farm activities, and livelihoods increasingly span across "rural" and "urban" sectors and spaces. This marks a profound shift in the trajectory of rural change in a region still often depicted as the country's rural heartland.

Table 5.3: *Job categories of heads of households surveyed in Kyaw from field survey, 2017*

	Job Category	Ward (1)	Ward (2)	Ward (3)
1	Farmer	213	240	113
2	Farmer + Driver		28	3
3	Farmer + Carpenter		15	
4	Farmer + Staff	6	18	
5	Farmer + Rice mill + Oil mill		4	2
6	Farmer + Grocers	10	2	
7	Farmer + Blacksmith		1	
8	Driver		24	4
9	Grocer	9	13	8
10	Carpenter	7	11	
11	Car rental	57	21	6
12	Restaurant	2	1	5
13	Tea shop	3	1	
14	Civil servant		13	2
15	Hair dressing/beauty salon	2	1	1
16	Copy shop/photography	2		
17	Guesthouse + restaurant	1		1
18	Student lodging services	3		
19	Car mechanic	2	1	4
20	Pump station		1	
21	Goldsmith	4		
22	Electrical goods	8		2
23	Garment shop	10		4
24	Blacksmith		2	
25	Casual labourer	175	42	25
26	Housewife		13	2
Total		**514**	**452**	**182**

As discussed in previous sections, early forms of land dispossession and livelihood transitions in the Kyaw area were linked to efforts to control swidden agriculture in upland forest land and encourage farmers to adopt a sedentary livelihood system. In the 1990s, much Kyaw agricultural land-paddy, farmland and fallow-was acquired by the state and private companies for large infrastructure projects which opened up the region to resource exploitation and urban and industrial development. Owing to its location, Kyaw became a principal trading zone for timber, oil and consumer goods transported between the central lowlands, Chin State and the Indian border. Thousands of migrants arrived in Kyaw to work in construction projects and perform other economic activities.

Local residents took advantage of alternative employment and earning opportunities associated with these development projects. They opened up home shops or market stalls selling vegetables, forest products, construction tools and a range of consumer goods. As shown in figure 5.6, new businesses sprang up providing a range of services to newcomers. Women and girls have actively participated in and benefitted from these opportunities and become important income earners at the household level. Today, households exhibit a complex mix of occupations that cannot be easily classified. It is common to find a husband or wife working on the land (as landowner and/or tenant), while also engaging in various forms of non-farm wage labor. Younger generations are opting not to continue farming and instead seeking jobs as drivers, construction workers, carpenters, mechanics, etc. Those with higher education seek better-paid positions as company and government employees. Rural households have in this way embraced a diverse portfolio of activities to secure higher incomes and living standards in the face of increased land pressure and new economic opportunities. This does not mean that there is no future in agriculture, but the balance of livelihoods is no longer dominated by agriculture, and there is a high degree of interpenetration of the rural and urban spheres of work and life.

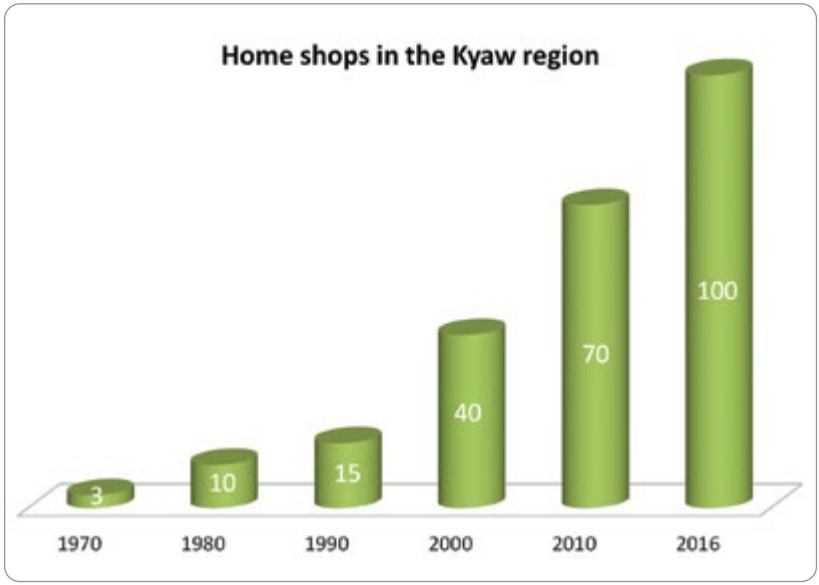

Figure 5.6: *Growth over time of family-owned home retail shops in Kyaw Town, data from village administrative office in Kyaw (2017)*

The influx of migrant workers has played and continues to play a key role in local livelihood transitions. Many of the local businesses still depend on workers who live near oil fields and the *Ka Pa Sa* industrial complex, as explained by a local teashop owner:

> *"The shop is not, in fact, for local people but for those who come from other regions. On weekends, people from Ka Pa Sa leave the compound and go shopping. Every shop is crowded with buyers. Mechanics, barbershops, grocery stores, they all mainly get their business from Ka Pa Sa workers. It is the weekends when Kyaw Town is bustling with activity. The local people hardly spend money"* (anonymous informant, personal communication, June 10, 2017).

Development in Kyaw region has provided both challenges and opportunities for local people's livelihoods. Locals do not have equal access to jobs and alternative income-generating opportunities. Adaptation has often been more challenging for those families most vulnerable to the impacts of development – think of those farmers

who have retreated further into the hills to permanently settle and continue cultivating on their former swidden fields. Yet even these poor farmers, who might be thought of as less successful in adapting to new economic contexts, are increasingly crossing boundaries through increased mobility. They circulate between their homes near their farm fields and Kyaw Town, where their children attend school and later engage in a range of non-farm pursuits where they can earn an income and acquire an acceptable standard of living.

Household trajectories of livelihood change and how people respond to the risks and opportunities created by development are examined in box 1. These household narratives illustrate that the adaptation experience is diverse and usually linked to a range of "capitals" (e.g., economic, social and political) of which individuals and households have different capacities to draw upon (Scoones, 1998). Successful adaptation is more often associated with sectoral and spatial mobility, meaning that opportunities are drawn across multiple sectors and locations rather than from limited areas in and around Kyaw.

Box 1

Household Trajectories of Livelihood Change: The Entrepreneurial Village Head.

Mr. A (72 years old) was the head of Kyaw Village Tract from 1982 to 1988. In 1990, he sold half an acre of his farmland and invested the money in setting up a sawmill. In those days, the timber felling industry in Kyaw was at its prime. He earned a lot of money selling timber (Padauk wood) to Myat Noe Thu (မြတ်နိုးသူ) Company. He also invested in opening a shop to sell clothes, shoes and toys in 1994.

In 1996, Mr. A was reappointed as a village head for the second time. During his time as Village Head, he was responsible for overseeing the construction of a railway project, various small bridges and the Kyaw railway

station. Through connections with the relatives of a former authority, he was able to obtain a construction contract with Myat Noe Thu Company in 1997. Myat Noe Thu was one of the companies responsible for the railway, highway and bridge projects, in addition to its involvement in the timber industry. Mr. A bought a lorry truck to transport workers and construction material and his business grew to have a 40-employee workforce.

After years of selling wood to the Myat Noe Thu Company, Mr. A was able to get broader insight into the market and expanded his wood selling business to major areas such as Chin State, Bago Region (ပဲခူးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) and Taungoo District (တောင်ငူခရိုင်), and other areas around Taungtha (တောင်သာ), Kyae Ni (ကြေးနီ) and Letpadaung (လက်ပံတောင်း).

Mr. A's sons initially worked in the family timber business, but now they have set up separate businesses and home grocery shops. Currently, Mr. A is supervising the construction of a religious building. He has also purchased additional paddy land from other villagers. Mr. A's position as head of the Kyaw Village allowed him to use his political capital to gain contracts with companies and thus he was able to gain personal benefit from state-led development projects in Kyaw. He profited from his wood selling business and from supplying companies with construction material and workers for large infrastructure projects. He also invested his profits into side businesses, such as shops and in purchasing additional land. Mr. A is one of the wealthier successful businesspeople in town.

While Kyaw Town has become more prosperous and income earning opportunities have expanded for the rural poor, it has also led to social differentiation and created a gap between rich and poor families.

Those who profited most from state-led development projects in Kyaw Town are government officials, tendered companies and a few village heads. Former village chairmen and wealthier families with contacts in government were able to secure contracts with companies in building and construction and now own their own transportation business. The sons and daughters of company owners and wealthier families attend the better schools in town or in Mandalay and many are studying to become doctors and engineers or gain secure employment with company and government sectors.

The majority of local people became landless or land-poor and have to work as wage laborers. The more entrepreneurial people opened shops and businesses, but most have come to depend on low paid labor and face limited choices. They are more vulnerable to employment losses and wage reductions in urban-based industries and services and some do not have agriculture work to fall back on. Access to better jobs for vulnerable groups is constrained by skill shortages, informality and discrimination. For example, Chin families who migrated to Kyaw are not allowed to buy or hire paddy land or farmland from locals and mainly work as casual laborers in both farm and non-farm activities.

While in the past there were plenty of laboring jobs available, these have become scarcer as large infrastructure projects are no longer being planned in the area. Construction companies and associated industries and workers are instead moving to other regions such as Chin State to carry out projects there. As one local remarked:

> *"I bought my vehicle for 700 lakhs so that I could transport construction material. I worked at U Sanny Company (ဦးဆန်နီ) and was paid daily based on the number of trips I made. But now there are no plans for projects anymore, and so I have to go to other regions such as the Chin Hills and Pale to find work there,"* (anonymous informant, personal communication, September 25, 2017).

While Kyaw once attracted migrant workers, this trend is reversing as more and more people emigrate in search of jobs. In and around Kyaw Town, men and women are increasingly competing for low paid work such as stone crushing. As large infrastructure projects come to a halt, many are left with uncertain future employment.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined how a mountainous and forested rural area on Myanmar's lowland-upland borderlands was territorialized by the state during the 1990s by a combination of resource extraction projects, infrastructure development and urban-industrial expansion. The state applied various strategies of land and population control over decades to dispossess people from their land and reorganize space in line with its vision of rural development. This chapter also described the resulting transformation on agricultural land use and rural livelihoods in the context of broader rural-to-urban transformation, highlighting how rural change has been deeply embedded in processes of state building and restructuring.

The experience of Kyaw offers insight into the risks and opportunities associated with state-led development from the perspective of a particular locality, highlighting the changing position of rural areas and people living and working in them. As agricultural land has become more scarce, rural livelihoods have become contingent on exploitation of a wide range of non-farm activities, suggesting profound changes in the trajectory of agrarian change. The research thus complicates depictions of "rural" and "urban" by examining the peri-urban frontier as a zone of transition where livelihoods are increasingly a hybrid mix of rural and urban lifestyles and modes of belonging, as villagers transcend sectors and their associated spatial boundaries. Thus, even in small satellite towns such as Kyaw, which is still considered remote from the gaze of Myanmar's main urban centers, lives and livelihoods are becoming increasingly divorced from farming and, therefore, from the land. Patterns and associations of wealth and poverty have become more complex and diverse as non-farm opportunities have expanded and increased mobility has fragmented livelihoods across sectors and space.

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6

The Determinants of Shan Migration from Northern Shan State to Mahaaungmyay

Sai Phyoe Zin Aung

Abstract

Migration is a process that expresses the political situation, economic conditions, cultural influences, social relations and population dynamics in two areas; those migrated to and from. Several studies claim the primary factor in internal migration is an economic imbalance between two areas in one country, though there are several other factors involved. This paper aims to describe and explore the factors behind internal migration in Myanmar through a functionalist, materialist approach by focusing on migration from Northern Shan State, a large area long-affected by conflict and instability, to Mahaaungmyay Township in the relatively stable and prosperous Mandalay City. How do the elements of infrastructure, structure, and superstructure influence the decisions made by migrants before and while on this pathway? In this chapter, data gained from qualitative research methods determines infrastructure (security, economy, career opportunities, and geographical location) to be the primary factor behind internal migration, while structure (social network and family ties) is a secondary factor, though also partially constituted through infrastructure. Both infrastructure and structure shape this

particular pattern of migration, with the long-running conflict in Shan State a major motivation for out-migration.

Keywords: infrastructure, structure, internal migration, functionalism, materialism, Shan people.

1. Introduction

Migration studies is a growing discipline that analyses the political situation, economic conditions, cultural influences, social relations and population dynamics in two locations; those migrated to and from, or home and host areas. Migration has been a key human response to environmental, social, political, and economic changes (Kardulias & Hall, 2007). In addition, migration has been recognized as an important and essential component of economic and social life as it is one of the key factors in poverty reduction, human development and economic growth (Griffiths & Ito, 2016).

There are always multiple motivations and influences involved in the movement of people. Migration is usually considered to be dominated by the flows of people from low-income to high-income areas (Ravenstein, 1885). Modernization theory explains a bipolar framework for analysis that separates and opposes home and host areas, as well as push factors for out-migration and the pull factors for in-migration (Brettell, 2000).

Migration can be seen to have two forms: internal migration and transnational migration. Internal migration refers to movement within a country, while transnational migration refers to movement across borders to another country. Internal and transnational migrations have varying degrees of influence on local cultures, societies, politics and economies. Although migration has drawn the attention of many scholars, most of them usually focus on transnational migration (De Hass, 2005; Zúñiga & Hernández-León 2005; Kaur, 2010; Eberle & Holliday, 2011; Ito, 2016; Dannecker & Schaffer, 2016) with only a few discussing internal migration (Nyi Nyi, 2013; Maharjan & Theingi Myint 2015; Oh, 2019). In 2019, it was estimated that the

number of internal migrants globally was more than three times the number of transnational migrants (United Nations Population Division, 2019). Therefore, internal migration can be considered as one of the most important factors impacting host and home societies. Like transnational migration, internal migration is an outcome of economic disparities, imbalance in career opportunities and incomes, inequalities between public service accessibility and different levels of living conditions and physical security.

Myanmar has a long history of both internal and transnational migration. Scholars have described how migration and national development in Myanmar are interconnected (Griffiths & Ito, 2015). Migration can be both a cause and a result of development, while development can be either alleviated or exacerbated by migration. Migration affects development and growth in Myanmar in at least three ways: changes in labor supply, changes in productivity due to gains or losses in human resources and skills, and the extent of migrants' remittances spent in the local economy and/or on community development (Griffiths & Ito, 2016, p. 15).

Internal migration in Myanmar plays an important role in the country's welfare, development, and population dynamics. However, internal migration in Myanmar is much less researched than the migration of Myanmar people abroad. According to the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 23.3 per cent of the population is moving both locally and internationally. Out of that number, 19.3 per cent (9.2 million) of the population migrate locally and four per cent (2.02 million) of the population is reported to have migrated abroad (Republic of the Union of Myanmar Department of Population, 2016).

Thus, this research will contribute to the discussion of the interrelationship between anthropology and migration studies by focusing on the factors in internal migration from Northern Shan State (ရှမ်းပြည်နယ် မြောက်)to Mahaaungmyay Township (မဟာအောင်မြေ), Mandalay City (မန္တလေး). Migration can be explained through functionalist analysis by examining the social factors that influence individuals in fulfilling their needs, but materialist concepts can also be applied for a better understanding of factors in migration. The factors can be analyzed through the concepts of infrastructure, structure and

superstructure and by understanding the way infrastructure and structure influence the superstructure that leads to the decision of individuals to move and reside in a new place.

Infrastructure consists of "material realities" that include technological, economic, ecological, environmental and demographic variables (Buzney & Marcoux, n.d.). In this paper, "infrastructure" refers to unsafe environments, economic conditions, career opportunities, and geographic location. According to Buzney and Marcoux (n.d.), of culture consists of organizational aspects such as social structure, social organization, and political economy, while the "superstructure" consists of feelings, beliefs, ideas, and symbolism (Buzney & Marcoux, n.d.). The "structure" in this paper refers to social networks and family ties, while superstructure includes feelings and decisions to migrate. Therefore, this chapter will argue in nine sections that factors in migration include the influence of the infrastructure and the structure on the individual's decision to migrate, while migration itself can be understood as a social factor that individuals use to fulfill their needs.

2. Literature Review

Migration is a well-studied topic in anthropology and other disciplines. Neoclassical theories such as modernization theory, dependency theory and articulation theory focus their attention on wage differentials across markets or countries as the primary determinant in migration (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Horevitz, 2009; Kearney, 1986). Kearney (1986) explains that modernization theory is urban-centric and based on dualist assumptions that suggest a polar distinction between city and countryside. According to the author, modernization theory synthesizes models of social change and neoclassical economics that conceptualize migration as rural to urban and progressive, with economic development fostered by migrants bringing innovation and knowledge back to their homes and converting tradition into modernity.

However, Brettell (2000) describes that the modernization theory framework usually focuses on economic decisions that migrants make

in response to the disparity in land, labor, and capital between migrants' home and host locations. "Latin American anthropologists and economists (Kearney, 1986; Brettell, 2000) began to recognize that modernization theory focuses on analyzing individuals at the micro-level and in response they shifted towards a more macro-level dependency theory" (Horevitz, 2009). Dependency theory explains that migration is serving the developmental needs of urban areas and developed nations by focusing on the flows of labor surpluses from the rural to urban and from underdeveloped to developed nations (Kearney, 1986). On the other hand, dependency theory points to the world capitalist system and pays less attention to the flow of cash and goods. This theory uses the imbalance of the international division of labor to explain inequities in flows of labor from low-wage countries to high wage countries (Brettell, 2000).

Anthropologists then shifted into articulation theory which focuses on the community level because they found dependency theory too macro-focused to analyze the local level (Horevitz, 2009). Articulation theory focuses on the community level from where labor is extracted and argues that communities have particular forms of reproduction which are not capitalist but based on their own structural imperatives (Kearney, 1986). Despite different levels of focus, these neoclassical theories make the economy and markets central and influential factors of migration.

In other literature, there are explanations of push and pull factors based on the economy and the market. Stark and Taylor (1991) observed that absolute income and relative deprivation incentives play an important role for both internal and international migration: "Individuals or households below the upper end of the income distribution may decide to engage in migration on the assumption that they will thereby succeed in improving their positions in the village by securing an income higher than their initial income" (1991, p. 1165). The "dual economy" type model concludes that migration usually occurs as a labor flow from lower-paid origins to higher-paid destinations because migrants voluntarily choose the market with higher income potential. The Marxist model in migration is explained as the model "in which the stress is on structural factors rather than migrant agency, and on the efforts of dominant classes to expand

surplus extraction by exploiting uneven patterns of proletarianization and depeasantization" (Mosse et al., 2002, p. 59).

However, some anthropologists have argued that migration can be approached from both economic and non-economic perspectives. Gerald-Schzaepzrs (1978) explains that migration can be analyzed by using both Marxist and non-Marxist lenses which focus on the level of social structure. He states that Marxist approaches see migration as one aspect of the penetration of capitalism and as the mechanism by which rural producers are divorced from their means of production and moved from a pre-capitalist mode of production into the capitalist mode of production, while non-Marxist approaches see migration as the result of interaction between man and his social and natural environment as well as social interaction.

Another anthropological approach is the functionalist approach. At the macro-level, this approach is based on the assumption that migration affects individuals' optimistic decision-making that leads to an optimal allocation of production factors and labor flows from underdeveloped to developed areas, while economic gaps are minimized by capital flowing from developed to underdeveloped areas (de Hass, 2014). De Hass states that the functionalist approach is generally based on the assumption that most people migrate with the expectation of finding better opportunities at their destination. On the other hand, at the micro-level, the functionalist approach sees migration as a social factor that is functioning to fulfill the needs of individuals. However, the functionalist approach has limitations in conceptualizing how structures shape migration behavior and how structures such as family, community, networks, and culture constrain migration choices, according to de Haas.

Another group of researchers explains migration by focusing on social networks. Kuhn (2003) emphasizes the role of social exchange networks in rural-urban migration. He incorporates the role of an expanding network of village-based social connections in the formation of the flow of migration. Kuhn states that rural-urban migration generates social capital that migrants transform into economic capital. He argues that when a group of people moves from their home village to cities, their identities often create trust between current and prospective

migrants. In addition, the facilitating role of family and friend networks makes migration easier for new migrants (Singer & Massey, 1998). In this way, network connections are a form of social capital that people draw upon to gain access to employment abroad. Friends and relatives in host areas usually provide help to new migrants in their transportation, routes, residence, and career opportunities.

In addition to social networks, there are also other factors that maintain and determine the flow of migration. Saha and Goswami (2020) states that "a network is a self-determining system, which reduces the cost and risk of enlarging the physical and psychological support of migrants at the destination and facilitates matching between newcomers and employers" (2020, p. 113). In addition to economic, functionalist and social network perspectives, there are several other factors in migration. Studies have for instance identified factors such as income differentials, policy constraints, distance from borders, population density, social proximity, amenities, and migration traditions as important (Fafchamps & Shilpi, 2008; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005).

Regarding research on internal migration in Myanmar, the national data on population was absent for a prolonged period between 1983 and 2014, as no national censuses were conducted during this period. The 2014 Myanmar Housing and Population Census was the first national census in 31 years and recorded an estimated more than nine million people identifying themselves as internal migrants (Department of Population, 2016). In 2013, a study on migration in Myanmar pointed out various perspectives on migration such as migration patterns and some demographic information about internal migration in Myanmar (Nyi Nyi, 2013). The study noted that rates of urban-urban and rural-rural migration streams in Myanmar had increased. The motivations and other factors involved in internal migration were not addressed.

Elsewhere, Maharjan and Theingi Myint (2015) mentions a short overview of the reasons for migration from Myanmar's "Dry Zone", which in their study refers to Mandalay and Magway (မဂ္ဂဝ) regions. They argue that although income generation is the most common reason in many other cases of migration, for their own research

participants it was the lack of sufficient employment in their home communities in the Dry Zone that primarily caused them to migrate. They also state that other factors such as development interventions and infrastructure construction pushed people to migrate. Research has been done in Ayeyarwady (ဧရာဝတီ) and Magway regions in Myanmar revealing that motivations for migration include earning differentials, job availability, and gaps in working conditions and lifestyles (Pattison et al., 2016). This research stressed that social networks, transportation, and communication technology play roles in enabling migrants to move.

A study conducted in Min Ga Lar Kwet Thit (မင်္ဂလာကွက်သစ်), Yangon, stated that cheap illegal-land renting prices became one of the factors that attracted migrants although they face the risk of eviction (Boutry, 2017). In that case, social networks were not an enabling factor which led to difficulties in accessing resources and coping with vulnerability. Oh (2019) also pointed out that factors in internal migration can include natural environmental impacts such as shock responses and risk management, social factors and technological disparities between different areas. Based on these assumptions, it can be deduced that motivations for and factors in internal migration in Myanmar can be different from one area to the next according to the environment, political situation, geographical location and socioeconomic condition of the home and host communities.

These prior works of research have explained different contexts of migration both in the micro and macro, their economic implications and the role of social networks. Research conducted in Myanmar has discussed and explained some factors in internal migration. However, as Myanmar has very different situations from one area to another, there are other factors in internal migration that have not been clearly identified so far. As the rate of migration is increasing, humans tend to move away from agrarian societies and into industrialized societies and therefore the allocation of labor and economic surpluses is becoming off-balance. Thus, these gaps in the literature should be addressed to understand the disparity and unbalanced conditions between host and home areas.

3. Rationale

Based on the identified research gaps, this paper will contribute to extant migration studies by focusing on internal migration from Northern Shan State to Mandalay. According to research conducted by the International Labor Organization in 2015, 18 per cent of respondents from Shan State had migrated to Mandalay, which is the second most common destination for Shan migrants (Rogovin, 2015). As the political condition of Northern Shan State is different from other parts of Myanmar, the drivers of migration there are distinctive.

These drivers will be explored by applying a functionalist and materialist approach. Migration can be understood as a social phenomenon that individuals use to fulfill their needs and as a human response to practical problems of earthly existence. A functionalist perspective that focuses on the individual is emphasized by anthropologist Malinowski in his theory of needs, which is built upon the functional approach to culture, i.e. that culture exists to meet the basic biological, psychological, and social needs of individuals (Moore, 2009). However, migration can be better understood by analyzing the influence of infrastructure and structure on the individual's decision to migrate. Marvin Harris argues with his materialist approach that the explanation of sociocultural phenomenon must be in terms of how infrastructure shapes the structure and superstructure (Harris, 2001).

Therefore, the specific objectives of this paper are: to explore internal migration from Northern Shan State to Mandalay through a functionalist approach; and to analyze the factors involved in this internal migration through a materialist approach. How do elements of the infrastructure, structure, and superstructure influence decisions of migrants relocating from Northern Shan State to Mahaaungmyay Township, Mandalay? In other words, this chapter analyzes migration as a social phenomenon functioning as the fulfillment of individual needs while factors involved in this are illustrated through the heuristic of materialism. This kind of research can greatly inform policymakers, giving them a better understanding of the individual needs and factors involved in migration. This can then influence more effective and equitable policies being initiated and eventually implemented in and for Myanmar and its people.

4. Methodology

This study uses data gained from qualitative methods and the study period lasted from April to November, 2020. Primary data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and in-depth interview (IDIs). KIIs were first conducted with leaders of Shan social organizations and one ethnic-based Shan political party in Mandalay. During these interviews other research participants were introduced to the researcher. Due to the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, some informants were contacted and interviewed via phone calls rather than in-person.

For the IDIs, Shan migrants aged over 20 living in Mahaaungmyay Township and migrating from different townships in Northern Shan State, including Hsipaw (သီပေါ), Mongmit (မိုးမိတ်), Namtu (နမ္မတူ), Hseni (သိန္နီ), Namhkan (နမ့်ခမ်း) and Muse (မူဆယ်) townships, were interviewed. IDIs were used to gather in-depth information about relocation narratives. Some sensitive questions about political conditions, conflicts, and opinions were also asked during the one-on-one in-depth interviews. Informants chose between the Shan and Burmese languages as working languages during the interviews, depending on their comfort level in each. In addition, secondary data was gathered by analyzing official reports and reviewing existing literature.

All field notes and audio transcriptions were analyzed and organized by subject. Then, the collected data was examined to understand the factors behind internal migration. The study area of Mahaaungmyay Township is located downtown in the Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC) municipality. The study population includes leaders of social and cultural organizations, members of an ethnic-based Shan political party and Shan migrants living in Mahaaungmyay Township. A total of 20 informants were interviewed, providing the invaluable data that made this paper possible. They were working in different sectors, including construction workers, manual workers, freelancers, students, service-industry workers, schoolteachers and doctors. Because this study used qualitative research methods, its results should not be used to generalize about the whole community of Shan migrants in Mahaaungmyay Township. However, this paper can provide some insights about some of the factors behind internal migration in Myanmar.

5. Background of Northern Shan State

Northern Shan State is regarded as a geographic sub-region within Shan State as shown in figure 6.1. It is bounded by Mandalay Region in the west, by Sagaing Region and Kachin State (ကချင်ပြည်နယ်) in the northwest, by the People's Republic of China in the northeast and east, and by Southern and Eastern Shan State in the south. Northern Shan State is home to Shan people, as well as many other groups of ethnicities such as Bama (ဗမာ), Palaung/Ta'ang (ပလောင်/တအောင်း), Wa (ဝ), Kachin, Kokang (ကိုးကန့်) and Chinese (Minority Rights Group International, 2017). Shan people in Myanmar speak a language belonging to the Tai-Kadai Language family and in fact the name "Shan" is Burmese; Shan people refer to themselves as "Tai" (တႆး) (Jenny, 2016).

The political situation in Northern Shan State is complicated as there are multiple ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and state-backed militias. Northern Shan State has suffered from armed conflict between EAOs themselves as well as between EAOs and the Myanmar state military (the Tatmadaw) for decades since an uprising began in Shan State in 1958. Prior to the Shan armed uprising, the years immediately following Myanmar's independence in 1948 saw a spillover of conflict from China to Shan State involving the vanquished Kuomintang (KMT). Despite the fact that the government initiated the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October 2015, some of the EAOs active in Northern Shan State have been reluctant to sign on (Quadrini, 2020). Armed conflict in Northern Shan State has escalated since the time of research and remains intense. The civil wars in Northern Shan State impact the local population and contribute to structural inequalities and a lack of socioeconomic development. Extrajudicial killings, torture, forced recruitment (conscription), taxation, and destruction of property are common in Northern Shan State (Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2018). These conflict situations have contributed to many critical issues and the dynamic of populations, such as migration, forced displacement and contractions in the economy.

Figure 6.1: *Geographical location of Northern Shan State*

6. Individual Needs and Migration

According to data collected as part of this study, the individual needs motivating migration from Northern Shan State to Mahaaungmyay Township are education and career development. Education plays an important role in the migration decisions of young migrants in particular. Most young migrants said that they moved to Mandalay to get access to higher education opportunities not available in their hometowns. In Northern Shan State there are only three universities, all in Lashio (လားရှိုး): the city's Arts and Science University, Technological University and University of Computer Studies. There is one degree college, the Lashio Educational Degree College. Young migrants stated that Mandalay can provide them more opportunities and better educational services than their native state. Regarding educational needs, a 26-year-old female doctor said:

> *"I would not have studied medicine if I had stayed in my hometown because there is no university offering medicine degrees in Northern Shan State. Therefore, I moved to Mandalay to study. When I moved here, I realised I could improve myself even more than if I stayed in my hometown*

> *because I can learn other skills outside of the University here such as language skills. Such language classes are not available in my hometown,"* (Ma Chaw, personal communication, June 22, 2020).

In this way, it is not only university education that attracts young migrants, but also education and skill development opportunities outside of the university sector. Consequently, young people who would like to learn and improve the skills they consider relevant to contemporary life and their futures usually migrate to Mandalay. One 20-year-old female informant said that in addition to her university education, she is also studying fashion design as she wants to be a designer. When she completed high school she chose to move to Mandalay and study at Mandalar Degree College (မန္တလာဒီဂရီကောလိပ်) because she thought that if she moved to Mandalay, she would be able to learn fashion design (Naunt Htwe, personal communication, May 30, 2020).

Being the second-largest city in Myanmar, Mandalay can provide a variety of such career development opportunities. Young people from Northern Shan State who seek careers with good future prospects usually move to Mandalay for their career development.

> *"I hope to have a better future by moving to Mandalay," a 25-year-old photographer and event organizer said, "I can learn advanced technology in photography and decoration in Mandalay. At the same time, I earn more money here. When I save money, I can expand my work and buy more devices to support it"* (Sai Lao, personal communication, June 13, 2020).

Hence, migration appears to be a solution for individuals to fulfill their career needs. While migration is clearly a social phenomenon that functions to fulfill the needs of Shan migrants to Mandalay, it is not sufficient to claim that individual needs are the only factors for their migration, as there are other factors that also contribute to their decisions.

7. Infrastructure, Structure and Superstructure in Migration

In addition to education and career development, there exist a multitude of factors that contribute to internal migration from Northern Shan State to Mandalay. In this section, those factors will be described through three concepts of the materialist approach: infrastructure, structure, and superstructure. It will explain how infrastructure influences structure and superstructure and how structure influences the superstructure by focusing on findings from field interviews in Mahaaungmyay Township.

7.1 Infrastructure

The basic influential factor in migration from Northern Shan State to Mahaaungmyay Township is infrastructure. The concept of infrastructure refers to unsafe environments, the economy, career opportunities and geographical location. One of the most important factors is the unsafe environment in Northern Shan State. As most parts of Northern Shan state have long hosted civil wars between EAOs and the Tatmadaw, people there have long suffered from conflict directly and also indirectly. The civil wars have resulted in a large number of civilian deaths and injuries. Feeling unsafe and afraid, people in war zones feel compelled to leave their homes. The aforementioned situation is one of the direct impacts that people in Shan State are undergoing. Then, even when there is a pause in conflict, little reprieve from fear follows. People usually worry about when the fighting will begin again. Some take the situation into their own hands and migrate since they are unable to stop the war. Thus, direct impacts from civil war seems to be a key factor in people migrating from Northern Shan State.

Not only people who are facing direct impacts are moving but also those who have suffered from indirect impacts decide to move. From the interviews, two indirect impacts, conscription and taxation by EAOs, can be identified. Conscription is one of the main factors that threaten young males and their parents from countryside areas. Despite there being multiple options for young males such as moving to other places, getting married, or ordaining to be young Buddhist

monks to escape from being conscripted, migration tends to be a popular option. A 22-year-old male said:

> *"Actually, I did not want to move to Mandalay. I just wanted to live with my family. But I have two male siblings. If I live there and people know that we have two male siblings, one of us will be conscripted. I do not want to be conscripted and therefore, my mother rented a room for me in Mandalay and I live here to avoid being conscripted"* (Sai Han, personal communication, June 30, 2020).

Hence, the longstanding practice of compulsory conscription carried out by many EAOs and militias has caused many Shan people to migrate from their homeland.

Additionally, EAOs efforts to tax residents also burden livelihoods in Northern Shan State. Generally, high-income households and farmers have to pay more taxes. Furthermore, as there are many EAOs in Northern Shan State, people in some areas have to pay tax to multiple EAOs. A 50-year-old migrant said:

> *"I was able to pay tax in earlier times. I could afford to pay one group off. But these days there are multiple groups trying to tax us there. In some years, I was taxed by two or three individual groups. This equated to all of the profits obtained from my businesses. In the end, I decided to move my businesses to Mandalay to avoid these EAO taxes"* (U Aik Sai, personal communication, July 5, 2020).

In addition to coercive taxes and an insecure environment, the economy is also one of the motivations of migrants. First and foremost, the liquidity in Mandalay is an important pull factor. Most farmers want to divorce themselves from rural economies such as agriculture and engage in urban economies such as the services industries because rural economies provide lower incomes when compared to urban economies. There are more jobs in Mandalay than in Northern Shan State and they also pay higher. A 22-year-old female migrant who works in a Mandalay service industry said:

> *"If I live in my hometown, I have to work in the field, grow seeds, do the weeding and so on. This kind of work is so tiring and poorly paid. I get only 3,000 Myanmar Kyat for the whole working day there and working hours are from around 6AM until 5PM. But in Mandalay, I get a higher salary for working from only 9AM to 4PM doing work much less tiring than farming"* (Nang Phway, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Career opportunities attract many migrants from Northern Shan State to Mandalay. As Mandalay is a large and developing city, it can provide various career opportunities for many young people. A 20-year-old male content writer said:

> *"I want to be a professional writer and editor. Currently I am working as a content writer. Content writing is not a well-known or impressive career in my hometown. Most people back there usually ask, 'What's content writing?', and ask if it provides me with enough income. For me, being a content writer is a good career that can give me a lot of knowledge and self-improvement. If I stay in my home town I will not be able to reach my career goals. So, I have to find someplace that I can accomplish this goal. This is why I decided to move to Mandalay, which is the nearest developed city"* (Sai Hark, personal communication, June 21, 2020).

Geographical location is another reason why migrants choose Mandalay over Yangon, the largest and most developed city with possibly more educational and economic opportunities. Figure 6.2 shows that Mandalay is closer to Northern Shan State than Yangon. A 28-year-old floral artist said:

> *"There is more potential for me to work in Yangon. But, Yangon is too far from my hometown. So, I chose Mandalay because Mandalay is closer to my hometown and I can go back easily in case of an emergency in my family"* (Nang Saw, personal communication, July 11, 2020).

Thus, geographical location also influences migrants in choosing their destinations. An insignificant number of migrants also mentioned that other factors such as transportation, population density, and local foods also influenced their decision.

It can be assumed that the four factors of unsafe environments, the economy, career opportunities, and geographical location are the basic factors for migration in this case study. When people migrate, it can also impact the social structure of migrant families and home communities that can lead to the assumption that the infrastructure has some influence on the structure. Thus, in studying migration, we must take into consideration the structure in order to explore migration more comprehensively.

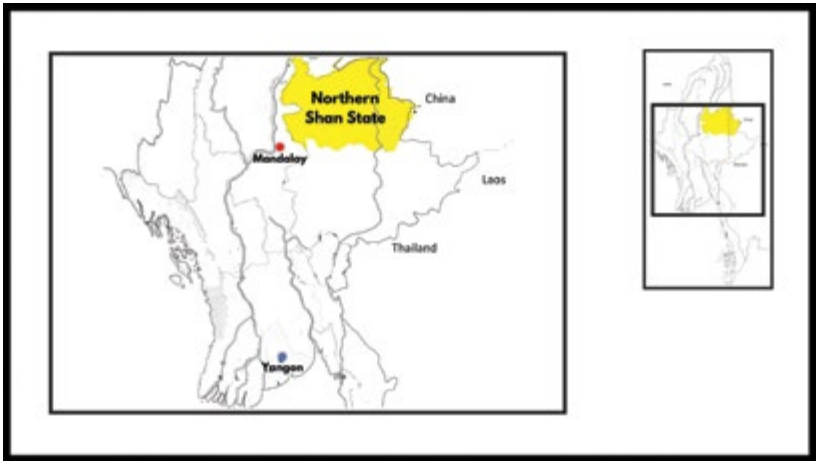

Figure 6.2: *Location of Northern Shan State, Mandalay and Yangon*

7.2 Structure

Elements of structure such as social networks and family ties can be identified as further factors in internal migration. When migration occurs, the social structure can also change as a person moves to another place and becomes part of another society. Migrants tend however to maintain a connection with their home communities and connections between current migrants and prospective migrants at home are a form of social network.

Such existing social networks in a destination greatly influences prospective migrants' choices. Many migrants said that they already had some relatives and friends working or studying in Mandalay before they decided to move there. These relatives and friends helped them to get settled in, giving them the confidence required to move to a new place. In this way, social networks among migrants play an important role in migrants' decisions to migrate and their destination choices. A 22-year-old male said:

> *"I moved to Mandalay because my aunt got married and moved here. She helped me a lot when I first arrived. She provided me with accommodation while I was seeking a hostel and she also introduced me to my employer. Without her help, I would not have been able to move here, as I had limited knowledge about Mandalay,"* (Sai Aom Main, personal communication, July 18, 2020).

Another form of structure that influences migration is family ties, meaning people migrating by following family members to new locations. These family ties are commonly found between a married male and his family. In Shan society, a married male is usually considered the household head of his family. If a family decides to migrate, the household head moves first and then his family follows later. A 26-year-old freelance English teacher said, "My migration pattern is simple. I just followed my parents to Mandalay. My father came to expand his business. After he settled down here, my mother and I just followed him". Hence, family ties are another enabling factor for migrants to move to a new place.

These social networks and family ties can be explored as part of structure. In these cases, the infrastructure influences the movement of household heads and current migrants because they also moved to Mandalay for economic and career purposes. Therefore, the infrastructure has an influence on the structure which itself also plays an important role in the decision to migrate. The infrastructure can be assumed as the primary influential factor while structure is a secondary factor. Although the infrastructure and structure tend to be the main factors in migration, the superstructure should not be taken for granted because the ideas and feelings of migrants also play important roles in deciding to move.

7.3 Superstructure

Looking back to infrastructure, the environment is the most influential factor in migrants' feelings and decisions to move to Mandalay. Many migrants decided to move to Mandalay because they think that Mandalay can provide a safe environment, a better economy and career opportunities. A 56-year-old school teacher said:

> *"Imagine you were living through the middle of a war, how could you be happy? I could not work properly and I got a very low income. With the expectation of a safe environment and a better-paying job, I decided to move to Mandalay"* (Daw Nang Myaing, personal communication, June 13, 2020).

Moreover, the structure also affects the decisions of migrants because they feel more confident to move to Mandalay when they have connections with people who migrated there previously. Similarly, family ties encourage the members of families to migrate because they feel that moving to live with their household head will be safe and comfortable. These feelings and ideas appear to be the driving factors in their decisions to move to Mandalay.

Because of civil war and insecurity, people feel unsafe and afraid, which leads to the idea of migrating to escape from this situation. As people migrate, the social structure of both communities changes due to the influence of infrastructure. On the other hand, the social network established between current and prospective migrants allows prospective migrants to be supported. Having networks with current migrants makes prospective migrants more confident and safe when they move. When the household head of a family migrates, it influences the decision of family members to follow the household head. As displayed in figure 6.3, the infrastructure can be considered as the primary factor in migration that impacts both structure and superstructure. The structure itself is also a secondary factor that influences the superstructure in the migration process.

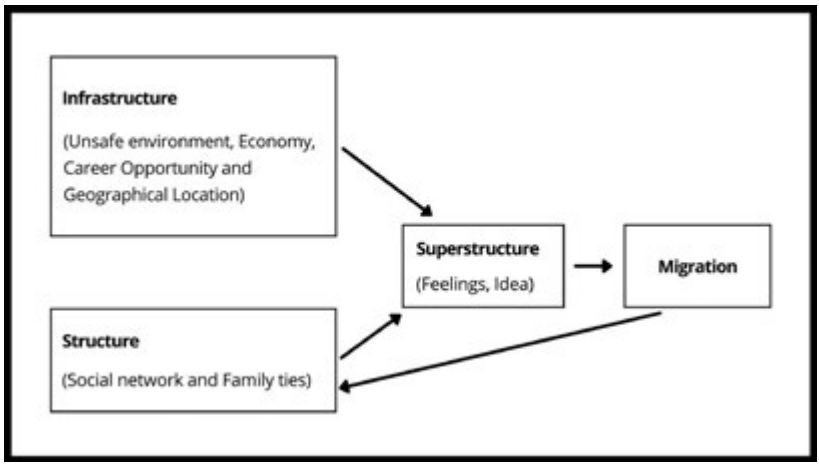

Figure 6.3: *Interrelation of materialist concepts in internal migration, Myanmar*

8. Discussion

The findings indicate that the factors of migration can be better understood through materialism rather than functionalism. In relation to Malinowski's functionalist approach-that culture exists to meet the needs of individuals (Moore, 2009) - the case of Shan migrants shows that migration is one of the social factors functioning to fulfill individual needs by supporting their education and career development. However, the factors involved in migration are not limited to economics, education, and career. They include an insecure environment, the economy, career opportunities, geographical location, social networks, and family ties. Therefore, the functionalist approach has limitations in conceptualizing how structures such as family, community, networks, and culture impact migration choices (de Hass, 2014). In this paper, despite the fact that the study of migration through a functionalist approach gives an understanding of the needs of migrants, this approach is limited to pointing out only some important factors such as an insecure environment, social networks, and family ties. Therefore, the data suggests that the heuristic of the materialist approach can provide a better understanding of the factors behind internal migration.

The findings indicate that infrastructure is the primary factor in internal migration. First, the infrastructure directly influences the superstructure by giving migrants the idea that migration will provide a safe environment and better economic and career opportunities. Secondly, after moving, migration indirectly leads to creating social networks and family ties. Consequently, this structure has an impact on the decision of migrants to migrate. With reference to Harris' (2001) assumption that sociocultural phenomenon needs to be explained in terms of how infrastructure shapes the structure and superstructure, the study of Shan migrants also asserts that infrastructure is the primary factor that impacts both structure and superstructure. This is the correlation and patterns of the concepts of infrastructure, structure, and superstructure in studying migration.

While many scholars of migration focus on the economy and markets, this paper demonstrates that migration goes beyond this. As Northern Shan State has significant armed conflict some elements of infrastructure (an insecure environment) become an important factor. In contrast to Maharjan and Theingyi Myint's (2015) observation that limited opportunities for employment in the dry zone is a major reason for migration, the case of Northern Shan State highlights the role of physical insecurity. In addition, some influential factors for migrants from Ayeyarwady and Magway regions are related to differentials of wages, employment availability and other lifestyles (Pattison et al., 2016), while the influential factors for Shan migrants go beyond economy and employment and include security measures and geographical locations. The case of Northern Shan State also reflects the role of social networks that enable migrants in Ayeyarwady and Magway regions to move (Pattison et al., 2016). Therefore, this paper claims that internal migration in Myanmar is different from one area to another, based on the environment, political situation, geographical location, and socio-economic condition of the home and host communities.

On the other hand, a better economy and career opportunities act as influential factors in migrant's decision to move from Northern Shan State to Mandalay. Respondents in this study show that the disparity in liquidity and career opportunities between Northern Shan State and Mandalay play an important role in their decision to migrate. This

supports the explanation of modernization theory that highlights disparities between home and host communities in the economic decision of migrants (Brettell, 2000). Similarly, these data are in line with the assumptions of classical theories in migration (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Kearney, 1986; Horevitz, 2009) and push and pull factors models (Stark & Taylor, 1991; Mosse et al., 2002) that pay attention to economics and markets in studying migration.

This chapter has also shown how social networks and family ties can facilitate migration. Migrants who participated in this study acknowledged that the help and connections provided by earlier migrants enable them to migrate easily and confidently. These findings support the argument that social exchange networks in rural-urban migration act as social capital that assists the flow of migration (Kuhn, 2003; Saha & Goswami, 2020; Singer & Massey, 1998). However, Northern Shan State shows insecure environments and geographic location should be taken into account when considering the influential factors in migration.

9. Conclusion

Traditionally, research in migration studies focused on economic factors. However, in some areas with ongoing disturbances the economy may not yet be the main priority for migrants. This study shows factors in internal migration, demonstrating the interrelation among the elements of infrastructure, structure, and superstructure that influence the decisions of migrants. By analyzing those factors in internal migration through materialism, this paper has shown how insecure environments, the economy, career opportunities, and geographic location can, directly and indirectly, shape the flow of migration and people's feelings and ideas.

It is hoped that policymakers will be able to get a better understanding of the factors in internal migration and can identify the various disparities between Northern Shan State and Mandalay. By taking into consideration this comprehensive discussion, policymakers can initiate and implement appropriate and unproblematic policies that

can reduce social inequalities. In the contemporary world, migration is increasingly popular as a human response to environmental, political, and economic challenges in home communities; it then impacts population dynamics, economic development, labor relations and socio-cultural change. Migration can result in challenges for migrants to adapt to new social structures and socio-cultural environments. Therefore, to better understand the implications of migration, further studies should address the factors involved in the migration of other groups of migrants from Northern Shan State as well as the social conditions of those migrants because Shan people are only one group of many in Myanmar, each with unique identities and cultural values.

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7

The Impacts of Migration on Socioeconomic Life in Kan Village

Sandy Moe

Abstract

Migration is a common phenomenon worldwide with urbanization, industrialization and economic growth encouraging people to migrate for work and to try to improve their quality of life. This chapter aims to explore the impacts of migration on family structures in Kan Village, Myingyan Township, by asking: What are the push and pull factors affecting emigration? And what is the age and gender of the villagers who become migrant workers? To answer these questions, the chapter uses data from applied ethnography as well as mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods. A government project in 1996 negatively affected agricultural livelihoods in Kan Village, pushing residents to seek work elsewhere. During the same 1996 policy period, the employment branch of the Ministry of Labor began providing support to locals who wished to work abroad by connecting selected candidates with foreign employers. This only hastened international and internal emigration from the village, leading to a shortage of working-age people in the village and forcing the young and elderly to look after themselves while depending on migrant worker remittances for their livelihoods.

Keywords: domestic migration, international migration, push and pull factors, family structure, dependency.

1. Introduction

Migration is a common phenomenon worldwide and people continue to move to various destinations for various reasons. People move from one place to another place, usually in order to meet their needs and wants, to find new jobs and to live temporarily or permanently in a new place (Bhattacharya, 1993). Lee (1966) showed that push factors act to motivate out-migration and pull factors attract entering migrants. Push and pull factors are paired, that is, migration can occur if the reason for emigrating (the push) has a solution found in the pull of the destination. Migration produces gene flow and has both positive and negative socioeconomic impacts on residents and those struggling to survive (Britannica, 2020).

In Myanmar, migration increased rapidly after 1988. The major reasons are relative poverty, lack of jobs, inability to earn enough money to survive and political/ethnic conflicts. Local people who live in Kan Village (ကန်ရွာ), Myingyan Township (မြင်းခြံ), have long had various livelihood strategies based on the changing conditions of local natural resources. However, because of government policies and climate instability beginning in 1996, these strategies have since failed to provide for the needs of households. The changes in government development policy in 1996 in particular caused inhabitants of Kan significant turmoil and difficulties in their agricultural livelihoods. In response, many chose to migrate to major cities in search of economic opportunities and a better life.

During the 1996 new policy period, the employment branch of the Ministry of Labor also began supporting locals to work abroad by connecting selected candidates with foreign employers. This encouraged Kan residents to consider not just domestic, but also international migration as pathways to earn a desired living. This chapter examines patterns of domestic and international migration. It addresses gaps in the literature on the impact of migration on family structures due to the changing policy of the military government after 1996 and seeks to ground further insights and comparative studies on Myanmar migration in the future. The study aims to explore the key patterns of migration and impacts on social structures at Kan Village, Myingyan Township, by asking the following questions: What are the

push and pull factors of migration at play here? What is the age and gender of the villagers who move to urban areas and how does this affect family structures in Kan Village?

2. Research Methodology

This chapter uses data generated from applied ethnographic research as well as mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods to understand the socioeconomic impacts of migration and changing lifestyles in the study site of Kan Village, which lies about 2.4 miles away from Myingyan Town and was founded approximately 350 years ago. The qualitative data collection methods chosen as the main research tools were Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Natural Group Interviews. Secondary data from existing scholarly and other literature, both published and unpublished, was also used. The period of data collection was from December, 2019 to November, 2020.

KIIs were conducted with six well-known people in the village, including the village administrator and village elders, who advised and/or introduced the researcher to further informants. Natural Group Interviews were useful in confirming the economic activities, seasonal variation, and social conditions of differently aged people in non-migrant and migrant households. Twelve interviewees belonged to non-migrant households and twelve belonged to migrant households. Quantitative research methods were applied to get numerical data about migration. While conducting interviews and fieldwork, note-taking, audio recording and taking photos were employed. For qualitative data analysis, descriptive data analysis was performed.

3. Literature Review

Migration is a part of livelihood strategies in rural areas, which focuses on minimizing risks and diversifying household income. There are many reasons for migrating and they are interrelated at various levels

(individual, household, local and national). People decide to migrate for economic and sociocultural reasons, often seeking work elsewhere (Doetti & Estruch, 2016).

According to Waugh and Bushell (2002), migration refers to people moving to a new place or country, usually in order to find new jobs and to live temporarily or permanently there. It is not inherent or static and is influenced by social, cultural, economic and political factors, being historically associated with industrialization, urbanization and economic growth. Migration is one of the struggles for survival and to improve one's quality of life. Nowadays, around the world, people move from one place to another to fulfil their families' and others' needs (Bhattacharya, 1993).

According to the National Geographic's Human Migration Guide (2005), migration is the movement of people within or outside countries for the purposes of taking up temporary or permanent residence. The guide maintains that rural-urban migration is one of the most significant internal migration patterns, especially in developing countries, and identifies three scales of migration: intercontinental (between continents), intracontinental (between countries on a given continent), and interregional (within countries). However, in this chapter, migration scale is described using the terms internal migration and international migration.

Kearney (1986) defines migration as "the movement of people through geographic space" and classifies a group of "contemporary migrants", referring to "predominantly workers moving from areas where they were born and raised to others where they can find a higher return for their labor". This contemporary migrant phenomenon accords with my own research. Kearney explains that internal and international migration creates communities with both development and underdevelopment. Migration further impacts communities through different aspects of culture, and the consequences of different kinds of migration impact the individual, local and national levels in which development programs are being implemented.

To further understand the relationship between migration, development and underdevelopment, Kearney draws on the example of Mexican

migrants relocating to the United States as annual or seasonal migrants. In the 1960s and 1970s, an agreement between the two countries promoted labor exports and imports. But when the United States economy contracted in 1973 many Mexican migrants faced livelihood challenges and returned back to their home communities because of a lack of job opportunities in the U.S. Kearney named this kind of migration "return migration". The term refers to migrant workers who went to work in mostly Western and European countries, residing there for a number of years and then returning home, usually with new intangible qualities such as skills, ideas and attitudes that they learned abroad, as well as monetary savings. These savings impact the home community both negatively and positively according to the literature, but most studies show they affect the community negatively (Kearney, 1986).

In Kearney's Mexican case study, some people did not want to work in their home community because they wanted to be independent, even though their skills were relevant for new jobs. Some skills were not associated with their primary work abroad and they moved from one job to another in their home community. Moreover, they invested remittances in houses and land for housing rather than in businesses, while some abandoned farming and changed to other occupations. These factors affected the underdevelopment of each family and their socioeconomic wellbeing. However, parents' long-term investment in the education of their children was a positive effect of migration in the home community. Some farmworkers founded agricultural cooperatives and had a chance to contract with employees who contributed funds to their cooperative (Kearney, 1986).

Keeping in mind the ways in which migration affected the socioeconomic life of home communities in Mexico is useful to better understand the case of Kan Village. This chapter explores the migration pursued by Kan residents and whether it has impacted the village's development and the socioeconomic life of its people. Kearney's (1986) explanation shows how remittances are used in home communities and this particular question was put to the return migrants living in Kan: Did they invest in businesses, housing or land, and how?

Returning migrants bring back valuable work experience from new industries, new ideas and skills, changing the social structures of their homelands (Gmelch, 1980). They also bring capital needed for the economic development of their homelands. Behaviors of return migrants raise the status of returnees and give them better access to village resources. Many return migrants invest their savings in housing or in the purchase of a building plot for a house. Returned migrants often paint their houses in bright colors and buy modern devices such as stereos and television sets, gas stoves, electric refrigerators and water pumps. Their homes use better modern devices than non-migrant homes. It is not surprising that returnees prefer to invest their savings in self-employment, with a distaste or disinterest in both agriculture and wage labor (Gmelch, 1980). Although economic migrants' main intentions are to improve their economic prospects and those of their families, in some instances that is not always possible (Ndlovu & Tigere, 2018).

According to Gmelch (1980), returnees bring about significant change in the productive techniques or attitudes and values in their home communities. Innovative returnees aim to develop new businesses and make things more profitable. These migrants desire to demonstrate that the old ways are not always the best. In Ireland, many migrants have the potential to introduce change because of the nature of conservativism there. The country has traditionally been slow to accept change. In order to gain acceptance at home, Irish returnees have found that they cannot push their ideas or foreign experiences on local people. Returnees encourage young people in the community to emigrate. The returnee is a living demonstration to young adults in the community that it is possible to go abroad, look at part of the world, obtain a better paying job, save money, and return to the homeland to be reunited with family and friends with enough capital to achieve a comfortable standard of living (Gmelch, 1980).

According to Teerawichitchainan and Knodel (2017), migration has both advantages and disadvantages for migrant-sending households, but it appears that in most cases the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. In Myanmar, migrant households do not appear particularly disadvantaged. Migrant households in rural areas do not suffer from a shortage of adults to perform work, as they tend to have

adequate income and have more adults in working age than non-migrant households. Migrant-sending households are better-off in terms of household wealth and size of land ownership. People with disabilities in migrant households are no worse off than their counterparts from non-migrant households in terms of receiving care and having unmet care needs.

According to Shin Thynn Tun, Theingi Soe and Amy Khaing (2020), local people in Hlaing Ka Bar Village (လှိုင်ကဘာ), Hpa-An Township (ဘားအံ), Kayin State (ကရင်ပြည်နယ်) face difficulties primarily in farming due to low wages and unreliable yields and insufficient income for health, education and other social affairs. These factors push people to leave for Thailand and make contact with others who were pulled to work there before them. Hlaing Ka Bar Village inhabitants migrate to provide for their families and send remittances home to invest in general stores, Thai food restaurants, purchase farmland and construct brick buildings. Their family members can work their own farmland after migrants return back to their home village. Married couples who migrate entrust their children to their parents and relatives. So, children are unfamiliar with their parents and learn daily practices from their grandparents or relatives. Even youths now consider working abroad. So, farm-owners worry about getting labor and high wages in the farming season (Shin Thynn Tun, Theingi Soe, & Amy Khaing, 2020). In this chapter, the ways in which migrant workers from Kan Village apply their migrant experiences to their home communities and economic effects on the families left behind are explored.

4. Findings

Kan Village is located 2.4 miles north of Myingyan Town in Gaung Kwe Village Tract (ခေါင်းကွဲ), six furlongs east of the Ayeyarwady River (ဧရာဝတီ), between Gaung Kwe and Ah Neint (အနိမ့်) villages. Kan Village's origin story is:

> "*The king's servants who were exiled from the capital lived with their families near the large lake at the place which*

would later become known as Kan Village in the Myanmar year of 1015. Around 1653, the villagers named their village Kan village as they were dependent on the lake, which is known in the local dialect as Kan Twinn (ကန်တွင်း), *situated in front of the village*" (Kan villagers, personal communication, May 3, 2020).

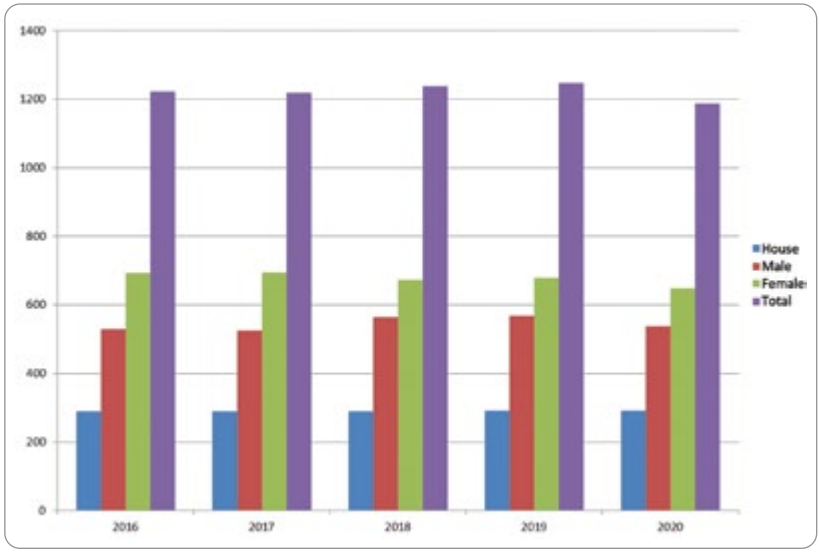

Figure 7.1: *Households and population of Kan Village, according to the author's own data*

4.1 Livelihoods and Economic Change in Kan Village

Located in the Central Dry Zone, Kan Village average temperatures vary from 40°C in the hot season to 35°C in the coldest periods of the cold season. Average rainfall in the rainy season is up to 40 inches. Kan is mainly an agricultural village with most of the villagers working as farmers. Livestock and other farm-based occupations are also common. The main cash crop is tobacco. Other plants cultivated include chili, millet, corn, watermelon, tomatoes, sesame, cotton, onions and various types of beans and legumes. Livestock such as cattle, poultry, pigs and goats are raised on a small scale. Handicrafts including weaving, cheroot rolling, garment sewing and family-run snack making also take place during the summer agricultural break.

In the past when the climate was more stable, working outside of the village was almost unheard of. The majority of the villagers' livelihoods were located within the village. The two major factors that changed this were the 1996 irrigation project and the employment branch of the Ministry of Labor beginning to provide support to locals who wished to work abroad by selecting candidates in 1997. Due to these factors, an increasing number of young villagers began to move out and find work in other areas outside of the village.

4.2 The 1996 Irrigation Project

A 50-year-old former chairman of the village provided some information about this consequential irrigation project. In 1996, the Department of Agricultural Development initiated a seven-year long project, the Tha Baung Dam (သာပေါင်းဆည်) and associated *myi yedin simankone* irrigation project (မြစ်ရေတင်စီမံကိန်း), with the purpose of constructing a dam to irrigate 4,000 acres of farmland along the Ayeyarwady River. Official state orders in 1997 required farmers living along the dam to cultivate rice. Farmers faced difficulties as the government-funded irrigation canals did not supply enough water for the designated 4,000 acres. As Kan Village was situated south of the dam and at a higher land elevation, the canals could not reach their rice fields and the rice planters struggled. On the other hand, villages situated in the lower elevations north of the canal such as Tha Baung and Ah Neint received ample canal water and their rice paddies and fields thrived.

Out of the 4,000 acres that were included in the project, nearly 2,000 acres were within Kan Village. Rice as a crop requires plenty of water, particularly when cultivated on dry land instead of wet paddy fields. As the irrigation canals built by the government could not supply enough water to Kan Village, which mostly had normal farmland instead of paddy fields, rice yield in the village was very low. The only use for the low-yield rice crop of Kan Village was as cow feed.

Then in 1997, the village received new orders to plant rice in their paddy fields and cotton on their farmland. The crops planted on farmland and paddy fields near to the irrigation canal thrived. In order to bring water to areas far from the irrigation canal, farmers had to

pump water through pipes from the canal. In addition, as the farmland was used to cultivate rice in the previous seasons, farmers had to painstakingly repurpose the land. For the cotton to grow properly, farmers had to adopt the use of pesticides and fertilizers on their farmland for the first time. Compared to tobacco, cotton grows much faster and can be harvested much more often. But due to the lack of ample water and the cost of fertilizer and pesticides, many farmers were unable to reach the seven-year mark of the project and gave up after two or three years. These years are remembered as the most economically difficult times of Kan Village. One 67-year-old farmer related:

> "*In the past, the government dug irrigation canals and told us to plant rice in paddy fields and farmland according to their project plan. The irrigation canals that they dug were very far from my land. The rice that we planted on normal farmland yielded very little grain - we had to use it as cow feed*" (Daw Saw Tin, personal communication, March 16, 2020).

Figure 7.2: *Tha Baung Dam*

For farmers growing tobacco, their stores of leaves are normally kept until they are able to sell for favorable prices. If the price is low, they will hold on to their tobacco reserves until the next year. In this case, they run the danger of not having enough investment money for the upcoming planting season. Out of the need to make up for this, they borrow money from traders and plant their next crop of tobacco. Caught in interest and debt, they end up having to do the exact thing they wanted to avoid: selling their tobacco reserves at low market prices.

Due to the fluctuations of tobacco agriculture, many farmers depend on money lenders such as local traders and dealers to lend them money for the next season's crop. If they are unable to repay their debts by the end of the next season, they sell off their tobacco to the money lenders for the current price. According to the farmers, only sometimes are they able to make a profit.

4.3 Migrant Work

Although there is a rising trend among the village youths to work abroad or in urban areas, the majority still choose to continue to live and work in the village with their parents. The reasons being: lack of ample school education to find work outside the village, economic instability, possession of native skills in agriculture and other local occupations and sentiment for the village in which they grew up.

At the same time, the majority of the first people who chose to find work outside in the towns and cities were college graduates as well. Many men, even the uneducated, looked outwards for work in the cities and even in other countries. According to a 50-year-old former chairman of the village, most of the migrant workers who do not have a college education go to work as manual laborers in countries such as South Korea, Japan and Malaysia, while college graduates migrate to Singapore.

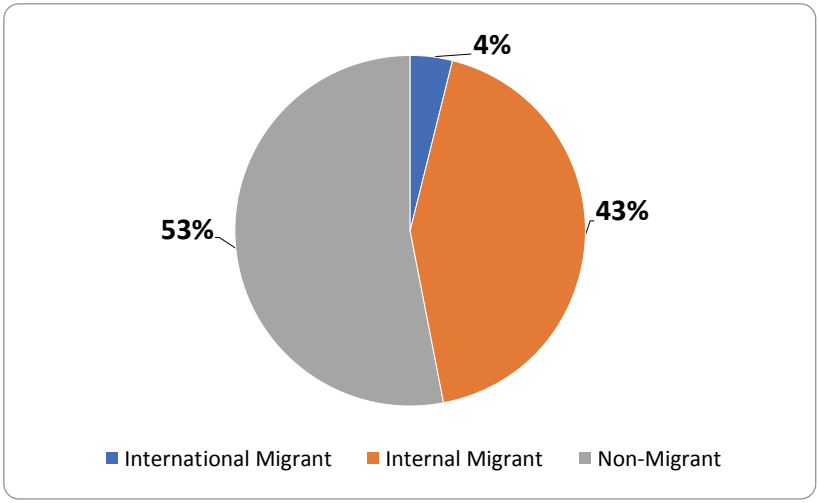

Figure 7.3: *Migrant population of Kan village by percentage in 2020, according to the author's own data*

The pie chart illustrates the percentage of the population in Kan Village who were migrants in 2020. According to this survey on migration conducted in 2020, the percentage of international migrants is four percent of the population while the number of domestic migrants moving to other regions in the country in search of jobs, either with the whole family or alone, is 43 percent. In addition, the percentage of people who remain in the village and involve in agriculture is 53 percent.

Before 2010, young educated people rarely migrated to other regions. At that time, it was challenging to get jobs as civil servants, and even if they did, they would usually get low wages and be assigned to countryside areas. Therefore, many parents did not allow their children to migrate to other areas out of concern for them. Although some locals did get positions in governmental sectors, many parents did not have contact with their children after they migrated as communication and transportation were slower and more difficult at that time. Therefore, most educated youths got involved in agriculture at home.

The irrigation project with its negative impacts upon the local economy is one of the push factors that contributed to the number of Kan educated youths migrating within the country and abroad. During the

period of the project in 1996-1997, U Aung Thaung (ဦးအောင်သောင်း), an authority from the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts, who is originally from Myingyan Township, initiated a program with the aim to improve his native home. It was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and provided chances for young, educated people to work abroad. Many such people were selected through a process of interviews and introductions to potential employers in foreign countries. Those who were successful were then able to help other villagers migrate and work abroad as well.

Eventually, hopeful migrant workers began to depend on go-between brokers who would guarantee employment in return for large sums of money. In order to use their services the villagers would borrow the required amount of money in hope of paying it back when they found work abroad. But due to the lack of knowledge, many villagers were cheated on and ended up in debt, becoming hesitant to pursue further work abroad. Those who did manage to find work through brokers were able to make money and support their families back home. Moreover, 'Three-Sa' (စခလုံး) Special Branch officers from Yangon came to the village to inquire in cases of workers being cheated. Consequently, in addition to being cheated, some locals who aimed to migrate to Singapore were summoned by courts in Yangon. Although some people could go abroad with their own budget, many poor families had to borrow money from others or pawn their property only to finally be cheated and end up in debt. However, there are also some migrants who migrated to Singapore and can support their own families.

Around 2001-2002 there were some people who moved to Malaysia with help from their colleagues already there. Many people migrated to Malaysia rather than Singapore as it cost less and jobs there required lower education. Moreover, there are more migration agencies leading to increasing numbers of migrants to Malaysia. However, migrants to Malaysia get lower wages and must work harder than those who move to Singapore. At that time, international migration could only support the agriculture livelihoods of their families and was not able to improve their overall economic position. In addition, there were also some migrants who moved to other places within the country with support from their colleagues and relatives. Some people chose to migrate

internally because not much money is needed for internal migration and it is easy to communicate with their parents. Internal migrants can only support food and shelter for their families and are unable to support their parents' agriculture. Some locals choose to stay in the village for multiple reasons: the financial cost of migrating to other regions, the work opportunities in their local economy, risk-aversion and anxiety about the kinds of jobs at their potential destination.

Sharing his thoughts on having to find manual labor abroad to support his family around 2001-2002 one 45-year-old return migrant said:

> "*In the past, villagers would go to work outside of the village because they faced financial difficulties. The irrigation project came around and the weather was unpredictable. So farming became hard with the costs far outweighing the benefits. We could not make a living anymore so many chose to work abroad where the pay is twice as much as we could make here. Even then, we didn't go abroad because we could easily afford it. We had to borrow money from other people. Finding work within the country isn't expensive but finding work abroad is. After getting employed abroad, we had to work there 3 years. The money we made in the first year was used to repay our debts and the rest of the two years' income we sent as much as possible back to our families. Not all people are able to repay their debts. Some can't manage their money and end up putting themselves and their families in even more debt than before. And, since we are migrant workers in foreign countries, we have to always bend our heads low whether we like it or not*" (U Than Toe, personal communication, March 23, 2020).

Starting from 2010, many male teenagers from Kan Village migrated to South Korea and Japan with the support of connections and social networks from earlier migrants. Before 2010, although there were some internal and international migrants, the economic conditions of their families in Kan Village did not improve much. After 2010, as the incomes of migrants to Korea and Japan were more than two to three

times that of Singapore and Malaysia, the socioeconomic condition of people in Kan Village significantly improved.

Some villagers choose to migrate directly to foreign countries through brokers while others gradually move from their villages to towns, cities and from there, to other countries. By gaining experience, working hard and moving on from one place to another, they search for more opportunities. One 35-year-old female return migrant said:

> "*At first, I worked in Myingyan. Then after a few years I moved to Yangon. I got older and still had little money, so I tried to earn more. And in my pursuit, I moved from one place to another, with each place giving me different experiences and teaching me something new. So when I learned that I could make more money working abroad, I went there. Those who want to earn money will work hard for it. Some people don't think about tomorrow if they have enough money for today*" (Ma Soe May, personal communication, August 24, 2020).

Some people are involved in agriculture during the agricultural season and when they finish their work, they move to other places to work as housemaids. They also go to Shan State (ရှမ်းပြည်နယ်) for tea picking, to Pyinoolwin (ပြင်ဦးလွင်) for growing flowers and to work in grocery stores. During the agricultural working season, they just return to the village to work on farms.

5. Impacts of Migration on Socio-Economic Life

5.1 Education

Most parents are quite supportive of their children's pursuit of education. Commonly, matriculation graduates are allowed to attend distance education universities. The reasons for this are that parents are not well aware of other paths and they do not wish for their children to be far from home. Parents prefer their children becoming part of the family business to help generate income for the household.

Distance education university courses require one-month of in-campus attendance per year. After attending this month, youths return to the village and to their family occupations without much time to develop interest in other occupations outside of the village. More well-to-do families send their high-school graduates to regular universities. When they graduate, these youths prefer to live in towns or cities where they can find work relevant to their education and skills. Most of them start their own businesses while a few are civil servants. Females are most likely to be interested in school education and continue on to university-level.

After the Tha Baung Dam and Irrigation Project, villagers had a focus on migrating for work to recover from their financial difficulties. As a result, many youths in the village are now attending universities in other places, gaining new friends, knowledge and education. Some youths choose to depart from their parents' local occupations to live and work in towns and cities. While it is not easy to find positions in government organizations, a number of young people is finding work in the increasingly growing number of private companies and organizations. Now, many youths are choosing to find work outside of the village, move out and start their own businesses if they can afford it.

In the past, many parents felt that they had fulfilled their responsibility if their child was educated through high school. Some were more ambivalent. One 55-year-old parent said:

> "*We didn't tell him to discontinue his education. He himself didn't want to stay, so we took him out of school. If we forced him to go, he wouldn't be interested and nothing would become of it. Since he doesn't want to stay in school, he has to work now. Nowadays, even if they don't want to work in the village, they can go find work outside even without an education. Yes, if one is educated one can find less tiring work. Of course if one is not educated it is not as easy as being educated. And now, they can go abroad and work by the age of 19-20. So they don't want to work in the village anymore. And if they want to work somewhere else, we let them go. They're not interested in farming and aren't*

made for it. It's only us who keep on farming because it's been passed down from our parents" (Daw May Cho, personal communication, March 23, 2020).

5.2 Migration Pros and Cons on Personal Development

In the initial years when migration started taking place, locals from Kan Village did not have any other purpose in migration rather than to improve their economic position. However, with the knowledge they achieved from migration, they started aiming to improve their lives. Although some migrants can fulfill these aims after returning to the village by re-migrating to other places or initiating their own businesses, others who cannot reach their goals return to work in their parents' occupations. However, only a few returned migrants initiate their own businesses. A majority usually re-migrate to other places and work in other private companies and businesses. Regarding the development of return migrants, a 38-year-old female said:

> "*Although they went with few ambitions, they may come back with more ambition and can pursue goals they learned from their new surroundings. However, some people cannot achieve their goals as it needs much support from their families who may be unable to support them. People who remain in the village do not usually aim to expand their agriculture for instance. However, some people like to work in agriculture as their hobby. Those people choose to stick to and live in the village. For those who have worked in other places, they do not want to work in agriculture under the sun which is tiring for them. If they can re-migrate to other regions again, they also re-migrate. In the end, some people come back if they have no further place to move. There are only a few migrants who return and initiate their own business, while most of them choose to work in private companies*" (Ma Khaing Nwe, personal communication, April 24, 2020).

Migrants usually move to other places with different goals. They value their own money as they have worked in poor and tiring conditions in their local village. They can also support their families with better

housing, modern furniture, investing in other business as well as saving their money at banks. Regarding valuing money and loving their jobs, a 25-year-old return migrant said:

> "*Different people have their own goals. So, everyone tries to achieve their goals. As I have to work far away from my family, I usually value the money that I get from my work. In addition, I value the money that I earned through my own efforts because I come from a poor family, I have no large inheritance and I do not get any support from my relatives. I always try to use my money carefully without wasting it. I always try to improve my life to a better standard*" (Ko Wai Yan, personal communication, May 30, 2020).

In addition, some migrants become disaffected from their parents as they are far away from them and are communicating with many more kinds of people with different values than they did in the small world of their villages. Those migrants usually spend their money on having fun and then cannot support their families back home. There are some migrants who moved to work in other places but cannot improve their family's economic condition. A 25-year-old migrant said:

> "*Despite migrating, there are also some people who became disaffected as they make the wrong friends. It also depends on their own personality. Sometimes, although they go to improve their lives, they ended up a failure as they follow fun and cannot balance incomes and expenditures. They are unable to manage their own budget as they have never had such a lot of money in their home. Some people even come back without any money at all*" (Ma Kaythi, personal communication, April 24, 2020).

After 2010, some migrants returned to the villages for multiple reasons: the improvement in the condition of their families' socioeconomic position, saving enough to initiate their own businesses, the families' personal situation and/or the expiration of their working visa (for international migrants). Among those return migrants, there are people who live together with their family and involve in agriculture,

those who initiate their own businesses with their wider vision achieved from migration, and those who re-migrate to work in other places. Many youths in the village are also enthusiastic to migrate to other places as they have seen the improvement in living conditions and economy and are tired of agriculture.

5.3 Economics

Among the internal migrants, educated migrants appear to get a higher income than those without skills and knowledge. Even so, the incomes of international migrants are three to four times higher than internal migrants, although international migrants may have limited skills and knowledge.

Migrant workers who return home to the village may or may not have enough money to start their own businesses. Tobacco cultivated in villages such as Kan is sold locally and also exported to other countries, making this business larger than before. This is the reason why the younger generations in the village are choosing to financially invest in their parents' tobacco businesses even if they are not directly involved in the tobacco making and manufacturing process. This has helped to develop the tobacco businesses of the village. At the same time, there are also some migrant workers who return to take part in the tobacco business themselves. Village parents are keen on allowing children to work elsewhere as they do not wish for them to work tiring jobs as tobacco planters or farmers as they did. Discussing this, one 58-year-old informant said:

> "*Being a parent means that you don't want to see your children poor and tired. We can't send them somewhere else because we love them but they can't handle farm-work either. We only allow them to work outside of the village because it enables them to support themselves. When they have filled their bellies, they send us the extra money*" (Daw Yi Mon, personal communication, March 24, 2020).

As more children are leaving to work outside of the village, their parents' tobacco farms are facing a shortage of working hands. Although some migrants have returned to their home community,

due to the imbalance in workload and income in their village, they prefer to migrate again rather than working in village agriculture. In addition, many return migrants have brought their experiences and lifestyles back to their host communities. They have transformed their lifestyles by renovating their bamboo houses into brick buildings, using modern appliances and modern agricultural machinery.

Some return migrants invest their saved money in businesses in other regions rather than in agriculture. On the other hand, some migrants have shifted from tobacco plantations into other plantations with the knowledge they gained from migration, as tobacco is a seasonal crop only and cannot generate income the whole year. Due to the increasing number of youths migrating internally and internationally, the elders (adults over 35) of Kan Village are left to maintain the village's traditional tobacco businesses on their own. Consequently, elders must hire working hands from other places to fill the gap. Farming techniques have changed alongside this with newer machinery being introduced, although some farmers prefer to maintain their traditional farming methods and tools.

5.4 Social Relations

Kan Village is an area where agriculture is the main occupation. Tobacco, the main cash crop, requires many workers during the planting, picking and storing stages. Due to the scarcity of workers, the cost of hiring them at peak times has increased. At that time, workers must be paid 8,000 Myanmar Kyat per day for men and 6,000 per day for women instead of the lower average wages. Attracted by the better pay, many able-bodied men and women are coming to work in Kan Village as day workers.

As tobacco business owners compete to attract more workers, workers enjoy better salaries. Tobacco business owners tend to focus more on the amount of time it takes to plant and harvest tobacco rather than on the amount of expenditure. Tobacco cultivation and processing has become a business requiring more human and financial resources. It is difficult for farmers to manage between their farm work and tobacco planting. They not only need money but also enough manpower to plant other crops every year before the tobacco season. Those who do

not have enough money but have farmland borrow or sell their land to more well-to-do villagers. Some villagers save up money and move with their families to other places. The decrease in farmland owners in the village means that there are less work opportunities for villagers who work as day laborers. Some villagers have migrated out with their savings to find work in other places. After the tobacco planting season, the day laborers seek jobs elsewhere to return back to their village only at harvest time.

In times of economic difficulty, the head of the family or another family member would leave to find work outside of the village. Migrant work has contributed to the relative financial stability of families in Kan Village. On the other hand, parents feel that it has become more difficult to guide and discipline their migrant children when they live far from home. A 55-year-old mother of a family with migrant workers shared her experiences:

> "*When work here became difficult, my husband had to work outside of the village. His income is enough to support the family but for the kids, it's not the same. A mother's instruction and father's instruction is not the same. Sometimes they don't listen to me. They don't want to help out. If their father was here, they would only need one word from him. They don't understand that their father has to live away from the family to support us*" (Daw Kin Pu, personal communication, May 15, 2020).

In Kan Village, it was found that children who did not receive care from both parents during their younger years gradually lost empathy for their parents as they grew up and became disaffected. It was also observed that parents feel more burdened if their children are living and working in other places. Parents are concerned for their children's job environments, health and social life. Some parents choose to move with their children who migrate to work in other cities within the country. But some of these parents decide to return home as they have a strong sense of attachment and love for their village.

Formerly there were very few marriages with people outside of the village. However, intra-village marriages have been decreasing. Birth

rates in the village have dropped and the population remains constant. Relating to the population of the village, a 55-year-old schoolteacher from the village said:

> "*In the past, at least nine to ten babies were born in a year. However today, as there is a low intra-village marriage rate, the birth rate has declined. Moreover, due to economic burdens, many youths are less interested in marriage and are more focused on improving their standard of living. In addition, many youths have moved to other places and get married there. A village midwife actually noted there are now some years when the birth rate is zero*" (personal communication, August, 2020).

In the past, when villagers married, disputes were settled within the family among villagers and between neighbors. With the common desire to maintain social ties amongst each other, forgiveness and understanding was exercised by both parties. But now, with migration, development and intermarriage with outsiders, there are more cases which require intervention from the village, village tract, and even township-level authorities if the case is serious.

5.5 Gender

Concerning the different roles of men and women in the tobacco planting business of Kan Village, it was found that the men play the lead role from the tilling to the pulling up of tobacco roots. Meanwhile, women play a different role in between household chores and other tasks. They are responsible for the caretaking stages after the tobacco seedlings have been planted, for the seedling planting process, the topping and the sucker-removing process. Many of the local migrant workers who are educated and work outside of town are women. A 20-year-old educated woman who migrated to Yangon shared her experience:

> "*I had the opportunity to attend university after I passed my matriculation exams. After I graduated, I found work as a government worker. My parents are happy that their daughter is doing government work. I personally prefer to*

> *work outside of the village so I choose to continue on this career path*" (Ma Wint Mar, personal communication, April 12, 2020).

On the other hand, men make up the majority of migrant laborers who work in foreign countries after finishing basic school education. A 23-year-old who worked abroad as a manual laborer after finishing high school said,

> "*I wanted to help and give back to my family because we aren't doing as well as we used to. With my education, it's not easy to get much money within the country. By going to South Korea as a migrant laborer, I am able to support my family financially*" (Ko Yan Myo, personal communication, May 14, 2020).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

According to Battacharya's findings (1993), migration has fueled industrialization, the development of urban cities and economic growth. In the present day as well, humans migrate from place to place and work in order to fulfill their families' needs. According to Kyaing Thet (n.d.), migrant work is brought about not only by economic factors but by social, political, cultural, environmental, health, education and transportation factors as well. This can be attributed to the fact that the socioeconomic situation of an area pushes its inhabitants toward migrant work, and that developed areas attract people from less developed regions to seek work there.

The people of Kan Village had to grow rice and cotton instead of their original crop tobacco because of the government's Ayeyarwady irrigation project. This project's inability to provide sufficient water for rice and cotton cultivation, as well as the incompatibility of the crop and soil, meant the project was unsuccessful. Thus, agricultural businesses and family livelihoods faced a myriad of difficulties. These difficulties were one of the forces that led the people of the area to seek work in other places. Although migration was initiated by the failure

of the governmental project, it provided better incomes, career opportunities, and economic conditions for people from Kan. Despite the fact that the economy has improved, many youths who are willing to leave tiring traditional jobs in search of a better future have left the agricultural economy and are choosing to migrate. Therefore, migration continues to exist as the main livelihood strategy for youths in Kan Village.

According to Teerawichitchainan and Knodel (2017), starting from the late twentieth century, many people from central regions of Myanmar left the agricultural economy since there were many failures of crops and economic crises caused by climate change. Consequently, most of the people started to migrate domestically and people from families who could afford it migrated abroad. To a greater extent, remittances from migrants were usually spent on their families' living needs and for investing in the traditional economy. Although they have invested in these economies, work delays and wage increases usually still occur due to the shortage of labor as many working-age youths have migrated to other areas.

Similarly, local people from Kan Village also experience labor shortages as local youths have migrated to other areas. As a result, there exist many economic barriers in Kan that lead to negative effects on local people. One outcome of labor shortages is that many employers have increased wages in order to attract workers, which can lead to social conflicts. In addition, many workers from the nearby villages are hired as day workers and workers from distant regions are employed by providing a monthly salary and accommodation for them. Due to the high costs of hiring workers, some landowners even lease their lands with yearly contracts and switch their own jobs to daily wage labor.

Kearney (1986) has discussed the relationship between migration, development and underdevelopment. He stated that many return migrants in Mexico are unwilling to work in their host community because working experiences that they acquired during working in other regions are not applicable in their local economy. In addition, instead of investing the money that they received from migration in their own economy, they rather build or renovate their housing and buy land and modern furniture for their houses. On the other hand, as

a result of migration, the education sector is being improved and migrants are able to invest more in their families' economies.

This chapter found that many families in Kan Village depend on remittances from migration to increase the rate of crop production by financing modernized agricultural machinery and the hiring of more laborers. In addition, some people also spend remittances on food and subsistence, modern furniture, electronics and utensils, to renovate their housing, and to contribute to the development of their village. Some return migrants apply their experiences and knowledge acquired from migration to utilize technology and machinery in their agriculture and their handiwork. The remittances from migrants are usually expended for the livings of the family.

Moreover, as a result of migration to other regions, much support can be offered to the education of children and the health sector. In Ireland, return migrants changed their attitudes, values and technology. Because they assume that their ancient traditions hold back the development of their home communities, to improve their homes, return migrants have applied their newfound knowledge and savings in new and beneficial businesses. In addition, the encouragement of return migrants by sharing information about career opportunities, knowledge and experiences and living conditions becomes a motivation for youths in these areas to engage in migration (Gmelch, 1980).

In contrast with the return migrants in Ireland, only elders in Kan Village are pursuing agriculture because many youths choose to migrate in search of jobs. Return migrants are willing to re-migrate to other areas because they do not want to work in agriculture and they prefer to work and live in areas with advanced technology and good lifestyles. Moreover, some migrants prefer to re-migrate to other cities and found their own businesses with money saved from migration. Furthermore, job opportunities and lifestyles that migrants exhibit result in the transformation of other locals' visions and provide motivation for youths in the study areas to migrate. Nowadays, not only educated and skilled youths but also a few uneducated youths are migrating.

Ndlovu and Tigere (2018) note that although the remittance gained by parents' migrant work can reduce poverty and benefit the family, the children may face detrimental mental consequences. In Kan Village, parents are concerned about their work and their children's health, social lives, and other matters when they leave to work in other places. However, they have to leave their children with their grandparents when they go to work in other areas. When parents and children live apart, although the parents can provide financial support for the children's education, health and other matters, they are also neglecting their children's emotional needs to a certain extent.

Migrant work has both direct and indirect effects on the birth and death rates of the localities of emigration and immigration (Zachariah, Mathew, & Rajan, 2002). Although changes in structural factors may cause economic and population growth, it is also shown that behavioral factors may lead to a decrease in birth rates. In Mexico, migration has been observed to increase health knowledge in addition to the direct effect on wealth, which has led to lower rates of infant mortality and higher birth weights (Ratha, Mohapatra, & Scheja, 2011).

Compared with Mexico, different patterns of population dynamics were observed in Kan Village. In the past when the villagers did not work in any other region, they married within the village, mostly at an age over 30 years old. Also, due to financial difficulties, marriage was not a priority and they focused on their families' businesses. After marriage, financial difficulties led most couples to have no more than two or three children, causing birth rates to drop. Thus, Kan village's birth rate gradually declined. Because of developments in technology, migrant work, and employment of workers from other regions, some of the young in the village married people from other areas and moved away as well. Financial difficulties and living apart also caused married couples to have fewer children. These factors can be seen as the causes of Kan Village's lack of population growth.

In Kerala, India, many youths are unable to live with and look after their old parents due to migrating away to other regions (Zachariah, Mathew, & Rajan, 2002). This results in the isolation of parents and anxiety about their migrant descendants. However, as young generations migrated and worked in other regions, the economic

conditions of their family improved and better health care could be provided to parents in need.

When compared to Kerala, some similarities and differences can be observed in Kan Village. Although the younger generations migrate to other areas in search of jobs, their parents remain in the village and continue to work in agriculture. On the other hand, some parents also rent their lands with yearly contracts and follow their migrant children. Those people rarely return to the village despite short visits on some occasions and for funerals of their relatives. However, although some parents have followed their descendants, they sometimes return permanently to the village due to homesickness. Those parents also show anxiety for their migrant descendants. Migrants also learn some knowledge about healthcare and are able to take care of their parents from far away by sharing health knowledge.

This chapter has shown that migration has become one of the livelihood strategies for youths in Kan Village for their survival and to enhance their economic condition. It becomes apparent that various changes can occur as a result of migration both to migrants and to those left behind, and migration has both positive and negative impacts on local communities.

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8

Resisting Relocation: Quiet Encroachment of the Theh Seik Slum Dwellers

Stephen Zau Zin Myat

Abstract

This chapter explores how relationships between slum dwellers in Theh Seik (resisters) and local formal residents (observers) influence slum dwellers' struggles to resist state municipal authorities (targets) in Mandalay City, Myanmar, and aims to foster a more constructive dialogue between policy makers, slum dwellers and third parties. Relationships between informal and formal residents in the area of Theh Seik actually strengthen informal residents' resistance towards the municipality. Thus, alternative solutions to the 'slum issue' that consider social integration and interdependence between formal and informal residents are needed, requiring in turn that policy makers and the public shift away from simplistic narratives that frame slum dwellers and squatters as merely a 'problem'. Using the ethnographic method of participant observation, this chapter analyzes observers and resister relations to present a grounded understanding of Mandalay's urban poor and their role in the urbanization of the city. In particular, this chapter's contribution is to highlight the often-overlooked role of observers in the formation and maintenance of resistance.

Keywords: slums, everyday resistance, resistance, quiet encroachment.

1. Introduction

> *Kine kyun hmi, kyun kine hmi* (ကိုင်းကျွန်းမှီ၊ ကျွန်းကိုင်းမှီ).
>
> *"The sugarcane plant depends on the teak tree and the teak tree depends on the sugarcane plant,"* - an old proverb in Myanmar.

Slums are a global phenomenon that take many names. As slums are heterogeneous, what constitutes them differs according to the country, state and even city (Nolan, 2015). This study uses the UN-Habitat's operational definition in which a slum household is defined as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following (2006):

1. Durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions.
2. Sufficient living space which means not more than three people sharing the same room.
3. Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price.
4. Access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people.
5. Security of tenure that prevents forced evictions.

Today, more than one billion people live in slums (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019) and in the developing world approximately one third of the urban population live in slums (UN Habitat, 2014). Slums are becoming an increasingly important issue for the world as a whole. Their emergence and growth is associated with rural-urban migration and is also linked to governance issues: failure to incorporate the urban poor into urban planning, inability to respond to rapid urbanization and a hostile approach to urbanization (Cities Alliance, 2020). However, slums are a significant part of the urban economy. In the Asia-Pacific, as much as 68.2% of the population is employed in the informal sector ("More than 60", 2018). Slums are the only viable housing solution for low-skilled laborers who migrate to the city as low wage service and goods providers (Korff, 1996). In short, cities

depend on slum dwellers to provide a supply of unskilled and cheap labor that is an integral part of the economy (Lubeigt, 2007).

Attitudes towards slums and approaches to addressing the 'slum problem' vary from one country to another. According to Forbes (2019), in countries such as India and Egypt, where informality is the norm, slums are largely tolerated by the government. In countries such as Myanmar where formality is valued, slums are viewed as unclean and unfitting: an irrelevant part of the urban landscape. In such countries, slum dwellers are often displaced through eviction, demolition and relocation (Forbes, 2019). A large proportion of the population in Myanmar's urban areas lacks formal housing but these people remain economically integral to the function of these cities, even as they constantly face eviction and relocation. This threat has existed for over 160 years across Myanmar's various governments. Rhoads (2018) points out that in Yangon the land control policies of colonial Burma which were largely unsupportive of the urban poor have been passed down from one government to the next with little change and continue to influence urban planning practices and policies in Myanmar today.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s when Myanmar was ruled by the military State Peace and Development Council, and then under the military-civilian Union State Development Party in the early 2010s, the Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC) followed an agenda of constant slum dweller eviction. This was met by continuous resistance in the form of retreat and return. In 2015, one billion Myanmar Kyat (approx. $76,4837 USD) was spent by the MCDC on the relocation of 3,000 slum dwellers living along Myo Pat Road (မြို့ပတ်), which is the main road along the Ayeyarwady River (ဧရာဝတီမြစ်) flanking Mandalay's western edge. Out of 1,500 housing units provided, 1,000 were either sold or rented out to the middle-class while slum dwellers returned to their informal residencies (Phyo Wai Kyaw, 2019).

Mandalay slum dwellers' resistance against eviction and relocation is neither deliberate nor hostile. It is an extended resistance characterized by avoidance and persistence. On the other hand, municipal authorities have been equally resistant; constantly addressing the urban poor in

terms of their informality and illegality. Meanwhile, observers of this resistance – formal residents, local businesses and the media – continue to play an important yet unrecognized role in this resistance.

This chapter focuses on this arena of prolonged resistance by researching Theh Seik, one of the many slum communities along the Mandalay riverbank, and its 400 households. Using ethnography and multidisciplinary perspectives, this research will address the need for "in-depth research … at the local level to inform the strategies of individuals and communities as well as public policies for coping with rapid urbanization and growth of informal settlements" (Forbes, 2019, p. 96). This research gap will be contributed to by providing an in-depth analysis of social interrelationships between different agents (targets, resisters and observers) in Theh Seik that form the basis for the resistance of slum dwellers. Such an approach avoids framing the discussion solely in terms of dominant versus subordinate groups, by illustrating the role of observers in shaping the dynamics of resistance and discourses around informal urban settlements. The chapter highlights the importance of understanding relationships between observers and resisters within the concept of resistance, which is often overlooked in contemporary social science literature on resistance.

2. Background Literature

Early resistance studies emerged in the 18th century and focused largely on collective, visible acts of mobilization against oppression and on counter-culture groups, rather than examining small-scale groups. This focus later changed in the 1970s and 1980s as anthropologists began using the concept of resistance to explain how global capitalism was affecting small communities around the world. These studies provided an alternative perspective to Marxist theory that failed to explain the non-mobilization of subordinates under capitalism (Sivaramakrishan, 2005, pp. 346-347). Thus, the discipline shifted its focus away from social control to social agency (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 535).

James C. Scott's (1985) work on "hidden transcripts" and "everyday resistance" was a major contribution to this change in fundamental focus. Influenced by Foucauldian notions of power where power exists everywhere in different forms and there are multiple complex relationships of power in society, Scott developed his own definition of Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" which was less all-encompassing, more dynamic and continually renewed, whereby people were attributed agency to engage in "everyday resistance" (Seymour, 2006, pp. 303-304). He argued that compared to mass collective mobilization, resistance more often occurred in local forms (Vinthagen & Lilja, 2007, p. 1216), which were significant sites of struggle as well as units of analysis. He pointed out that collective action to counter repression may not be possible everywhere and alternative forms of struggle must be discovered and acknowledged (Bayat, 2010, p. 52). Thus, the anthropological concept of resistance from the late 1960s to early 1980s, which consisted of a simple dichotomy of resistance versus domination, was expanded by Foucault's attention to pervasive, less institutionalized forms of power and Scott's emphasis on unorganized, hidden, everyday forms of resistance (Ortner, 1995, p. 175).

One of the key criticisms of resistance studies is the lack of a concrete definition of what is meant by resistance. Major disagreements exist on whether or not resistance requires cognitive intent and recognition by target groups (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, pp. 539-542) and the extent and scale to which the term should be applied. Since the 1980s, little consensus has existed on what the term actually means despite it being used to describe a wide range of phenomena. Without distinguishing between large-scale collective acts and individual acts that have unequal effect and implications, resistance has become a borderless concept without delineation. Such lack of clarity in the concept of resistance often causes resistance studies to overestimate and read too much into the acts of agents, where almost any action by subjects becomes one of "resistance" (Bayat, 2010).

This essentializing of subjects ignores cultural particularities, leading to an idealized understanding of the resistant group (Hoffman, 1999, p. 672). At the same time, it ignores the prevailing systems of power within which these practices occur, and the internal politics, conflicts and power hierarchies that exist within the subordinate groups. While

the resisters are "romanticized", the analysis of resistance itself also remains inadequate as it fails to properly understand all groups engaging in it (Ortner, 1995, pp. 176-177). As anthropology has become preoccupied with resistance there has been less focus on other aspects of social life, such as cooperation and reciprocity which may exist simultaneously alongside resistance in marginalized communities (Brown, 1996, p. 729).

In light of the rapid proliferation of scholarship on resistance despite not reaching consensus on its definition, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) focused on conceptualizing resistance and developing a typology of resistance. Exploring two central dimensions on which the usage of resistance varies, they developed a seven-part typology of resistance showing the differences and relationships among varied uses of the term (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 537). In their view, the core elements that characterize different forms of resistance are action and opposition, and the recognition and intent of the three agents involved in resistance: the targets, observers and resisters. This typology summarizes the central disagreements in the conceptualization of resistance and clarifies the underlying issues that produce such disagreements. One limitation of the typology, however, is that it tends to box agents into categories whereas identities may in fact be more fluid. In the context of Mandalay's slums, for example, where people are in constant flux between the formal and informal, and may transform between the three different types of agents, placing agents within a definitive typology may discourage a multi-dimensional understanding of resistance.

This concern is shared by Johansson and Vinthagen (2014) who argue that although providing a clear-cut definition of resistance helps to classify different forms of resistance, it renders a static and one-dimensional view of resistance. Instead, they emphasize resistance as a complex and ongoing process of social construction. They agree that resistance is an ongoing process of negotiation between different agents: between the agents of resistance (the resisters) and the agents of power (the targets) and between the two former parties and different observers. On top of this, they introduced a theoretical framework for researching resistance that is based on four fundamental assumptions: (1) Everyday resistance is a practice (not a certain consciousness,

intent or outcome); (2) it is historically entangled with (everyday) power (not separated, dichotomous or independent); (3) Everyday resistance needs to be understood as intersectional with the powers that it engages with (not one single power relation); and (4) it is heterogeneous and contingent due to changing contexts and situations, i.e. not a universal strategy or coherent form of action (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 2). In their view, resistance has the potential to undermine power relations yet not all resistance succeeds in doing so. In some cases, it might have the opposite effect of reproducing and strengthening relations of dominance.

In contrast to Hollander and Einwohner (2004), Johansson's and Vinthagen's framework discards precision in order to analyze resistance through four "organizing principles" of social action: repertoires of everyday resistance, relationships of agents, spatialization and temporalization of everyday resistance. For them, these four dimensions of resistance are always tied together with four fundamental intersections of power relations (gender, sexuality, class and 'race'/ ethnicity). As intersectional agents, individuals involved in resistance construct and shift between multiple identities and may even possess contradictory positions of being both dominant and subordinate at the same time. Thus, Vinthagen and Johansson's multi-dimensional approach that considers the intersectionality of agents is well-suited for the study of the Theh Seik community where the lines between agent, observers and targets are not always clear.

Vinthagen and Johansson's theoretical framework is helpful in establishing a foundational understanding of the scope in which resistance occurs and changes. Yet, it would be difficult to conduct research that incorporates all dimensions and levels of intersectionality at the same time. They acknowledge that their framework, which includes (at least) four dimensions of everyday resistance and four intersections of power relations, is too complex to be fully covered by any single piece of research. They suggest that future studies on resistance might focus on certain dimensions while regarding other dimensions as relevant and needing to be incorporated at a later stage (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2014, p.16). Instead of aiming to cover every dimension of resistance, this chapter focuses on the relationships of agents who, with their dynamic roles, unconsciously create resistance

across intersections, time and space. While Vinthagen and Johansson's multi-dimensional research framework serves as a strong theoretical basis for understanding the complexities of resistance, there still remains the question of how resistance in Theh Seik, with its cultural particularities, may fit into the wider picture of urbanization, economic globalization and the changing political structure of Myanmar.

As an alternative to the "conceptual perplexity" of resistance literature, Asef Bayat (2010) emphasizes the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" that "better captures the important aspect of urban subaltern politics in conditions of globalization" (p. 43). In this view, lifelong struggles or non-collective actions of marginalized people such as squatters, are not resistance per se. Rather, they are "the silent, protracted, but pervasive advancements… on the propertied, powerful, or the public, in order to survive and improve their lives" (Bayat, 2010, p. 45). Bayat's concept of quiet encroachment argues that the struggles of marginalized groups are cumulatively encroaching, expanding and advancing in a form of quiet, gradual grassroots activism, which contests many fundamental aspects of state prerogatives (2010, p. 56). In his view, marginalized individuals choose quiet direct action over collective demand-making as it allows for the redistribution of social goods and opportunities while retaining autonomy from control imposed by state and modern institutions.

In short, under authoritarian states such as those observed by Bayat in the Middle East, resistance in the form of gradual advancement of individual gains and non-movement or "quiet encroachment" has become a viable strategy for survival and self-improvement for the urban poor. Despite being non-political in nature, cumulative increases by such non-movements brings agents in direct contact with state power which seeks to categorize and control them. Bayat's concept of quiet encroachment is instrumental in exploring the social and political dynamics within which resistance occurs, particularly the relationship between state power and resisting agents such as slum dwellers squatting in Theh Seik. Bayat's notion that the urban poor strive for autonomy from the state may be true, but there still remains the possibility that in some cases, agents of resistance maintain multiple identities and roles within resistance. Although Bayat's concept of quiet encroachment helps to understand resistance as a

part of a wider picture influenced by factors across multiple time periods, it contradicts the possibility that agent roles and identities are fluid and can change categories over time. Thus, Johansson's and Vinthagen's multidimensional approach to understanding resistance and how it forms (2014), serves as a better starting point for studying Theh Seik's resistance as it takes into consideration the fluidity of identities within resistance. Overall, the role of observers or third party agents remains untouched in contemporary literature of resistance and quiet encroachment. While discussions on resistance have been primarily focused on the relationships between resisters and their targets, further research is needed to understand the involvement of observers in the formulation and maintenance of resistance.

In conclusion, current resistance literature has been greatly influenced by Scott's concept of everyday resistance and Foucauldian notions of power, allowing for a wide range of resistance studies. Concerning its shortcomings in failing to definitively conceptualize resistance, scholars have made relevant typologies that categorize different forms of resistance while others emphasize the need for further research considering the multi-dimensional and intersectional nature of resistance. In response to the "essentialization" of resistance, scholars such as Bayat have proposed alternative perspectives to better understand the agency of subordinates under forces of power far greater than themselves. Yet, if the goal of resistance studies is to understand resistance as formed by the interrelationships of all agents engaging in it, the role of observers in resistance deserves more attention as much of the literature still remains focused on the power struggles between targets and resisters.

In light of this gap in the literature and the need for more informative in-depth studies on slums in Myanmar, this research aims to better understand the resistance of slum dwellers towards eviction and relocation by answering the following question: What role do local formal residents (observers) play in slum dwellers' resistance (resisters) towards the state and municipality (targets) in Mandalay? Given the need to understand resistance to relocation in Theh Seik and how the relationships between urban poor and local formal residents influence this resistance, the chapter also considers whether local formal

residents weaken or strengthen the urban poor's resistance to municipal authority, with the hypothesis that the nature of the relationships between local formal residents and the urban poor in Theh Seik strengthens this resistance.

3. Research Methods

Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic for subjects, fieldwork was conducted using the ethnographic method of participant observation. By investing time and energy in living and working alongside the urban poor and local formal residents in Theh Seik, mutual trust, greater openness and honest dialogue between the researcher and informants enabled the researcher to have open-hearted conversations with informants. This led to insights into many facets of informants' relationships. In addition to the primary observations of the researcher, secondary observations, experiential data and background data were also collected and analyzed to corroborate findings and discussion of certain topics.

4. Research Area

Theh Seik is located between the Ayeyarwady River and Myo Pat Road and stretches up to the Gaw Wein Jetty (ဂေါဝိန်) in the north and to the Yanmyolone Pawdawmu Pagoda (ရန်မျိုးလုံပေါ်တော်မူ) in the south. It is about 1.6 km in length and 250m wide at its widest point. As part of Mandalay City, it is subject to a semi-tropical climate with warm to hot summers and mild winters. As the community is located beside the riverbank, it is most vulnerable to flooding and the most recent large-scale deadly floods were in 2010. Theh Seik's border with Myo Pat road is vegetated with large banyan, tamarind and other tropical trees, under which many slum dwellers construct their shelters. There is very little grass as the area is located along a sloping riverbank that was cleared for housing and business.

Figure 8.1: *Google Maps satellite view of Theh Seik, pagoda and boats. Informal housing is under the trees*

There are a total of 400 households in Theh Seik and a population of around 1,000. A 10-household leader is officially in charge of administration. The Theh Seik community is part of the larger Zaw Min Ward (ဇေဝမင်း) of which it is a sub-ward. It is neighbored by Zaw Min Ward in the North and Chaw Seik Ward (ချောဆိပ်) in the South. There are a total of 10 sand dredging businesses operating in Theh Seik whose business owners serve as impromptu local leaders for employees and families who are living in Theh Seik, complementing the official administrator.

Business-wise, the sand dredgers of Theh Seik are part of the Mandalay City Sand Producers/Sellers Committee. This committee was formed to promote cooperation between all sand dredgers: whether it be business-related or social, to ensure that all members follow the rules and regulations set by the government and pay taxes. The majority of the male inhabitants in Theh Seik community are employed in the sand dredging business as boat drivers, operators, and excavation

drivers. Others work as coolies at the nearby docks. There are also mechanics, repairmen and sand diggers who manually load the sand into trucks. The women of Theh Seik also play an active role in generating income for their families. They run small roadside businesses such as betel quid stands, small food stalls, and also work as washerwomen and vendors at the market. The majority of school age children go to the nearby No.24 Basic Education High-school and some are also monastic school educated. However, due to their families' financial situations, many drop out before or after completing their high-school years and either seek work locally or outside of the community.

5. Mandalay and Theh Seik: The History and Beginnings of a Slum Community

Theh Seik means "sand docks" in the Myanmar language. The beginnings of the slums and sand dredging in Theh Seik are closely linked to the history of Gaw Wein Jetty. Theh Seik was a relocation area for sand dredgers who lived and worked at the Gaw Wein Jetty until the 1990s. Gaw Wein Jetty itself is one of the most famous places in Mandalay. The name Gaw Wein means West Gate or Entrance. It is considered the west entry point of the city and is the main port of Mandalay City. Goods and supplies of all kinds are transported to Mandalay from the north and south and enter via Gaw Wein Jetty.

In addition to its economic importance, the jetty has historical significance for the people of Myanmar. At the end of November 1885, the last king of Myanmar, King Thibaw (သီပေါ), and his queen Queen Suphayalat (စုဖုရားလတ်) were put aboard a flotilla on Gaw Wein Jetty and exiled to India. Because of its role as the backdrop to the final end of the Burmese monarchy, Gaw Wein Jetty is looked upon with sadness and nostalgia by Mandalay residents. It is against this backdrop of inauspiciousness and national loss that the story of slum dwellers in Theh Seik begins.

According to local oral history, sand dredging existed since the 1970s. Before there were any large, mechanized sand dredging boats or huts

in Theh Seik, sailboats carrying loads of sand from the opposite riverbank unloaded on the shores of Gaw Wein Jetty. According to a 70-year-old informant, sand miners, manual laborers and coolies lived in huts along the river-wall near Gaw Wein Jetty as early as the 1970s. In 1990, as more and more ships started using the jetty, it became crowded and the government ordered the sand dredging businesses to move south. One sand dredger who worked there at the time said:

> *"Back then, we didn't want to relocate at all, but the government ordered us to so we had to. We didn't have any say in it"* (U Cho, personal communication, August 14, 2020).

As a result, the sand dredgers moved to the wider riverbank south. In the 1990s, when the sand dredgers had all moved from Gaw Wein to Theh Seik, a community was born.

Theh Seik remains primarily a sand dredging site with 10 separate sand dredging businesses currently operating there. Sand dredging business owner U Ba Si (ဦးဘစီ) said:

> *"Some of us have been here for 40-50 years. Others for 15-20 years. People come and go but we're the natives"* (U Ba Si, personal communication, August 12, 2020).

The people who live in Theh Seik either work in the sand dredging businesses themselves or are related to others who do so. Thus, in order to understand the slum dwellers of Theh Seik it is necessary to mention the history of Mandalay's sand dredging.

As noted, when sand was first dredged in Mandalay it was taken from the other side of the riverbank by hand, shovel and basket and carried on wooden sailboats before being loaded onto trucks. This was known as the *thehkik* (သယ်ခေတ်) or the "carrying age" when workers needed to constantly prove their strength and endurance or they would be replaced. Compared to the still accident-prone sand dredging of today, sand dredging was even more dangerous in the past. Sand diggers could get buried alive when sand-cliffs were over-mined, ships would capsize in strong winds and people drowned in the river.

Later in the 1990s, a business man named U Han Myint (ဦးဟန်မြင့်) arrived from Yangon with the very first wooden sand dredging boat to be equipped with large machinery capable of dredging and transporting 325 cubic feet of sand per round. This was much more efficient than the small wooden sailboats that still collected and transported sand manually. Many sand dredging businesses copied U Han Myint's idea and bought sand dredging machinery themselves. Later, when Chinese metal-bodied ships were available in the 1990s, many switched to these larger machines. Currently, most sand dredging businesses operate using metal-body ships. On average, these ships dredge 3250 cubit feet of sand per round. The adaptation of new technologies has meant that sand dredgers in the area depend less on manual labor than before but manpower is still required to operate sand dredge boats and transportation machinery.

5.1 The Origins of Slum Dwellers in Theh Seik

Upon interviewing local slum dwellers in the area, it was found that they came from not just one locality or region, but from many different parts of Myanmar. There were migrants from Mingun (မင်းကွန်း), Sagaing (စစ်ကိုင်း), Magway (မကွေး), Myingyan (မြင်းခြံ), Salin (စလင်း) and Natmauk (နတ်မောက်), just to name a few. They had migrated to Theh Seik in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, for reasons as diverse as their places of origin. For example, one 55-year-old informant who arrived at age 10 did so to escape extreme floods in her village. She explained:

> *"When we were young, there was a big flood…fearing for our lives, we sought shelter in the pago-da of a nearby village. There were so many people there…we all cramped between the walls. We could only sit. So we got on the boats and moved to Mandalay. With all the floods and nowhere to stay, our mother sold away our land in the village. Mother didn't get very much for it. Just 750 Myanmar Kyat"* (Daw Thagu, personal communication, September 2, 2020).

Others like U Thiha (ဦးသီဟ), a 31-year-old sand-dredger, came to Theh Seik in the 1990s due to the loss of work caused by climate change and soil erosion in his home village. He explained:

> *"I moved here from Htone Bo Village. I worked as a manual laborer, working people's fields and plantations for daily wages. Later, erosion made it difficult to plant crops in our village, so I didn't get as much work as before. Even before that, work wasn't available all year round. I decided to move to Mandalay. It's been about 20 years now"* (U Thiha, personal communication, August 18, 2020).

In addition to escaping natural disasters and climate change, some people came to Theh Seik to escape extreme poverty and unemployment in rural areas. A local senior U Phoe Chit (ဦးဖိုးချစ်) explained:

> *"…Back in my village I didn't even dare go to ahlu (အလှူ) (charity or donation events). I was too embarrassed because I only had one old paso to wear. I've been down at that level before. Sometimes we had to eat corn grains because we couldn't eat rice. We couldn't afford it…I collected garbage, I planted crops for other people, but even that work wasn't available all-year-round…so we didn't have much to live on*" (U Phoe Chit, personal communication, August 15, 2020).

For others, moving to Theh Seik was a social choice, to escape from problems with their families. One example is 58-year-old U Sein (ဦးစိန်) who has lived in Theh Seik for 13 years. In one of his interviews, he explained,

> *"I'm not poor. It's just that I married an older woman and my family didn't approve. But since I married her because I loved her, now I have to work and support her - isn't that the right thing to do?"* (U Sein, personal communication, September 2, 2020).

In this way, multiple push factors persuade people to come to Theh Seik. Whether it is to escape floods, family, poverty or unemployment the people of Theh Seik have one thing in common: they all arrive seeking steady income and an opportunity to work and live undisturbed by the challenges and dangers of rural life.

Figure 8.2: *Author's photo of typical domicile in huts constructed from temporary materials in Theh Seik*

6. The Economic Role of Theh Seik in Mandalay's Development

Economic activities are essential to any community's survival and development. By looking into Theh Seik's economic activities and how they are formed through relationships between different slum dwellers and observers, insights into financial mobility and economic ties between resisters and observers can be identified. This in turn helps us understand resistance towards targets.

In Theh Seik, rural poor from villages all over upper Myanmar such as Sagaing, Myingyan, Magway and Natmauk have found refuge in the Ayeyarwady River, the lifeblood of the entire nation, and in the case of Theh Seik, the provider of income. In one sand-dredger's hut there is a large gold-framed picture on the wall. It depicts U Cho, the founder of Golden Sand Dredging Business, standing knee-deep in the waters of the confluence of the Maykha (ဧမခ) and Malikha (မလိခ) rivers, which join to become the Ayeyarwady. His clasped hands hold a bundle of flowers as he gazes towards the riverside pagoda in prayer, thanking the Buddha for the Ayerwaddy, and the riches and life it has given him and all who work for him. This photograph stands as a symbol of gratitude the people of Theh Seik have towards the blessings the Ayeyarwady River provides for the slum dwellers. Without its precious sand and waters, neither Theh Seik nor Mandalay would be possible.

Since its very founding, Mandalay has depended on the Ayeyarwady as a means of trade, transport, sustenance and sand. Sand from the Ayeyarwady has been essential for construction in the city for decades. Customers come from as far Taunggyi (တောင်ကြီး) and Lashio (လားရှိုး) to buy sand from Theh Seik. Until the 1 February 2021 coup, sand was in greater demand than ever before with increased construction happening throughout the country. The community of Theh Seik is proof of this demand. As suppliers of much needed sand for Mandalay's development, the slum dwellers in Theh Seik have contributed to the development of Mandalay for decades. The slum dwellers need the city of Mandalay as much as Mandalay residents need the slum dwellers.

Figure 8.3: *Author's photo of workers unloading sand on the Ayeyarwady River in Theh Seik*

6.1 Sand Dredging as Primary Source of Income for Slum Dwellers

The majority of slum dwellers living in Theh Seik depend on the sand dredging businesses that have been synonymous with the community for decades. Current sand dredging methods involve the use of large boats (either wooden or metal) that are equipped with large sand dredge pumps. These large boats can collect up to 92029.75 liters of sand per round.

Dozens of these boats can be seen navigating along the Ayeyarwady from Yanmyolone Pawdawmu Pagoda to the south of Gaw Wein Jetty. On average, the 10 sand dredging businesses own two sand dredging boats each, although sizes vary with some as small as tugboats and others as large as small coasters. One load of Theh Seik sand costs 50,000-70,000 Myanmar Kyat. Due to the perceived good value of sand prices, customers come from as far as Shan State to buy sand at Theh Seik. Depending on the business owner's connections and output, one sand dredging operation may sell up to 50-60 truck loads of sand per day.

With increasing development plans in Mandalay, sand is in year-round demand. As a result, the sand dredging businesses in Theh Seik operate

all-year-round with few holidays. This means work is available every day, but given the meagre wages, this results in few rest days for workers. Sand dredging is a loud and physically demanding occupation. Workers are required to work with heavy machinery in hot and gritty environments. Onshore, workers toil through sand all day in the heat of the sun. Offshore, in the sand dredging boats, they have to handle heavy machinery with few safety measures. There are occasional accidents and machine malfunctions. Engines overheating, fires, injuries from slipping on the wet deck and falling overboard are all common hazards for sand dredgers.

Figure 8.4: *Author's photo of sand dredging boats lined up on the Ayeyarwady River in Theh Seik*

Sand dredging is the main source of employment for the slum dwellers of Theh Seik. Half of the 10 sand dredging business owners are former slum dwellers, who through their relationships with local formal residents were able to borrow money and purchase sand dredging boats to create new business opportunities for themselves and their fellow neighbors. The success story of U Cho (ဦးချို) is one such example of how trust and interdependence benefits both slum dwellers and local neighbors in the long run.

U Cho was born in 1955 to a poor rural family of day labouring farmers in a Sagaing Region village. In the summer, when there was no farm work, his father went to Gaw Wein Jetty to work as a coolie. For much of his younger years, U Cho worked as a hired hand in farms and collected garbage for resale. In 1984, pushed by a lack of employment opportunities in his village and three young children to feed, he followed his father's footsteps and migrated to Mandalay to work as a manual laborer on the docks of Gaw Wein Jetty.

He explains:

> *"When I first arrived here, me, my wife and my three children lived in a small hut along the riverbank. We lived there for eight years. I didn't have any boats of my own. I had to struggle a lot"* (U Cho, personal communication, August 14, 2020).

For years he worked as a sand dredger, sailing across the river in a small wooden boat with four other workers and digging sand off the cliffs and ridges of Mingun, carrying it back to the boat on baskets balanced on his head. It was a dangerous and tiresome job, and many times his co-workers perished under collapsing sand mounds or drowned when the boat capsized in strong winds. He thanks his luck, *kan* (fortune ကံ), *za* (bold determination ဇ) and nightly trips to the liquor stall for his survival.

"Back then it was all done by hand. If you didn't work hard enough, they would replace you. You needed *za*. I did my best and it hurt my body. It hurt so much that I had to rub balm on my whole body and drink a bottle of alcohol to help me sleep…some people couldn't stand this life. Others like me survived…it all depends on your *kan*." U Cho explained that his hard work, *zwe* (ဇွဲ), his good will, *mittha* (မေတ္တာ), and his generosity, *zaydana* (ဇေတနာ) were the main factors that helped him to move up the ladder. He continued, "Even after I bought my first boat in 1988, I still couldn't afford a house. We had to go through many hardships…the main thing is *zwe* and treating people with *mittha* and *zaydana*".

7. Relationships Between Slum Dwellers and Locals

Another main component to U Cho's success story is his relationship with Daw Sabeh (ဒေါ်စံပယ်). When their business relations began, Daw Sabeh owned a store in Sein Pan Ward (စိန်ပန်း) that sold petrol and goods to slum dwellers such as U Cho. A brave investor, she was willing to lend hopeful slum dwelling entrepreneurs like U Cho money to upgrade their boats and start their own sand dredging businesses. Out of the five slum dwellers she helped, only one is no longer operating. In separate interviews with U Cho and Daw Sabeh both confirmed that showing trustworthiness and goodwill towards others were the key factors that made their relationship work. As U Cho explained:

> *"Daw Sabeh is a very brave woman. She empowered us to create and improve our own sand dredging business. Because she trusts us so much, we also have to be trustworthy. It's like the saying* 'kine kyun hmi, kyun kine hmi' - *we depend on each other. I always pay back in full and she never raises the interest rate. She is a woman of great* zaydana*"* (U Cho, personal communication, August 14, 2020).

Daw Sabeh's relations with slum dwellers is proof of contrasting perspectives concerning slum dwellers living along the Ayeyarwady River. Although many observers express fear and mistrust towards slum dwellers from afar, Daw Sabeh had trust and goodwill towards slum dwellers. She said:

> *"The slum areas around the riverbank are known for crime and violence. That doesn't scare me from working here. I treat them all with respect and goodwill, so I am not afraid. They respect me because I work for their good and trust them"* (Daw Sabeh, interview, September 15, 2020).

In the case of U Cho and Daw Sabeh, the economic relationship and interdependence between observers and resisters of relocation helped slum dwellers to establish themselves in the area, find and create employment opportunities and generate income.

7.1 Relationships between Current Slum Dwellers and Former Slum Dweller Employers

Today, U Cho lives in a concrete house in Chaw Seik ward and is the owner of the Golden Sand Dredging business which employs over 30 slum dwellers in Theh Seik. Now as a formal inhabitant of Chaw Seik ward, he is no longer concerned about eviction or relocation. With loans from Daw Sabeh, he has been able to help his three sons start sand dredging businesses of their own. The locals of Theh Seik look up to him as an example of how hard work, trustworthiness and high *kan* can improve the life of a slum dweller.

In the Theh Seik slum community, interdependency, goodwill and trustworthiness are seen as the most important characteristics individuals need to survive and thrive. This is best exemplified in an interview with manual laborer U Shwe Phyu (ဦးရွှေဖြူ) who is employed by U Cho. He explained:

> *"We come here because there is sand. They need workers for their business…if there are no workers, they can't operate. We are the workers, they are the bosses/business owners. But we have to be thoughtful and understanding. Every morning when we arrive, we draw the drinking water and clean the area with understanding, alike dathi (acting with consideration for others အလိုက်တသိ). So Uncle Cho also understands. He gives us extra pay and says 'here, go have some tea'. So we have a kine kyun hmi, kyun kine hmi relationship with U Cho. We have to know what we should do by ourselves. The bosses respond in return. We show zaydana towards them. There is an understanding between us. We don't do this in the hope of getting something from them. They're not giving us anything out of pity. We do as much as we can within our abilities. They also have mittha towards us"* (U Shwe Phyu, personal communication, August 31, 2020).

From the point of view of the slum dwellers, creating a bond of trust and goodwill according to the proverb *kine kyun hmi, kyun kine hmi* is important in securing employment and good relations with employers.

7.2 Relationships between Slum Dwellers and Nearby Neighborhoods

The trust and relationships between local investors enabled slum dwellers to start their own businesses and increase employment opportunities within the community. With steady income from sand dredging in Theh Seik, many slum dwellers have been able move into Mandalay's formal, urban neighborhoods such as Chaw Seik, Zaw Min, Sein Pan and Pay Pin (ပေါင်) wards. For example, U Kaung (ဦးကောင်း) was a boat driver for U Cho. When he won the lottery, he bought land in Chaw Seik Ward and constructed a two-story building of his own which he rents to former slum dwellers. Such examples of good luck reinforce slum dwellers' belief in *kan* and doing good deeds. Then on the other hand, someone like U La (ဦးလ) shows how pure hard work can achieve success. By carefully managing his daily wage of 12,000 Myanmar Kyat from sand dredging work, U La managed to move his family into low-cost apartments in Sein Pan. U La admits that he is still struggling financially but he hopes to create a better life for his children.

Yet, not all slum dwellers have been able to acquire legal housing in the neighboring wards. Some who moved into the wards still lack legal residency and live on rented private land or housing. Legal or illegal, slum dwellers either rely on their connections with former slum dwellers or with the local landowners and ward administration office who turn a blind eye, allowing them to live on vacant land. This is made possible by good relationships between slum dwellers of Theh Seik and the nearby neighborhoods. Such good relationships are created in times of need and mutual distress. During flooding in 2010, slums along the Ayeyarwady River and in neighboring wards were submerged for weeks. In order to survive the initial flooding, slum dwellers had to stay atop trees to survive. When the floodwaters breached the river-walls and descended further into the lower-elevated wards, slum dwellers aided local formal residents in cleaning and draining the area. Former slum dwellers like Daw Thagu (ဒေါ်သာဂု) who currently live in rented houses within local wards attribute such acts of kindness as the main determinant in improving slum dweller/ local neighborhood relationships. In her own words:

> *"My mother was very kind to the ward admin, they were like mother and son, he gave us land to live on in the ward and no one bothered us"* (Daw Thagu, personal communication, September 2, 2020)

Another event influencing locals' perspectives of slum dwellers is the founding of Yanmyolone Pawdawmu Pagoda in 2012. In 2011, Theh Seik residents supposedly came across five Buddha images while dredging sand. Upon this discovery, the slum community worked together to build a new pagoda and enshrined the Buddha images within it. The Yanmyolone Pawdawmu Pagoda is located at the southern end of Theh Seik, overlooking the river. Ever since its construction, the Theh Seik slum community has gained recognition by local formal residents in the neighboring wards for discovering the revered Buddha images and establishing the pagoda. The founding of the pagoda also increased the sense of community and belonging amongst slum dwellers.

However, not all relationships between slum dwellers and locals are amicable. During the distribution of government stipends released in response to COVID-19, several slum dwellers said they did not receive their share from local administrators, as betel seller Daw Win Win (ဒေါ်ဝင်းဝင်း) relates:

> *"They gave us many excuses; they said we didn't meet the requirements, that we're late. What can we do, it's not our money. It's the government's. They do what they want with it. Even if they keep it in their pockets we can't protest. They could harm us. We have to stay low and not cause too much trouble"* (Daw Win Win, personal communication, September 12, 2020).

For slum dwellers, non-confrontation and evasion are practices used on an everyday level within their interactions with authorities and local admins alike. Well aware of their precarious illegal residential status, slum dwellers in Theh Seik seldom seek interaction with people outside of their community unless necessary. However, when they do interact with outsiders, they practice great care to show respect, kindness and goodwill whenever possible.

7.3 The Various Perceptions of Theh Seik Slum Dwellers by Observers

People in the neighboring wards of Pay Pin, Chaw Seik and Sein Pan generally express positive attitudes towards the Theh Seik slum community, thanks to the decades-long gradual integration between the wards and Theh Seik, the shared ideal of *kine kyun hmi, kyun kine hmi* in business and social relations and the establishment of a shared religious center in the form of Yanmyolone Pawdawmu Pagoda. However, observers who are not in direct relationships with the slum dwellers cling to basic stereotypes influenced by two factors. First, the Ayeyarwady riverbank's notoriety as a haven for drug dealers, prostitution and crime influences outside observers' perspectives on the slum areas as a whole. Second, most media reports on the slums of Mandalay associate it with negative events, highlight the illegality of slum dwellers in the area, and label them as intruders, *kyu* (ကျူး). This has produced public feelings of fear, disgust and distrust towards anyone living along the Ayeyarwady River on the west side of Mandalay. In interviews with people outside of Theh Seik and its neighboring wards, terms such as "inherently bad", "criminal" and "dishonest" were used to describe slum dwellers. While it is impossible to completely disregard these biased perspectives until more research is conducted in slum communities north and south of Theh Seik, the researcher's daily interactions and involvement in the lives of slum dwellers living in Theh Seik suggests that such stereotypes are simplistic and untrue for the research area.

Informants who live in Sein Pan Ward shared similar perspectives. U Manu (ဦးမနူး) said, "compared to other places along the river, the people in Theh Seik are much more developed and established" (U Manu, personal communication, September 14, 2020). Another, U January (ဦးဇန်နဝါရီ), who grew up frequently interacting with slum dwellers in Theh Seik, said:

> *"It's true that slums to the north of Gaw Wein Jetty are infamous for bad things. But in my experience, Theh Seik is different… I've known some people there for many years. Even before they moved there from Gaw Wein Jetty. Every morning I go for a walk along the river wall. There's no*

> *danger at all…we people here in Sein Pan and other wards close to the slums are used to them. Some local businesses here are related to the sand dredging going on…slum dwellers also move into our ward. Since most of us used to be like them, there is no bad feelings towards them…and they were the ones who built the pagoda…every year on my brother's birthday, we would call the children from Theh Seik and give them school supplies like books and pencils"* (U January, personal communication, August 9, 2020).

In the eyes of locals, Theh Seik is distinguishable from other slum communities. Through their own lifelong experiences and interactions with the people of Theh Seik, local observers such as U January have developed an evenhanded outlook towards these particular slum dwellers which is more nuanced than the general public opinion of slums. Local observers in neighboring wards view and treat Theh Seik people differently than they would slum dwellers in other parts of Mandalay or elsewhere.

7.4 Slum Dweller Views on Relocation and Eviction

Relocation and eviction have long been an underlying concern for slum dwellers living in Theh Seik. Ever since the community's early days in the 1970s residents have constantly faced eviction from the municipality. Evictions happened at minimum once every two years yet never achieved their ultimate purpose, for after leaving and feigning compliance for a few days, the community would always return from hiding and reconstruct their huts along the riverbank. According to the slum dwellers, they returned simply for their livelihoods and as part of a plan to gain eventual formal residential status. Slum dwellers in Theh Seik have always been aware of their illegal status and sometimes self-identify as *kyu* living on government land. For them, eviction cannot be protested against. In their view, as long as they are allowed to squat in Theh Seik, they will continue to do so as it is one of the very few places where "uneducated" poor people like them can make a living in the city. As betel seller Daw Win Win said:

> *"I've been here for 20 years now. The government offered most of us low-cost apartments but few of us could afford them so we came back here. We won't protest eviction but we'll stay here as long as we can because this is where we can easily make a living"* (Daw Win Win, personal communication, September 12, 2020).

Thus, even those who receive low-cost housing units cannot afford the monthly rent and bills required for life in these new apartments. Despite positive reactions towards receiving housing units, the majority of recipients from Theh Seik have returned to their huts along the shore. Out of the 1,500 housing units received, 1,000 units were either rented out or resold to middle-class buyers. Community elder U Phoe Chit explained:

> "*When folks here got the housing units, they didn't know what to do with them. They couldn't afford to live in them. So they sold them and did all sorts of things with the cash. They didn't have any prior experience handling money, so they all ended up back here*" (U Phoe Chit, personal communication, August 15, 2020).

It is uncertain how long the slum community in Theh Seik and other locations along the Ayeyarwady River will be able to cope with eviction and relocation. Although slum dwellers believe evictions in Theh Seik have ceased since the ascension of the National League for Democracy party into parliament in 2016, slum dwellers are still concerned for the longevity of their community as the municipality plans to construct a new ship dock in Gaw Wein which will likely precipitate permanent evictions in the riverside slums. Community elder U Ba Si (ဦးဘစီ) said, "They (evictors) will eventually come to Theh Seik. It's just a matter of time," (U Ba Si, personal communication, August 12, 2020). When questioned on where they would go if evicted, a group of slum dwellers answered: "We don't know. It would be good if the government provided us with housing we could afford. But they already did, so..." (Daw Thagu, personal communication, September 4, 2020).

Figure 8.5: *Author's photo of 'low cost' housing units northeast of Theh Seik behind walls and barbed wire. The graffiti reads, "no defecation"*

8. Discussion

Everyday observations of and conversations and interviews with slum dwellers, i.e. resisters, and their observers, such as employers, former slum dwellers, business associates and formal neighbors, show that the values of goodwill and trustworthiness are the main components of good relationships between them. On the side of resisters, proving willingness to express and act upon such values has helped them to promote their employment opportunities, arrange temporary and permanent housing solutions and ensure the overall longevity of the Theh Seik community as a whole, even after supposed eviction. With such values shared by both parties, the relationships between slum dwellers and their formal neighbors in the nearby wards have developed into interdependency. This *kine kyun hmi, kyun kine hmi* relationship can be seen in the funding and operating of the sand dredging businesses and the social integration that has become common in the neighboring wards where formal slum dwellers now reside.

Pushed by unfavorable conditions in rural parts of northern Myanmar, the slum dwellers of Theh Seik have established their own pathways to legal employment, housing and further socioeconomic advancement in urban Mandalay through their interrelationships with their formal neighbors. By building relationships with locals based on trust, honesty and goodwill, former slum dwellers such as U Cho have fully integrated themselves into urban society and serve as ushers into urbanity for current slum dwellers by providing legitimate jobs, a sense of community and acting as living examples of how slum dwellers can advance their lives. This paper's findings indicate deeper relationships between resisters and observers of resistance than expected - the characteristics of which suggest that slum dwellers have never viewed squatting as a means of open or covert contestation of authorities' power, but rather as a necessary risk in order to secure employment, maintain social and economic relations with neighbors, and follow their own path of advancement in the city.

Although the continuous return of slum dwellers to Theh Seik may be defined as everyday resistance, by putting these returns into the overall context of ongoing resister-observer relationships it is evident that resistance to relocation/eviction has been a non-intentional response towards the use of municipal authority. This response is supported by slum dwellers' preference for self-reliance, dependence on pre-existing social and business relations within local neighbors and former slum dwellers and an overall mistrust of authorities due to decades of eviction and exploitation. Additionally, slum dwellers feel unequipped to immediately transition to life in "low-cost" housing units now largely rented out or sold to middle-class people. Many expressed the inability to afford the upkeep of a house as the main reason why they chose to keep their huts in Theh Seik.

9. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the relationships between slum dwellers (resisters) and formal inhabitants (observers) in Theh Seik's neighboring wards have strengthened slum dwellers' resistance towards relocation. This strengthening is produced through gradual

social integration between both agent groups and the interdependent nature of the economic and social relations between slum dwellers, former slum dwellers and the inhabitants of neighboring wards. Such interrelationships are based on shared interests and mutual benefit and lack any conscious intent to undermine municipal power. While both groups of agents favor conforming to the municipality's exercise of power in the study area, their relationships have enabled slum dwellers in Theh Seik to live in Mandalay regardless of government intervention or assistance. Given the potential infrastructural development of the Gaw Wein Jetty area, it is impossible to imagine the slum dwellers in Theh Seik will receive in situ permanent settlement there.

Therefore, it is recommended that during the planning stage policy makers and municipal authorities consider the social and economic consequences of eviction and relocation, the pre-existing social integration processes that have been going on between slum communities and neighboring wards for over five decades, and the need for the inclusion of and consultation with slum dwellers in relocation planning. While this chapter has given readers a small insight into the lives of people who are often misunderstood and feared by the public, further research is urgently needed to explore the realities of the interrelationships between slum dwellers and authorities in order to further clarify slum dwellers' roles in Mandalay's urbanization.

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9

Challenges for Migrant Workers Returning due to COVID-19 in mid-2020

Thin Thin Aye

Abstract

Myanmar has experienced an increasing number of returning migrant workers since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, fueled by migrant workers losing their jobs abroad and the global economic downturn. Many factories in Thailand and China closed and tourism came to a complete halt. The Myanmar government had no prior arrangements to address issues arising from the sudden influx of returning migrant workers apart from quarantine measures. It provided only immediate basic needs such as food, water, and hygiene kits at the quarantine centers and there are no governmental programs for returning migrant workers beyond immediate measures. Returnees need personal protection and long-term government support for their livelihoods. The spike in unemployment due to returning migrant workers and the domestic economic slump from the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 created a serious security risk for the country's stability. Historically, massive protests and violence have followed economic shocks in Myanmar. This chapter examines gaps in the government's response and challenges faced by the returning migrant workers in 2020. The study area was Lashio in Shan State, where tens of thousands of migrant workers returned from China. Surveys were provided to 100 migrant

worker respondents, of whom 65 returned questionnaires. The chapter is also based on interviews with Myanmar Red Cross Society directors and civil society organization members assisting returnees. The chapter's ultimate aim is to inform policymakers on what to focus on to improve the livelihoods of returning migrant workers in order to reduce security risks within the country for the current and future pandemics and similar crises.

Keywords: Migrant workers, security risks, COVID-19, emergency strategies.

1. Introduction

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused chaos for Myanmar's migrant workers abroad, with thousands returning overland from China and Thailand as fears rose and public health measures were adopted by regional governments (BBC Burmese, 2020). Having left or lost their jobs at short notice and returned thousands of kilometers to their homes, sometimes for the first time in years, and in a context of high tension and risk, migrant workers deserved clear policies and assistance from authorities and international organizations. This chapter sets out to understand what was done and how for this vulnerable group by focusing on migrants who returned to Lashio, Shan State, in the first half of 2020.

According to the Myanmar Population Census of 2014, over two million Myanmar citizens are estimated to work abroad with approximately 70.2% working in Thailand and a smaller number in China and other countries (International Labor Organization, 2020b), with data shown in table 9.1. A significant number of migrants in Thailand live with their families, mainly their young children but in some cases also the elderly. In the week of 22 March 2020, there was a sudden unexpected return of tens of thousands of workers to Myanmar from Thailand via all land border crossings, official and unofficial (BBC Burmese, 2020).

A combination of factors related to the spread of COVID-19 motivated the return, including job losses, fear of job losses, and simply fear of the virus itself. Some work permits of workers under the Nationality Verification System in Thailand were due to expire. In addition, migrants traditionally return home to be with their families for the very important water festival in April, so with an emergency decree announced on 24 March 2020, many migrants wanted to get across the border before it was enforced (International Labor Organization, 2020a).

Neither Thailand nor Myanmar were prepared for the movement of the migrants and large numbers congregated on both sides of the border, raising concerns about the spread of COVID-19. According to a recent International Labor Organization (ILO) report, the returnees included migrant workers, their family members and those who returned home after medical treatment in the neighboring country (International Labor Organization, 2020a). When migrants crossed back into Myanmar through official means, they were often tested for fever. Those with a fever were isolated in shelters on the border, while others were sent home on buses and told to self-isolate for 14 days. With living conditions in most rural communities unsuitable for self-isolation, many communities arranged their own makeshift quarantine centers on the outskirts of their villages (International Labor Organization, 2020a).

Although less remarked upon by the media, many migrants also returned from China (Nilar Oo, Deputy Country Representative, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Yangon, personal communication, December 2020). At the Shan State border with China, nearly 20,000 Myanmar nationals regularly pass through the Muse (မူဆယ်) border in Shan State (ရှမ်းပြည်နယ်) to work jobs in China, according to the border liaison office on anti-human trafficking between Myanmar and China. There are also an estimated 100,000 illegal Myanmar workers residing in China according to the anti-human trafficking police task force in Muse (Nilar Oo, personal communication, December 2020).

U Zayar Min (ဦးဇေယာမင်း), then-Deputy Director of the Migration Department under the Ministry of Labor, Immigration, and Population, said that migrant workers are being exploited and trafficked because

there is no official labor agreement between China and Myanmar (Nilar Oo, personal communication, December 2020). In 2019 alone, 31 migrant workers had to be rescued from abuses by Chinese employers, according to Myanmar officials (Nilar Oo, personal communication, December 2020). Despite the perils, many migrant workers still take the chance to work in China illegally because, anecdotally, the lowest salary for manual labor there is 400,000 Myanmar Kyat ($260 USD) per month (Nilar Oo, personal communication, December 2020), which compares favorably to Myanmar's 4,800 Myanmar Kyat (around $3 USD) daily minimum wage. Myanmar nationals work in Chinese factories, workshops, masonry yards, construction sites, restaurants, shops, farms and as domestic helpers. While the Myanmar government has bilateral labor agreements with Thailand, South Korea and Japan, Myanmar is still in negotiation with China. Without an official labor agreement, the Myanmar migrant workers may continue to be exploited due to their illegal status. Regional governments are responsible for arranging the return of migrant workers from China.

Recognizing the need for more formal measures during the onset of the regional spread of COVID-19, the Government of Myanmar made an appeal to returning migrant workers to delay their return, initially to 15 April and then later extended to 30 April, to allow time to set up quarantine facilities in government schools and training centers across the country (International Labor Organization, 2020a). Very few migrants were able to return in April as a lockdown in Thailand restricted their inter-provincial travel, making it impossible for migrants to get to the border, though migrants from China could return (International Labor Organization, 2020a).

Table 9.1: *Myanmar international migrants by selected destination* (International Labor Organization, 2020b)

Destination	Number	Percentage of migrants	Male	%	Female	%
All countries	2,021,910	100%	1,223,168	61%	78,742	39%
Thailand	1,418,472	70%	812,798	57%	605,674	43%
Malaysia	303,996	15%	245,772	81%	58,224	19%
China	92,263	6%	53,126	58%	39,137	42%
Singapore	79,659	4%	39,078	49%	40,581	51%

2. Literature Review

Myanmar's cross-border migrant workers have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A Transnational Institute report examined some of these socio-economic impacts with a focus on workers' well-being (TNI, 2020). It found that the pandemic altered migrant workers' lives in the spheres of economic production (e.g., jobs, labor market, etc.) and everyday well-being (e.g., daily subsistence, childcare, healthcare, pensions, etc.). The report looked into who the cross-border migrant workers were, why they had become migrant workers, and how they perceived their own conditions. Their individual life stories were highlighted helping to reveal underlying factors that condition their access to food, shelter, clothing, health and education, which then determines what work they do and where. Patterns in testimonies were identified through comparison of interview data and by using data and analyses found in other reports, studies and publications (TNI, 2020).

2.1 Economic Implications of Returning Migrant Workers

As the COVID-19 infection spread across Southeast Asia, the region experienced a massive movement of migrant workers. Source country governments have had to grapple with how to provide livelihood opportunities for returnees while their economies face high unemployment rates which have only soared since the sudden influx of returnees. The World Bank warned that a reduction in remittances would increase the risk of individuals falling into poverty (The World Bank, 2020). For many countries, remittances from overseas migrant workers are crucial to their economies and a reduction due to returning migrant workers could have devastating effects. The economic disruptions caused by COVID-19 are having a huge impact on the Myanmar economy as tourism and merchandise exports have been severely affected by the pandemic, the slowdown of trading partner economies and by supply chain disruptions in many countries (The World Bank, 2020).

The Thailand-Myanmar cross-border trade volume between October 2019 and May 2020 was $2.71 billion USD; the land border at Myawaddy accounting for most of the trade, according to the official

statistics of the Commerce Ministry. This declined by $104 million USD compared to the same period last year (Government of Myanmar, 2020). According to a survey conducted by the ILO on the experiences of migrant workers in ASEAN since the COVID-19 pandemic began, in Myanmar 58 per cent of returning migrants from Thailand expected to re-migrate, often to their previous job (International Labor Organization, 2020c). However, with long quarantine requirements in both Myanmar and Thailand, migrants may not be able to return fast enough for the needs of the employers and may find that their jobs have been taken by unemployed migrants who remained in Thailand. For migrant workers with work permits still valid for several more months, it is unclear if these work permits (linked to employers) will remain valid.

Myanmar has always had high rates of mobility and an estimated 25 per cent of its population consists of migrants – over nine million internal migrants and more than four million international migrants, including three million in Thailand alone (UNFPA Myanmar, 2015), underlining the centrality of migration as a poverty reduction strategy for many Myanmar families. However, measures put in place to control disease transmission both in Myanmar and in neighboring countries have resulted in disrupted mobility and labor markets that employ migrants, with the associated decline in remittances hitting the livelihoods of families of migrants particularly hard – the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that remittances may decrease by up to $100 million USD in 2020 (IOM Myanmar, 2020).

From mid-March to 10 June 2020, a total of 96,758 (approximately 65 per cent male, 35 per cent female) migrant workers returned through official land border checkpoints from Thailand and China, according to the Department of Labor (International Labor Organization, 2020a). This includes 28,356 migrants returning from China since 1 May 2020 through border checkpoints in Kachin (ကချင်) and Shan states and increasing number of returns from Thailand as part of a 'second wave' of returns beginning on 23 May. However, based on additional data made available by State and Regional Governments, IOM estimates that the real number of returns may be considerably higher, taking into account both regular and irregular returns since the onset of the pandemic (International Labor Organization, 2020a).

There are no figures on the number of Myanmar nationals still stranded abroad, but there are anecdotal reports of up to several hundred thousand Myanmar migrants having lost their jobs in Thailand alone as a result of the pandemic. The state of emergency in Thailand and intermittent land border closures with Thailand and China temporarily slowed the number of returns. But remaining abroad is challenging for Myanmar migrant workers, especially those without employment. The return to Myanmar of thousands of migrant workers adds pressure to limited COVID-19 surveillance resources at the points of entry, potentially driving viral transmission to areas with reduced health response capacities, as well as heightening the risk of transmission among returnees in crowded border entry points and quarantine facilities (IOM Myanmar, 2020).

2.2 Wider Security Implications of Returning Migrant Workers

Miemie Winn Byrd (2020) notes that mass return of migrant workers has broad implications for human, national and regional security domains that go well beyond increasing unemployment. Her 2020 paper reported on the complex web of security challenges surrounding migrant labor, as identified by security practitioners from the region. "Unexpectedly large numbers of returning migrant workers … overwhelmed existing under-developed healthcare infrastructure and quarantine facilities that were stretched to the limit. Border entry points were overwhelmed with the sudden influx of returnees, exceeding the capacity of immigration and border control agencies. The crisis at the borders accentuated existing barriers to cooperation with neighboring countries. As the overwhelmed immigration and border control agencies experienced gaps in cooperation, it is suspected that many undesirables were able to mix in with the masses to enter the country without detection. Some security practitioners were concerned that COVID-19 may have generated ideas for new biological weapons (Byrd, 2020, p. 2).

2.3 The Situation on Return for Migrant Workers

The elected civilian Government of the Union of Myanmar is to be commended for acting quickly to organize the return of migrant workers in 2020, setting up over 7,000 quarantine facilities around the

country and providing quarantine care to tens of thousands of people. Many of the quarantine facilities were in schools, but when schools opened in July, there was an additional need to set up new quarantine centers in compliance with Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS) and World Health Organization health guidelines, as well as UN Women gender guidelines. Many migrant workers noted that their families had to provide them food every day in some quarantine facilities. If numbers of returning migrants increase or if there are more outbreaks of COVID-19, the quarantine facilities will need additional support to provide nutritional food and safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities (International Labor Organization, 2020c). "Given limited resources faced by the Myanmar government, the formation of a partnership between the government and the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) was the hallmark of Myanmar response to the mass return of overseas migrant workers. The most prominent feature of the MRCS program was its emphasis on protection, gender and inclusion. A major effort focused on anti-trafficking-in-person measures for vulnerable populations among Myanmar returnees" (Byrd, 2020, p. 4).

With many of the country's COVID-19 positive cases being identified in people entering Myanmar from abroad, restrictions on travel into the country were put in place in line with measures in other countries. On 16 May 2020 the MOHS ordered COVID-19 tests for all Myanmar nationals coming from foreign countries. Over 7,000 quarantine facilities were set up around the country, mostly to quarantine returning migrants. On 18 May the MOHS submitted a new draft of the Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases Law to the Lower House of Parliament and on 31 May 2020 measures to prevent COVID-19 were extended but with some restrictions eased, including allowing the opening of restaurants and shops, with preventative measures in place.

On 22 May, the Department of Labor issued a letter to the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agency Federation regarding restarting recruitment procedures after 31 May for Myanmar workers seeking employment in Thailand (International Labor Organization, 2020a). According to the letter, migrant workers need health certificates and will undergo health checks at the border. This second return was much

more organized in terms of physical distancing, taking details and transferring migrants to quarantine facilities in their home communities. At that time there was a large number of migrants who did not register with the Myanmar Embassy and arranged their own transport, often at considerable cost. On 10 June, the National Level Central Committee for Prevention, Control and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 issued an announcement stating that anyone entering Myanmar through an unauthorized entry point from a foreign country illegally would have legal action taken against them in accordance with the prevailing laws (International Labor Organization, 2020a).

The ILO is supporting the Migrant Working Group to assist migrant workers, particularly women employed in the service sector, domestic work and construction sector, in Chiang Rai. A total of 3,000 migrant workers will be provided with personal protective equipment, food and legal assistance to file for unemployment benefits and other services, including in the context of violence and exploitation faced by women migrant workers. The IOM, with support from the ILO, has conducted several online psychosocial sessions to women migrant workers in the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security shelter in Surat Thani during the COVID-19 pandemic (IOM Myanmar, 2020).

In Myanmar, internal migrants have been shown to be at risk of migrating into sub-standard working and living conditions, with a smaller percentage migrating into situations of forced labor and trafficking. The ILO recognizes that the vulnerability of internal migrants is directly related to two major factors: the recruitment process and the type of work at the destination. The sectors which have been identified as most exposing migrants to situations of forced labor or severe exploitation are mining, fishing, construction and domestic work.

2.4 Myanmar-China Relations

Prior to the late 1980s, Myanmar and China did not have close political or economic relations. There was little official cross-border trade, as the areas of Myanmar bordering China were largely under the control

of resistance movements, including the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), which was directly supported by the Chinese government. Burma's military regime had also adhered to isolationist closed-door policies since its takeover of power in 1962 (Burmese Women's Union, 2012, p. 10).

This all changed in 1988, when nationwide uprisings took place in Myanmar against the junta's political repression and economic mismanagement (which had bankrupted the formerly prosperous country and caused it to sink to 'Least Developed Nation' status). The junta violently crushed the uprisings (Lintner, 1990a) and sought to address the economic crisis by opening its doors to foreign trade and investment. The rapid influx of foreign capital, particularly from neighboring countries eager to purchase Myanmar's natural resources, enabled the regime to expand its military forces and scale up attacks on resistance movements, including the CPB. Already in financial difficulty since China had cut off support in 1985, the CPB collapsed in 1989, splitting into various factions which soon signed ceasefire agreements with the regime (Lintner, 1990b). This cessation of fighting along Myanmar's north-eastern borders heralded a new era of trade relations with China. Over the past two decades, Myanmar and China have become close geopolitical allies, with frequent high-level visits between the two countries. China has repeatedly vetoed draft UN resolutions against Myanmar's military leaders over the years (Burmese Women's Union, 2012, p. 10).

China is currently Myanmar's largest foreign investor, primarily in large-scale development projects (Burmese Women's Union, 2012). Chinese companies are building or planning over 25 large hydropower dams on Myanmar's major rivers and their tributaries, mainly for export of electricity to neighboring countries. In 2010, China started the construction of transnational pipelines to transport gas from fields off Myanmar's coast, as well as oil shipped from the Middle East, across Myanmar to Yunnan Province (Burmese Women's Union, 2012). China is also one of Myanmar's largest trading partners. Bilateral trade between China and Myanmar totaled $4.4 billion USD in 2012, with China mainly exporting manufactured commodities to Myanmar and importing raw materials, such as timber, gems, minerals and agricultural products (Burmese Women's Union, 2012, p. 11).

The majority of migrants from Shan State are forced to migrate due to conflict and insecurity and their destination is often China (Aye May, Director of Women's leadership, Empowerment and Development, Lashio Women LEAD, personal communication, December 2020). From Northern Shan State migrants can pass through to China very easily, therefore 80 per cent of returnees in this area are returnees from China. As the Myanmar-China border is open for trade, a flood of Myanmar migrant workers have crossed the border into China searching for job opportunities. As noted earlier, nearly 20,000 Myanmar nationals commute across the border to work every day at Muse Township in Shan State to jobs on the other side. As COVID-19's first wave spread, many Myanmar migrant workers in China returned back to Myanmar (Nilar Oo, personal communication, December 2020).

3. Study Site, Objectives & Methods

While international focus was on the many returning migrants from Thailand in early 2020, returnees from China received little attention. This chapter seeks to rectify this by investigating the experiences of migrants returning to Lashio, the largest town in Northern Shan State, Myanmar, about 200 kilometers north-east of Mandalay. Lashio's population grew from approximately 5,000 in 1960 to 88,590 in 1983 and is currently estimated at over 300,000. It is the most important trade hub between Myanmar and China and most residents are traders.

In early 2020, authorities and NGOs in Lashio reported massive numbers of returnees from China (Aye May, personal communication, December 2020). Because of this, and due to its location and centrality, Lashio was a suitable location to undertake this chapter's study of the challenges faced by returning migrant workers and evaluate the government's responses to these challenges. Better understanding how returnees are experiencing the social, economic and psychological impacts of COVID-19 can inform policy and decision-makers how to better support and strengthen collective advocacy relating to long term sustainable development.

In doing so this chapter also aims to promote improvements in migration policy and programming at the union and state levels through provision of technical experts, guidance and advocacy of relevant actors, and establishment of an effective whole-of-society coordination mechanism. To support a mainstreamed and coordinated approach to rights–based assistance for returnees affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, cooperative mechanisms of governments and NGOs are urgently needed. To achieve these aims, this chapter utilizes a mixed methods (both qualitative and quantitative) methodological approach: analysis of primary reports, reviews of secondary documents and articles, collection of data through surveys, and interviews with directors and representatives of the MRCS and other NGOs.

The study used survey questionnaires to collect data and this data was evaluated in terms of understanding the plight of the returnees. Survey questionnaires are a reliable way to gather information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people. They were here used to assess needs, evaluate demand, and examine impacts on returnee migrant workers. Through the random sampling method, the study selected 100 survey respondents in Lashio Town from quarters no. 1 through 12. Of these, 65 returned completed questionnaires, with several of the 35 remaining providing feedback that they did not understand some of the questions. The questionnaire includes five parts and 72 individual questions. The data collected from these surveys was statistically analyzed to draw meaningful conclusions. Originally, 200 questionnaires were intended, 100 for Northern Shan State and 100 for Southern Shan State. However, local authorities in Southern Shan State did not provide research permission, so the research was confined to Lashio Town.

4. Survey Results

This section is composed of charts reflecting the results of the August 2020 survey introduced above and completed by 65 respondents. Here, the data speaks for itself, with a comprehensive discussion of the data coming in the following section.

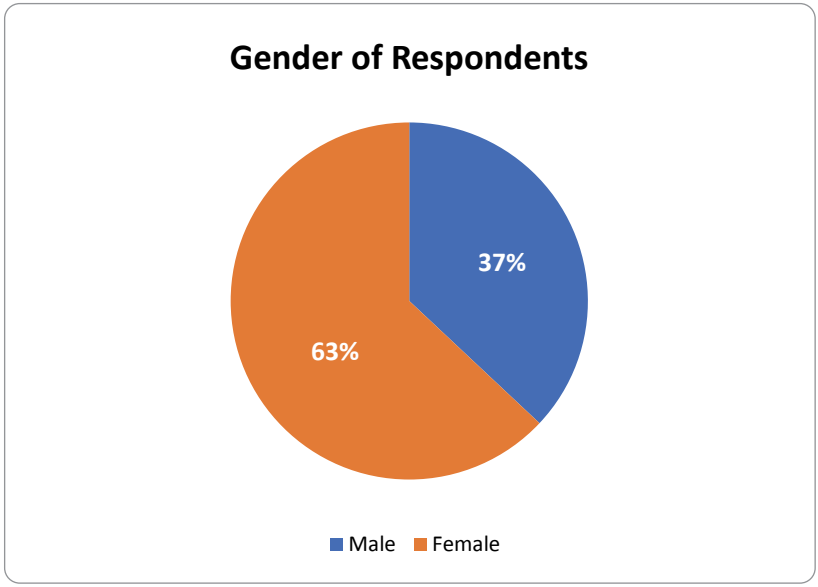

Figure 9.1: *Percentage of respondents by gender*

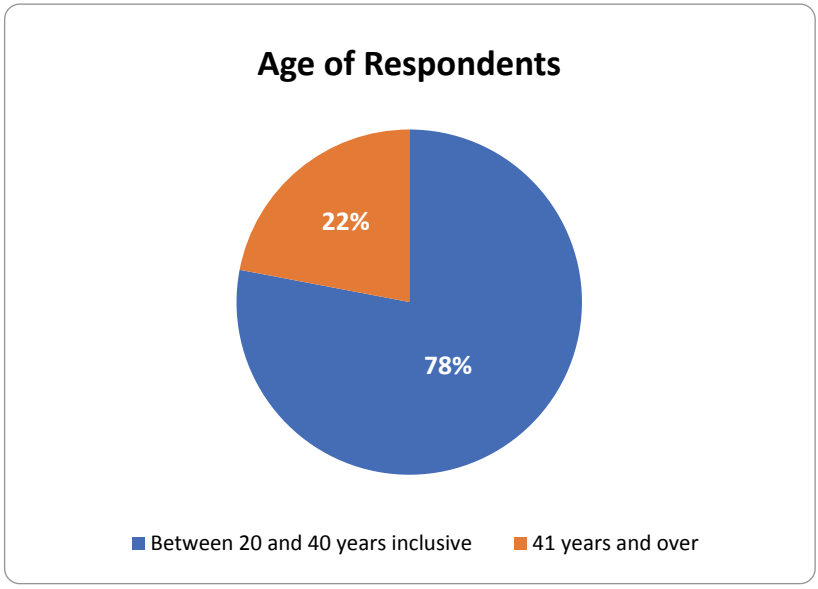

Figure 9.2: *Percentage of age of respondents based on twenty to forty years old or over forty years old*

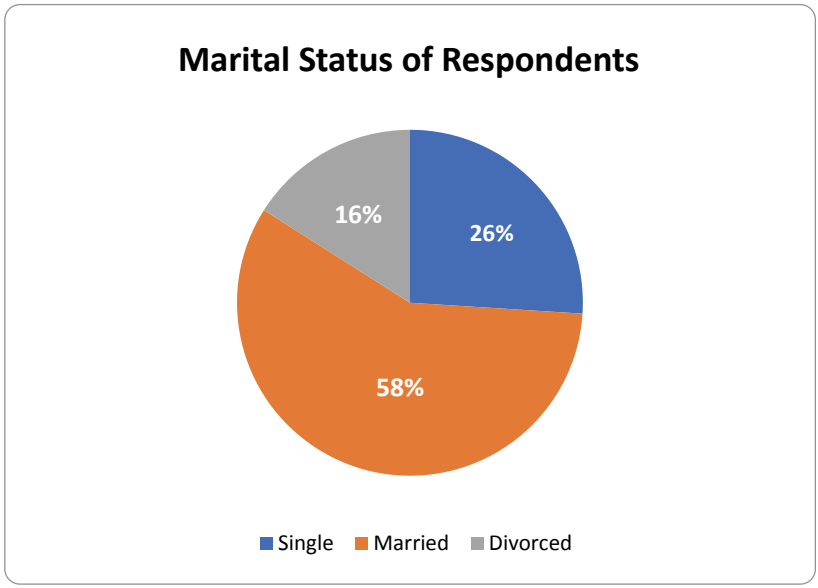

Figure 9.3: *Marital status of respondents*

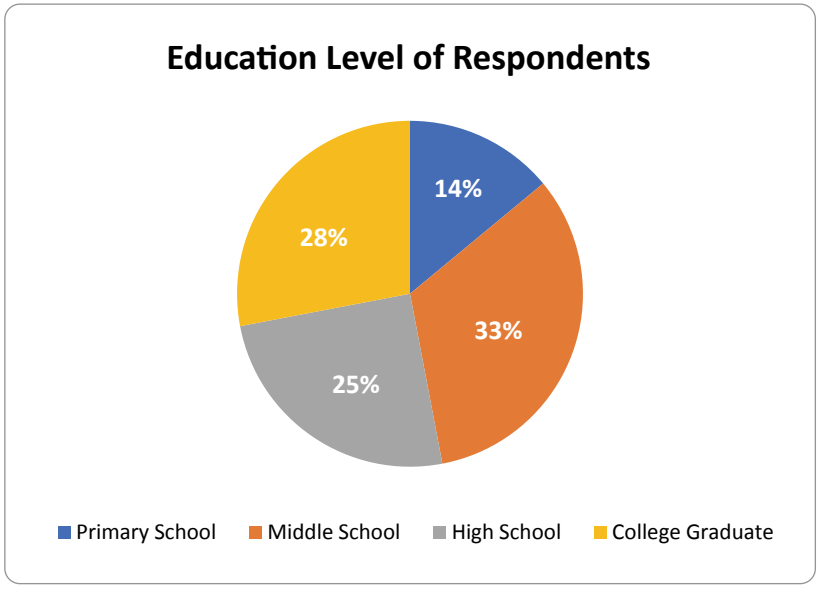

Figure 9.4: *Education level of respondents*

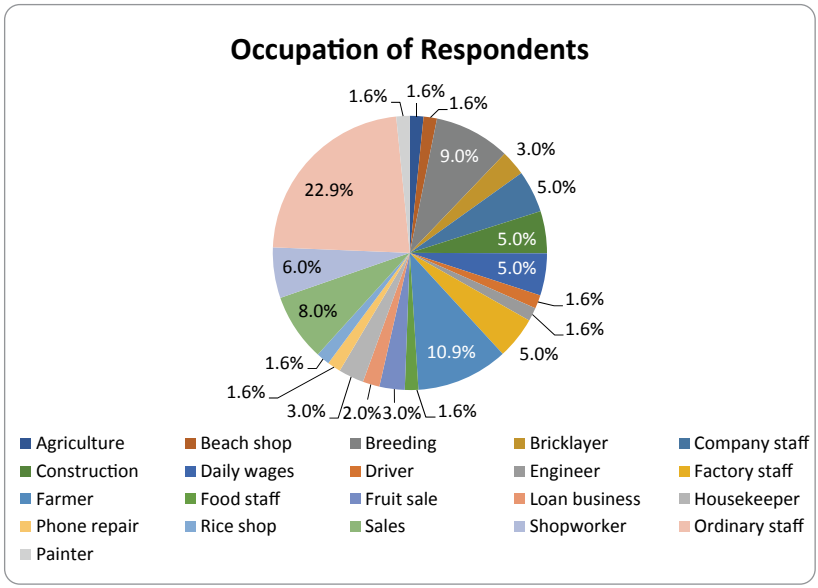

Figure 9.5: *Occupation of respondents*

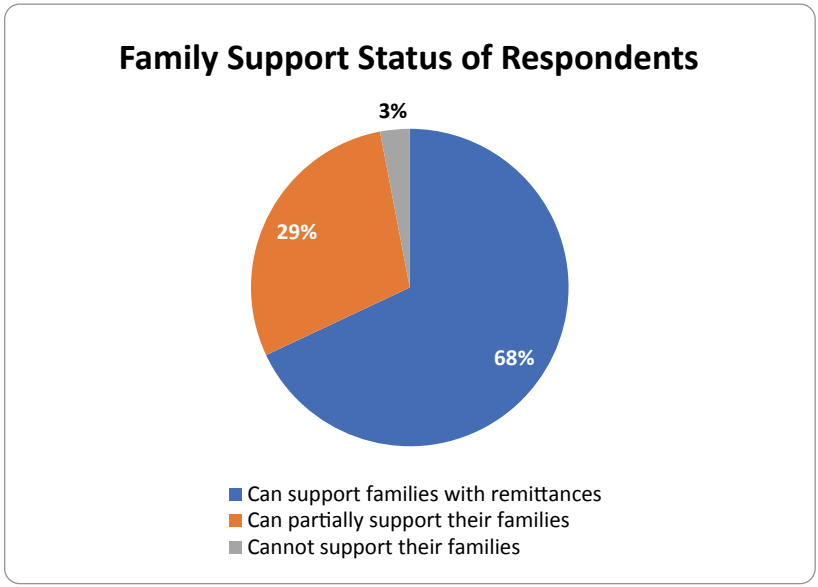

Figure 9.6: *Family support status of respondents*

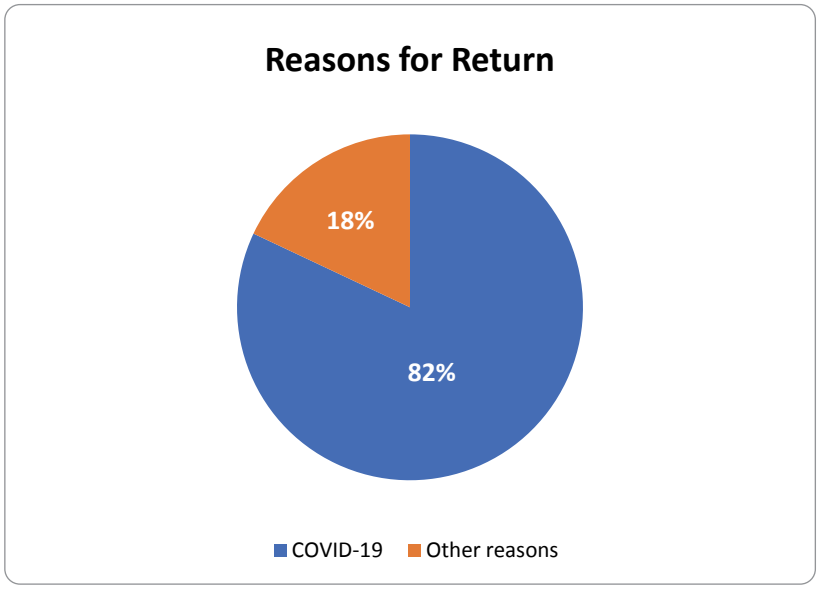

Figure 9.7: *Reason for respondents' return to Myanmar*

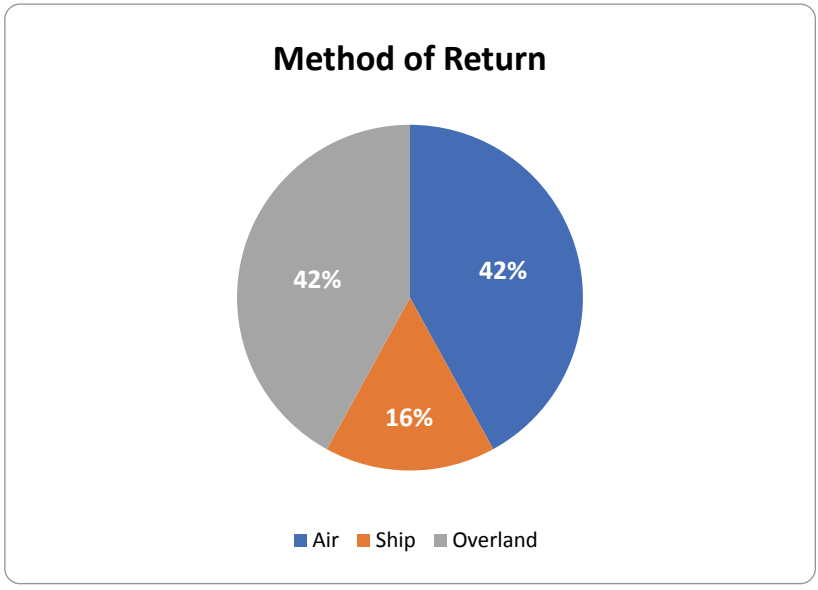

Figure 9.8: *Respondents' method of return*

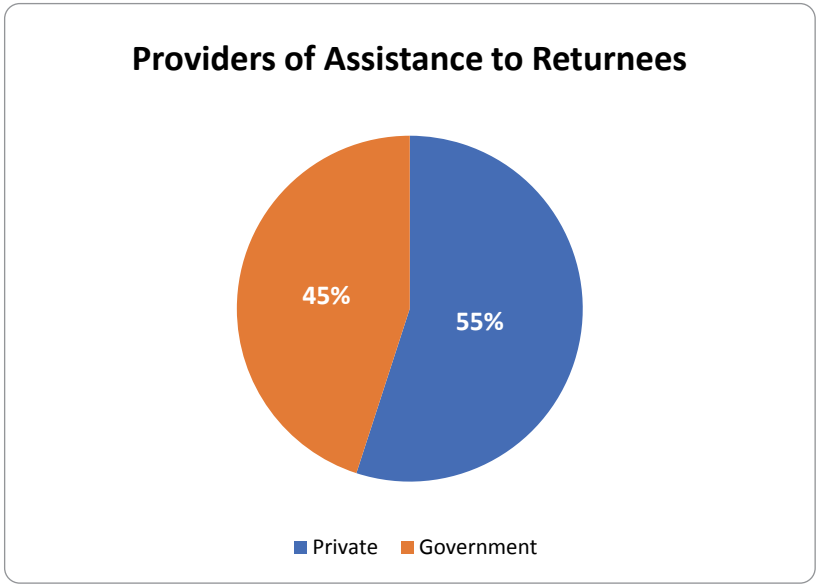

Figure 9.9: *Providers of Assistance to Returnees*

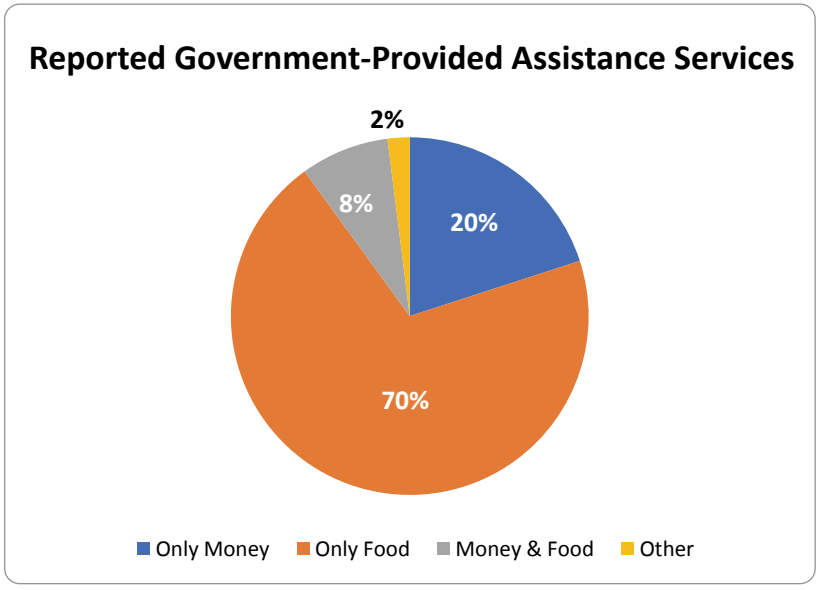

Figure 9.10: *Assistance Services Provided by Government to Respondents*

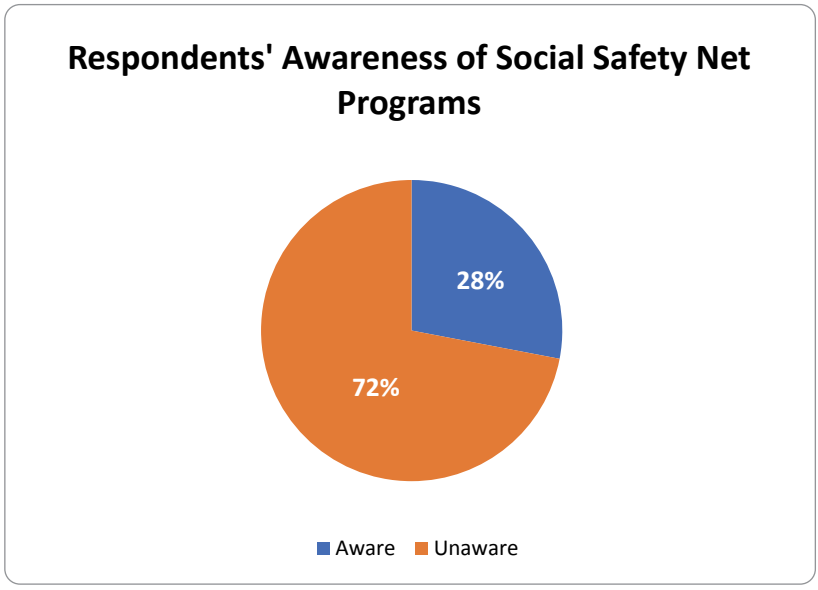

Figure 9.11: *Respondents' Awareness of Social Safety Net Programs*

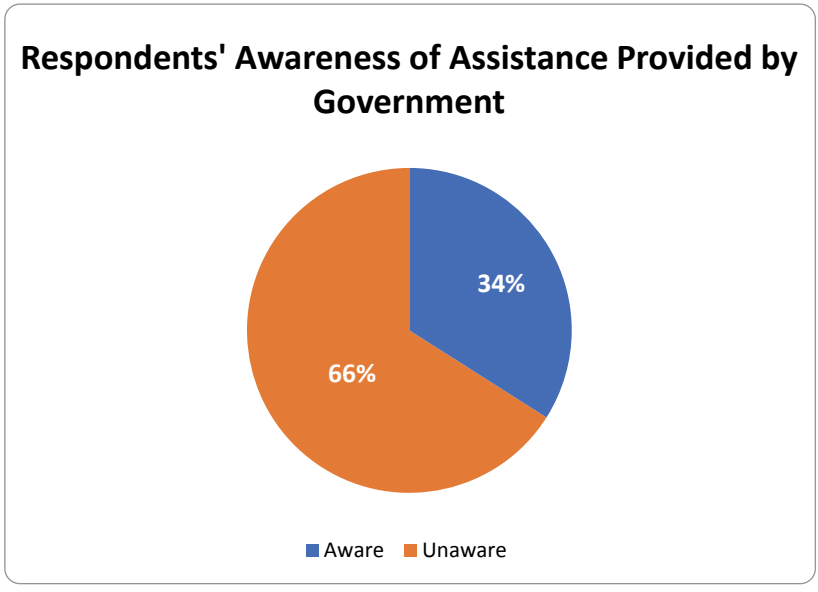

Figure 9.12: *Respondents' Awareness of Assistance Provided by Government*

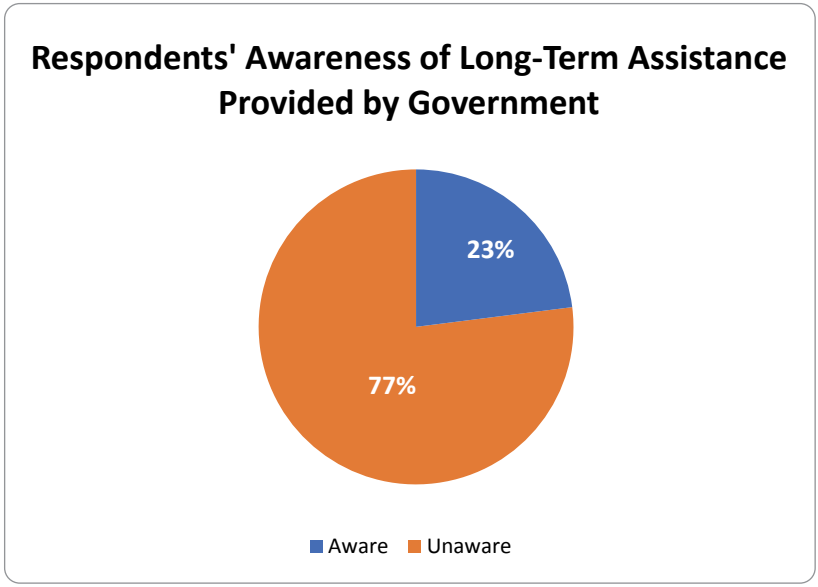

Figure 9.13: *Respondents' Awareness of Long-Term Assistance Provided by Government*

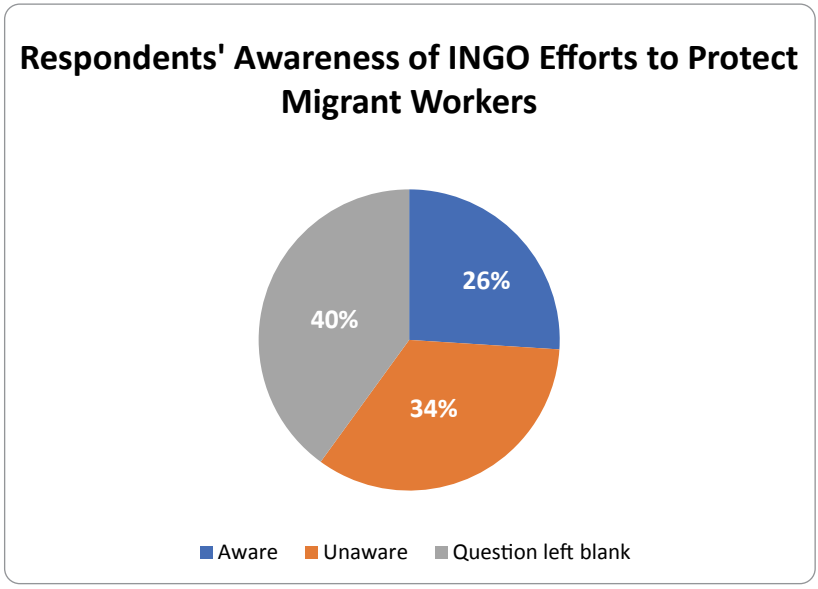

Figure 9.14: *Respondents' Awareness of INGO Efforts to Protect Migrant Workers*

5. Discussion

The survey results show that a majority of returnees received assistance from private donor organizations rather than from the government and they were generally not aware of government response programs or of international organizations that promote migrant workers' rights and protections. The survey also showed that migrants return back to Myanmar via air and land border crossings. The survey and interview results confirmed the weakness of the government's response to this crisis and vulnerabilities of the population. As the population continues to grow in numbers and the COVID-19 pandemic prolongs, it will exacerbate the security situation in Myanmar.

5.1 Respondent Data

According to the survey data and as shown in figure 9.1, 63 per cent of the respondents are women. In normal circumstances, women migrant workers are at risk of multiple intersections of discrimination and violence based on race, ethnicity, nationality, age, migration status or other sex- or gender-associated characteristics. Women in Myanmar have traditionally been under-represented in public decision-making processes (Gender Equality Network, 2021), a trend which is continuing in structures established to respond to COVID-19. This means that even as women are disproportionately affected by this crisis, they have less say in how their communities and country respond to it. When they returned to their hometowns/villages, they experienced additional marginalization. The current COVID-19 response does not adequately address the needs and priorities of the most vulnerable women and girls. With the closure of restaurants and karaoke bars, female workers are also being forced onto the street, where they are more exposed to physical and sexual violence. Pregnant women migrants within these groups may not be able to access necessary medical care and women who face violence may not be able to access essential health and social services.

Myanmar is a country with approximately 70 per cent of the population living in rural areas dependent on agriculture and suffering the effects of poverty more severely than in the cities (HelpAge International, 2017). Although the Myanmar government has launched its poverty

alleviation strategy for socio-economic development, focusing on remote areas to eradicate poverty and hunger, it is significantly short of achieving its goals. In search of opportunities, the rural population is forced to migrate to other countries and the majority end up working in factories in Thailand and China. The factory workers work for low minimum wages and endure long working hours in their destination countries.

A total of 68 per cent of migrant workers can support their families with their remittances. Some can support their family partially and a few cannot support their family at all, as shown in figure 9.6. The untimely and unplanned return of these migrant workers back to Myanmar creates loss of income and livelihood for their families. The IOM estimates that remittances may decrease by up to $100 million USD in 2020 (IOM Myanmar, 2020). This disproportionately affects the rural population where poverty is more acute and job opportunities are minimal. The majority of returnees expressed their desire to go back to where they came from and to their families, rather than to stay or go to where there are jobs. Although the majority of migrants did not consider staying in Thailand or China for life and they were planning to return to Myanmar when the time was right, COVID-19 forced their abrupt and unplanned return in 2020, as shown in figure 9.7.

Naturally, their choice of job upon return was influenced by the availability of work in their hometowns and villages and was usually quite different to the jobs they held as migrant workers in Thailand and China. Additionally, the majority of returning migrant workers had lost their agricultural lands, if they ever had any, for a variety of reasons. Therefore, these returnees are landless, jobless and of low education. The challenges to eradicating poverty in rural areas are immense and require longer term socio-economic assistance. Therefore, fighting poverty requires longer term programs with multi-dimensional approaches which need effective institutional management at the national level.

A total of 72 per cent of respondents were not aware of existing social safety net and multi-purpose grant programs. The majority of migrant workers did not receive any information regarding workers' facilities (figure 9.11). Regarding assistance, 55 per cent of assistance came from

private organizations and 45 per cent from the government. Compared with other ASEAN countries, the Myanmar government's support response rate is very low (figure 9.9).

The resulting mass return of migrant workers to Myanmar in response to the economic slowdown presents unique challenges beyond economics. It adds pressure to limited COVID-19 surveillance resources at points of entry, which heightens the risk of transmission among returnees in crowded border entry points and quarantine facilities. Additionally, many of these migrant workers worked in the informal sectors and as such, they did not have access to the social security system. These groups have limited access to COVID-19 testing and treatment and might not seek medical support due to the costs involved and for fear of repercussions for engaging with authorities - including deportation for those with irregular status. This is potentially driving viral transmission to rural areas with reduced health response capacities as the returnees return to their hometowns/ villages.

Myanmar has been able to devote only a minimal budget to assist migrant workers given the myriad of other humanitarian and welfare needs in Myanmar. Humanitarian needs in Myanmar are driven by multiple factors including armed conflict, inter-communal violence, and vulnerability to natural hazards. The situation is aggravated by chronic poverty, protracted displacement, food insecurity, limited social support networks, and underlying inequalities including statelessness, segregation, discrimination, and gender disparities. These inequalities exacerbate the vulnerability and marginalization of people in many parts of the country. Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that most of the assistance received by the returnees is from private organizations.

The majority of returnees received some immediate subsistence assistance as shown in figure 9.10. However, there are no long-term programs to assist with their loss of jobs, income, and livelihoods. As they return to their hometowns/villages, where jobs are rare and income opportunities are minimal, they will need more than short-term subsistent assistance. They need long term assistance for their life. They worry for their future.

A total of 77 per cent of respondents did not know about long term measures, which include international agreements on humane treatment, memorandums of understanding (MOUs), trade union or labor organizations and social safety net programs (figure 9.13). Further, 74 per cent of Myanmar migrant workers did not have any knowledge about international organizations for promotion and protection of migrant workers or did not answer the question (figure 9.14). It is not surprising that a large majority of returnees did not know about their rights and assistance programs given the low education level of respondents in this sample size. Additionally, there is a low availability of accurate information on jobs, labor laws, workers' rights, vocational and on-the-job training opportunities, financial management, risk of human trafficking, exploitation and abuse. There is very little advice on how to properly integrate returnees into their communities and reintegration is a challenge.

5.2 Result of Interviews with Myanmar Red Cross Society and NGO Representatives

According to the interviewed MRCS and NGO Directors who are working to assist returnees, they observed that the returnees are often excluded and shunned by their communities. The communities viewed them with suspicion, distrust, and disgust. Returnees are being viewed as a threat to their home communities' economy, to social safety and to cultural identity. This creates barriers in assessing health service needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously stigmatized the returnees and they are now victims of discrimination, marginalization, and alienation within their own communities.

The United Nations says the COVID-19 situation in Myanmar is particularly concerning as it has a weak healthcare system and humanitarian problems (United Nations, 2020). Returning migrant workers are vulnerable to physical security, psychological security, health security, social security, economic security, and political security problems in Myanmar. These conditions will increase poverty rates and crime rates. Moreover, women can become victims for sexual exploitation. Children sometimes drop out of school to engage in work to support their families. Additionally, drugs and psychotropic substances are easily available in Lashio and returnees could become involved in drug trafficking.

According to respondents, the government has provided basic needs such as food and hygiene kits at quarantine centers. The government does not have a plan to support the returnees for long term (such as social safety net, cash transfer programs), to create job opportunities, lacks coordination among various union ministries and between the union and state governments, and lacks proper laws and adequate enforcement. While Lashio and Northern Shan State area have plentiful natural resources, they cannot turn them into good products or value-added products without additional technology. The government has not been able to attract foreign investment in this area due to on-going political instability and violent clashes between the government forces and insurgents. There cannot be any economic progress when there is no peace and security. Although Myanmar does not have to worry about biological weapons as Byrd stated in her paper (2020), there are other security concerns from the COVID-19 crisis. The current situation creates an additional layer of serious security threat for the future of Shan State as well as the entire country.

The following challenges delay humanitarian operations and impede information dissemination carried out by the sector partners where migrant returnees are hosted in quarantine facilities: additional security clearance requirements; ongoing insecurity; telecommunication challenges; access/movement restrictions; closure of markets; stock shortages and limited supplies; increased material costs; logistic constraints; unclear bureaucratic processes; restrictions on border crossings; and natural hazards. According to civil society and relief organizations interviewed in Northern Shan State, these challenges seriously hinder partners' ability to deliver key messages and to effectively implement awareness and remote monitoring programs. In interviews with the returnees and relief organizations, five areas of need for Myanmar migrant workers were commonly identified:

1. Immigration status.
2. Working conditions.
3. Occupational training.
4. Security concerns.
5. Family integration.

The relief organizations and civil society organizations working with the migrant worker population stated that protection mechanisms for Myanmar migrant workers in the following areas are needed**:**

1. Actual implementation of existing policies.
2. Improved labor rights.
3. Improved occupational health and safety.
4. Improved access to quality education.
5. Provision of freedom of movement.
6. Provision of economic, cultural and social security.
7. Financial management education and debt relief programs.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Myanmar authorities must realize that migration and development are inseparable and interdependent processes in a globalizing world. Migration cannot be a substitute for development, and development is not necessarily dependent on migration, but each of the processes profoundly influence the other. Migration has emerged as an increasingly common livelihood strategy. Migration has always played a vital role in providing people with a means to maintain and sustain life. People have gathered resources and accumulated wealth through migration that has helped them to address poverty. In 2015, developing countries were estimated to receive about $441 billion USD out of the total worldwide remittance flows estimated to exceed $601 billion USD, nearly three times the amount of official development assistance (The World Bank, 2020).

In a policy briefing about the pandemic's impact on Southeast Asia released on 30 July 2020, the UN said Myanmar is among the countries considered vulnerable (United Nations, 2020). Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste are also considered vulnerable among the nations of Southeast Asia. Health expenditure in Myanmar was just five per cent of GDP in 2016 (United Nations, 2020). Critics say the country has a weak public health system and limited healthcare

expenditure and skilled health workers. Myanmar's public health system has all but collapsed due to mismanagement by the military over the last six decades. The UN is also concerned about people in conflict-torn areas of Myanmar as they are particularly at risk amid the pandemic (United Nations, 2020).

Specifically for the Myanmar migrant workers working in China who return to conflict-affected Northern Shan State, having a labor agreement between Myanmar and China would improve their working conditions. There is a difference between migrant workers returning from China and those returning from Thailand in regard to their labor rights and protection. Most of the migrant workers in China work there illegally and are often exploited. They have low awareness about the ILO, the IOM and other labor organizations protecting workers' rights, women's rights and children's rights. Most migrant workers from Thailand on the other hand are legal workers with higher awareness about the ILO, the IOM, and other labor organizations. There is also an MOU between Myanmar and Thailand. The Myanmar and Chinese governments are only now negotiating to advance an MOU. After the signing and implementing process, the Myanmar government can protect Myanmar workers in China legally and systematically.

Most crucially, a fundamental requirement for successful achievement of better labor migration outcomes for Myanmar people is a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to the management of international labor migration and mainstreaming of labor migration into the country's overall policy for national development. In recognition of this requirement, the Oversea Employment Supervisory Committee approved the establishment of an intra-agency taskforce chaired by the Department of Labor to assist the government of Myanmar to work with IOM and other development partners to implement the Second National Plan of Action on Labor Migration Management (2018-2022). This aims to achieve empowerment and protection of migrant workers, to increase the development of labor migrants and to improve the governance and administration of labor migration (IOM Myanmar, 2020).

The Myanmar government and international organizations should develop a joint information campaign to raise the awareness of migrant workers about the various assistance programs that are currently in existence. Since most migrant workers return via air and land border crossings, the government should provide information regarding existing assistance at airports and border check points. Additionally, returning migrant workers should be included in the social assistance packages being provided to vulnerable workers in the informal sector. The pandemic has highlighted the need for a special fund to support the needs of returning migrants and long-term plans to create jobs for the returnees. The Myanmar government must also strengthen its collaboration with IOM and civil society organization partners and work closely with local and regional health authorities to provide targeted COVID-19 assistance around the country, including data collection to identify specific challenges the returnees are facing, logistics and procurement of supplies, infection prevention and control (including water, sanitation and hygiene and non-food item support to migrants in quarantine), surveillance and health screenings at places of entry, and the development and distribution of Risk Communication and Community Engagement materials.

The COVID-19 crisis and associated restrictions disproportionally affected the most vulnerable segments of society, including women and girls, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, internally displaced people, garment sector workers and sex workers. These challenges are complex and numerous for the Myanmar government to address. However, the government must consider in its decision-making process how to manage remittances, how to make sensible investment choices, and how to assist and leverage migrants when they return home. Out-migration from Myanmar is unlikely to simply pick up from where it left off prior to the COVID-19 pandemic – mobility is likely to be restricted to varying degrees, with additional requirements (e.g., health certificates), increased risk of stigma, social exclusion or discrimination and increased vulnerability to a range of risks including exploitation and trafficking. The government needs a whole-of-society approach in collaboration with international organizations to address these challenges.

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Nita

Dr Nita was born in 1981 in Myanmar. She received an LL.B. degree from Yangon University of Distance Education in 2003. She has a B.A. (Business Law), LL.M. (Master of Law), M.Res. (Master of Research) and a Ph.D. degree in Law from Yangon University. She worked as a lawyer from 2004 to 2009. In 2009, she began working as a Tutor at the Department of Law, Dagon University. She cooperated with the Denmark–Myanmar Program on the Rule of Law and Human Rights in 2017 where she researched the field of Human Rights. Dr. Nita also taught business law for an MBA course at Nanyeng International College in Myanmar from 2018 to 2019. Currently, she is a Lecturer at the Department of Law, Dawei University.

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ecologies of the local people and how they understand and share knowledge of their environment and how positive aspects of indigenous knowledge should be maintained. She has vast experience in qualitative and ethnographic research methods in rural development. She also has published three books on the socioeconomic life of the Wa and Naga ethnic groups and one titled *Rural to Urban Transition in a former Periphery: State-led Development, Land Use Change and Livelihood Transformation in Kyaw, Gangaw Township, Myanmar*.

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Sai Phyoe Zin Aung is a first year (M.A) student specializing in Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Mandalay, Myanmar. He graduated his B.A. (Honors) in Anthropology in 2020 from University of Mandalay. During his undergraduate years, under the EU-SHARE scholarship scheme, he went on exchange to Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, and to the University of Groningen, Netherlands, where he studied social and behavioral sciences. Being a Shan youth migrated to Mandalay for his higher education, he has become particularly interested in Shan migrants and their struggles. As an early career researcher, he hopes to continue his research on migration, development, social inequality, resistance, and vulnerable communities.

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Sandy Moe is a master's degree student at the Department of Anthropology, University of Mandalay. Her thesis title is "The Impacts of Migration on Socio-economic Life in Kan Village". She graduated from her bachelor's degree in 2019. The title of her bachelor's degree thesis was "The San Yit Wine Hairstyle as Traditional Custom in Set Set Yo Village, Nyaung U Township, Mandalay Region". She is currently doing research on the social lives of garbage collectors from a critical point of view with a social research group. In general, Sandy Moe is interested in culture and society.

Stephen Zau Zin Myat

Stephen received his bachelor's degree in Anthropology (Hons) from the University of Mandalay in 2019. As an alumni of the 41st SSEAYP (Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program) and Erasmus+ awardee at the University of Florence, Italy, he is keen on promoting cross-cultural understanding and interdisciplinary research. Stephen's research interests center on urban poverty in Myanmar and beyond within the backdrop of increasing rural-urban migration, development policy and social inequality. He also translates Myanmar research papers and is the Burmese interpreter and researcher for the upcoming independent documentary, "A Higher Art".

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Dr. Ashley South has 20 years' experience as an independent author, researcher and consultant. He has a Ph.D. from the Australian National University, and an MSc from SOAS (University of London), and is a Research Fellow at Chiang Mai University.

Ashley's research interests include: ethnic conflict and peace processes in Burma/Myanmar and Mindanao; forced migration (refugees and internally displaced people); politics of language and education; climate change, varieties of adaptation and resilience. He works closely with a range of ethnic nationality stakeholders in and from Myanmar, including Ethnic Armed Organisations, civil society actors and political parties.

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Index

This book provides a rich, detailed exploration of contemporary migration in Myanmar, a nation undergoing turbulent social and political change. The nine chapters present incisive case studies of migration before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through research enabled by the growth of the country's higher education sector from 2011-2021, the book's contributing authors analyze several forms of movement in, to and from Myanmar, such as overland refugee repatriation and economic migration, human trafficking and upland and lowland mutual labor flows. The book's chapters explore multiple drivers of migration, from the intermittent economic growth fueling the expansion of Myanmar's cities to the enduring problems of poverty, civil war, and conflict. They also expose central dynamics in these migrations such as state regulation, gender, and ethnicity.

With nine of the ten authors identifying as belonging to cultures and ethnicities that call Myanmar home, Moving Around Myanmar: Migration in, from and back to Burma is also a locally driven project aimed at addressing the under-representation of southeast Asian scholars in the field. Published in the wake of the 2021 military coup and subsequent devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the important research agendas forged herein, mostly emerging from the nation's public university system, show the importance of freedom of thought, of study and also of access in Myanmar's higher education system.

This edited volume will be of interest to undergraduates, postgraduates and scholars of Asian politics, economics and society and to journalists and professionals working within governments, companies and other organizations in the region.

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